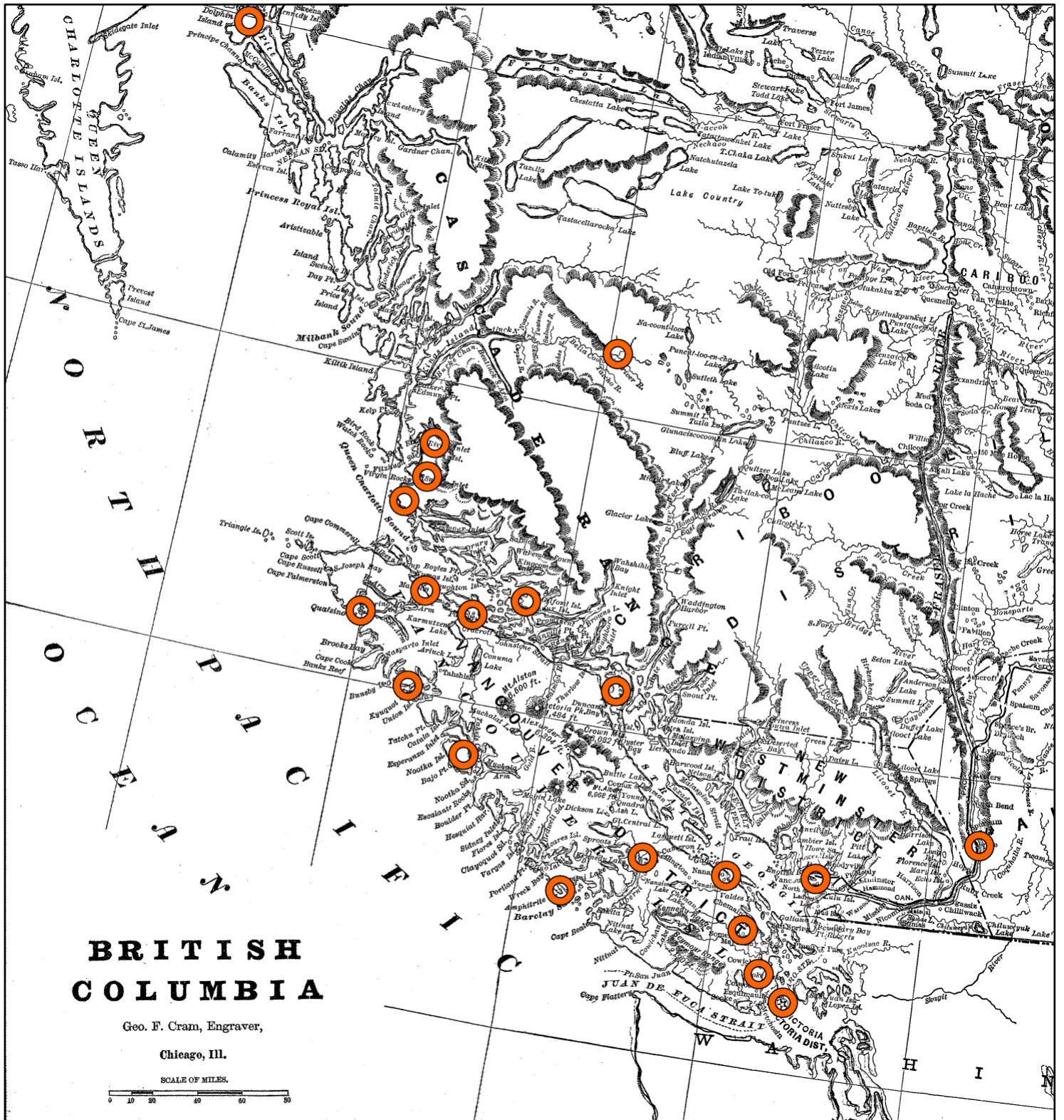


BANNED PRACTICE

The Potlatch and British Columbia, 1803 – 1953

Curated by Chris Willmore



Some of the potlatch locations mentioned below. Map c. 1888 from the collection of C. Willmore.

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Transcribed, annotated and curated
by Chris Willmore

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*Cover Image: Elder holding a Copper at the potlatch.
Original doll by Indigenous artist “E. M.,” 1973.
Collection of and photo by Chris Willmore.*

Preliminary Notes

In what follows I have left most names and places spelled as they were in the original articles. A short guide to the phonetic notation used by Boas and others is provided below. Some accounts use words in Chinook. An Appendix discusses this trade jargon, but does not provide a full dictionary. [Square brackets] label my insertions in the text, and [...] signifies omitted text. I've replaced certain offensive words with modern equivalents, for example, by changing the "s-word" to [woman] where appropriate. The words Siwash and Klootchman are offensive today, and in many cases were offensive or dismissive even in the 19th century. They are also, however, ordinary words in Chinook jargon. Given the importance of this jargon to the history of the potlatch, I have left these words in place.

Pronouncing Franz Boas's Phonetic Notation¹

a, e, i, o, u	have their continental sounds (short)
ā, ē, ī, ō, ū	long vowels
A, E, I, O, U	obscure vowels
a, e, i, o, u	vowels not articulated but indicated by position of the mouth
-	separates vowels which do not form diphthongs
q	velar k
k	English k
x	<i>ch</i> as in German <i>Bach</i>
!	designates increased stress of articulation due to the elision of q.
ε	Is a very deep laryngeal intonation, due to the elision of q.
L	posterior palatal l, short and exploded; the tip of the tongue touches the alveoli of the lower jaw, the back of the tongue is pressed against the hard palate, <i>sonans</i>

¹ From Boas, F. (1894). *Chinook Texts*. Washington: Government Printing Office. Written by Franz Boas (1858 – 1942).



*Elder holding a Copper and salmon at a potlatch.
Doll by Indigenous artist "E. M"., British Columbia, 1973.
Collection of and photo by Chris Willmore.*

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES

The Kwakiutl (“Kwakiool”) Potlatch² (1885)

CUSTOM OF THE “POTLATCH” OR DONATION FEAST

This custom is common to all the coast tribes of this part of North America [the Pacific Northwest], 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 Columbian coast. They are certainly nearly the same with the Haida, Tsimshian and Kwakiool³ 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. In speaking of the custom I will, however, use the commonly recognized word *potlatch* as being the most convenient.

The rules governing the potlatch and its attendant ceremonies have grown to be so complicated that even those persons most familiar with the natives can scarcely follow it in all its details, and it is sometimes difficult for the natives themselves to decide certain points, leaving openings for roguery and sharp practice with the more unscrupulous.

Mr. George Blenkinsop, who has been for many years among the Kwakiool, informs me that the custom was formerly almost entirely confined to the recognized chiefs, but that of late years it has extended to the people generally, and become very much commoner than before. The Rev. A. J. Hall bears testimony to the same effect. With the chiefs, it was a means of acquiring and maintaining prestige and power. It is still so regarded, but has spread to all classes of the community and become the recognized mode of attaining social rank and respect. Many of the younger people in the Kwakiool villages are willing to abandon the custom, but the majority, and particularly the older people, are in its favor – a circumstance probably largely explained by the fact that nearly all are creditors or debtors under the system.

The pernicious effect of the extension and frequent recurrence of the potlatch, arises chiefly from the circumstance that every member of the tribe, male or female, is drawn into it. If not themselves endeavoring to acquire property for a potlatch, every one is pledged to support, to the utmost of their means, some more prominent or ambitious individual. Thus, wives even rob their husbands to assist a brother, or some other relative, in amassing blankets preparatory to a struggle for social pre-eminence, and should the aspirant be beaten, would feel mortified and ashamed. All become miserly and saving, but to no good purpose, and the great gatherings of natives which occur when the potlatch takes place, lead not only to waste of property and time, but to troubles of many other kinds.

² From Dawson, G.M. (1887). Notes and Observations on the Kwakiool People of the Northern Part of Vancouver Island and Adjacent Coasts, made during the summer of 1885; with a Vocabulary of about seven hundred words. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Section II, 1. Written by George M. Dawson (1849 – 1901).

³ The Kwakiutl First Nation.

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 appropriate 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 in 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 excuse for giving a potlatch are numerous, the most common being, however, the wish to assume a new and honorable name⁴. 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 behoves the debtor to bring out and destroy a like, or if possible a greater, amount

⁴ [From p. 15 of the original:] Just as among the Haida and other coast tribes, a man must give a potlatch (Kwakwaka'wakw *pus-a* or *ya-hooit*) on assuming a name. To obtain a name for his child a potlatch must be held, and at every subsequent occasion on which a man gives a potlatch, he assumes a new name, which is generally that of one of his ancestors. He is then known only by his last assumed name, which is regarded as his chief or most honorable one. This custom naturally introduces much complication in the matter of tracing out genealogy, or in arriving at the names of the actors in former events.

of property. If he is not able to do this, he lies under the reproach of having been worsted by his fore.

The present principal chief of the Fort Rupert people is now known, since his potlatch has completed (autumn of 1885), as Na-ka-pun-thim, and he aspires to, and well maintains, the position of premier chief of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. He is apparently a man of great energy of character, but naturally has many enemies, among whom are to be reckoned the chiefs of most of the other tribes. One of these, the Nim-kish⁵ chief, to attain a superior position to Na-ka-pun-thim, lately broke up and destroyed a very valuable "copper," leaving Na-ka-pun-thim in an inferior position till he could obtain and destroy a similarly valuable piece. Not himself having a suitable "copper," the Nim-kish chief collected his means to purchase one which was in the possession of a young man of the tribe named Wa-nook. This "copper" had been purchased by Wa-nook's father from Wa-nook's wife's mother, in order that his son might assume an important place in the tribe as its possessor.

The various tribes were assembled at the Fort Rupert village for a potlatch, and after haranguing them, Na-ka-pun-thim publicly offered 1,400 blankets for the "copper," but Wa-nook still held back for a higher price. The natives assembled were divided into two parties, and were much excited, calling each other by opprobrious names and some encouraging Na-ka-pun-thim, others his adversaries. Mr. Hall describes Na-ka-pun-thim as coming out before the people accompanied by a man hideously dressed and wearing a mask, drawing out and exhibiting a scalp in each hand and saying to his principal rival: "These are enemies of mine whom I have killed, and in a like manner I will crush you." Then, even before he had quite completed the purchase of the "copper," he began to break a large piece from one corner, and as the "copper" in question was undoubtedly more valuable than that previously mutilated by the Nim-kish chief, he, according to Indian ideas, effected his triumph, changing his name from "Suh-witti" to that above given, and – as is sometimes done – erecting a post in commemoration of that event, on which, in this instance, the "copper" itself was elevated.

A. P. Niblack on the potlatch⁶ (1888)

The potlatch – This is one of the most widespread and curious customs on the northwest coast. It has its origin not only in the custom of the exchange of gifts, but in securing the good-will of others by presents. To procure a wife; to enter the ranks or obtain the influence of medicine men; to become a great chief; to give social standing to one's children; to take on oneself the name of a paternal ancestor; to build a house; to become a respected member of the community; to atone for a wrong done; to resent an insult – property in some form or other must be sacrificed either by destroying it, to show one's rage, grief, or disregard of wealth, or by giving it away to obtain the good-will of others. The accumulation of property is a necessity in these

⁵ The 'Namgis First Nation.

⁶ From Niblack, A. P. (1888). *The Coast Indians of Southern Alaska and Northern British Columbia*. United States: National Museum. Written by Albert P. Niblack (1859 – 1929).

Indian communities in order to stand well in them, and wealth becomes primarily the basis of social organization. Under the head of wealth the general question of property has been discussed. In a potlatch all kinds of personal and household property – blankets, dishes, bowls, canoes, guns, ammunition, money, mirrors, knives, garments, spears, furs, robes, pots, kettles, spoons, etc. – are given away. Discrimination must, however, be made between a reward for services rendered, damages mulcted, or the debt paid to the wife's parents, and the ceremonial distribution of gifts, which last is the potlatch proper. The custom is a very widely-spread one, and is practiced by some tribes of the interior, even east of the Rocky Mountains, particularly among those of the Dakotan stock.

Amongst the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian the potlatch is a perfectly systematized distribution, involving much more thoughtful consideration and balancing of obligations than the giving of a select German or limited entertainment by a well-recognized leader of society in any of our large cities. The occasions on which they are given will be enumerated later on in the description of the different ceremonies. In general, the more frequently and liberally an Indian distributes property, the better his standing with the others, the greater his chances of reaching the dignity of chief in his village, and the more is due him when some other member performs the same ceremony. An ordinary man confines his potlatch to those of his own village, while a chief usually sends out to certain individuals of distant villages by name. Often a chief is assisted by his people, whom, in this case, he invites to a feast, and from whom afterwards he receives gifts which, with those of his own, are given away subsequently at the grand potlatch.

Whenever it is the intention of an individual, other than the head chief, to make such a distribution, he calls together his friends and relatives, makes an inventory of his property, and, with their help, makes out a list of persons to whom he intends giving presents and what articles go to each. It is often the custom, however, previous to calling together the friends, for the host to quietly distribute his property among his friends and the principal people of the village, who by etiquette are required just before the time set for the potlatch to return the presents with interest or increase – that is, for four blankets to return six, or in some such ratio. In this way all the tribe immediately concerned know what the visitors are to receive. The inventory being made out and the council of advisors assembled, the list is read out name by name. As soon as a name is read, the friends present express their approval or disapproval of the intention to give the individual named such and such present. The list being finally made out, the messengers are sent out to announce the date and to invite the guests.

On the assembling of the guests, on the date fixed, feasting and dancing are indulged in. If the occasion is for the purpose of raising a house, cutting out and erecting a new carved column, or undertaking some industrial enterprise requiring the combined effort of many, the feasting and dancing alternate with the work, gambling being indulged in during spare times, and the distribution takes place when the work at hand is finished, after which all disperse. In this case, however, the gifts are in the nature somewhat of reward for services, and go to the guests pure and

simple, the relatives receiving none; but in case of a grand potlatch, unconnected with the industrial idea, all receive presents according to the list made out. In any case, however, the distribution is the final ceremony, and is conducted as follows:

The guests all being assembled, the goods are displayed about the walls and on poles and cords or piled up on the floor in a great mound. The host stands or sits arrayed in ceremonial attire, and presides over the affair with the ceremonial baton in his hand. The herald blows a call [...], announces the opening of the ceremony in a speech, extolling the liberality and prowess of the host, and calls a name, giving the present he is to receive. An attendant takes the present and deposits it in front of the person who is to receive it, where it remains until all are thus honored, the names being called out one by one. On the announcement of each name, the host solemnly nods his head and thumps on the floor with his baton. The whole ceremony forcibly reminds one, in a general way, of a Sunday-school Christmas-tree distribution. Formerly slaves were given away to the rich and powerful visitors, but to the poorer guests worn-out blankets, or even pieces or strips of blankets were and are still given, on the principle that to those who have, shall be given.

A song is sung, a dance performed, and the guests disperse, but frequently a repetition of the whole affair occurs in the next lodge, and so on until the whole community has contributed to make the affair one long to be remembered and handed down by tradition as an epoch in the history of the village.

Horatio Hale on the potlatch⁷ (1890)

Two institutions which are, to a greater or less extent, common to all the coast tribes, and which seem particularly to characterize them and to distinguish them from other communities, may be here specially noted. Both appear to have originated in the Kwakiutl nation, and to have spread thence northward and southward. These institutions are the political secret societies, and the custom of “potlatch”. Secret societies exist among other Indian tribes, and probably among all races of the globe, civilized or barbarous. But there are perhaps no other communities in which the whole political system has come to be bound up with such societies.

As Dr. Boas informs us, there are in all the tribes three distinct ranks – the chiefs, the middle class, and the common people – or, as they might perhaps be more aptly styled, nobles, burgesses, and rabble. The nobles form a caste. Their rank is hereditary; and no one who was not born in it can in any way attain it. The nobles have distinction and respect, but little power. The government belongs mainly to the “burgesses,” who constitute the bulk of the nation. They owe their position entirely to the secret societies. Any person who is not a member of a secret society belongs to the rabble, takes no part in the public councils, and is without consideration or influence. The greater the number of secret societies to which any man belongs, the higher is

⁷ From Hale, H. (1890). Remarks on the Ethnology of British Columbia: Introductory to the Second General Report of Dr. Franz Boas on the Indians of that Province. In British Association for the Advancement of Science (Ed.). *Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*. London: Burlington House. Written by Horatio Hale (1817-1896).

his standing in the community. As there are several of these societies in every tribe, it is evident that no person whose character would make him a desirable member of one of them is likely to remain outside the burgess class. The lowest class, or rabble, is therefore a veritable residuum, composed of feeble-minded or worthless individuals, with, of course – in those tribes which practice slave-holding – slaves and their descendants. Grotesque as this system seems at first thought, further consideration shows it to be by no means ill-contrived for keeping the government of the tribe permanently in the worthiest hands, and bringing men of the first merit into the most influential positions.

Connected with this system is that of the “potlatch,” or gift-festival, a custom which has been greatly misunderstood by strangers, who have regarded it as a mere parade of wasteful and ostentatious profusion. It is in reality something totally different. The potlatch is a method most ingeniously devised for displaying merit, acquiring influence, and at the same time laying up a provision for the future. Among these Indians, as among all communities in which genuine civilization has made some progress, the qualities most highly esteemed in a citizen are thrift, forethought, and liberality. The thrift is evinced by the collection of the property which is distributed at the gift-feast; the liberality is, of course, shown in its distribution; and the forethought is displayed in selecting as the special objects of this liberality those who are most likely to be able to return it.

By a well-understood rule, which among these punctilious natives had all the force of a law of honor, every recipient of a gift at a potlatch was bound to return its value, at some future day, twofold. And in this repayment his relatives were expected to aid him; they were deemed, in fact, his sureties. Thus a thrifty and aspiring burgess who, at one of these gift-feasts, had emptied all his chests of their accumulated stores, and had left himself and his family destitute, could comfortably reflect, as he saw his visitors depart in their well-laden canoes, that he had not only greatly increased his reputation, but had at the same time invested all his means at high interest, on excellent security, and was now in fact one of the wealthiest, as well as most esteemed, members of the community.

We now perceive why the well-meant act of the local legislature, abolishing the custom of the potlatch, aroused such strenuous opposition among the tribes in which this custom specially prevailed. We may imagine the consternation which would be caused in England if the decree of a superior power should require that all deposits should remain the property of those who held them in trust. The potlatch and its accompaniments doubtless had their ill effects, but the system clearly possessed its useful side, and it might perhaps have been better left to gradually decline and disappear with the rise and diffusion of a different system of economy. [...]

[By way of example,] the Cowichan tribe [...] on the south-east corner of Vancouver Island [...] are described as making fair progress, but as more unsettled in their habits. The recent statutory interference with some of their customs had produced a remarkable effect. Under the peculiar stimulus of their own system they had accumulated in 1888 “personal property” to the large amount of 407,000 dollars. In the following year that value had suddenly sunk to 80,000 dollars. This startling

change is briefly explained by the Indian Superintendent for the Province: “The decrease in the value of personal property as compared with last year,” he states, “is ascribed by Mr. Agent Lomas to the fact that most of the natives have not collected property for potlatching purposes.” Thus it appears that a law of compulsory repudiation, enacted with the most benevolent motives, had in a single year reduced the personal wealth of one small tribe from over 400,000 dollars to a fifth of that amount. This must be deemed a lesson in political economy as striking as (coming from such a quarter) it is unexpected.

First report of Franz Boas on the potlatch⁸ (1889)

One of the most complicated and interesting institutions of these tribes is the so-called *potlatch* – the custom of paying debts and of acquiring distinction by means of giving a great feast and making presents to all guests. It is somewhat difficult to understand the meaning of the potlatch. I should compare its most simple form to our custom of invitation or making presents, and the obligations arising from the offering, not the acceptance, of such invitations and presents. Indeed, the system is almost entirely analogous, with the sole exception that the Indian is more anxious to outdo the first giver than the civilized European, who, however, has the same tendency, and that which is custom with us is law to the Indian. Thus, by continued potlatches each man becomes necessarily the debtor of the other.

According to Indian ideas, any moral or material harm done to a man can be made good by an adequate potlatch. Thus, if a man was ridiculed by another, he gives away a number of blankets to his friends, and thus regains his former standing. I remember, for instance, that the grandson of a chief in Hope Island, by unskillful management of his little canoe, was upset near the beach and had to wade ashore. The grandfather felt ashamed on account of the boy’s accident and gave away blankets to take away the occasion of remarks on this subject. In the same way a man who feels injured by another will destroy a certain amount of property; then his adversary is compelled to do the same, else a stain of dishonor would rest upon him. This custom may be compared to a case where a member of civilized society gives away, to no good purpose, a considerable amount of money ostentatiously in order to show his superiority over a detested neighbor. I adduce these comparisons to show that the custom is not so difficult to understand, and is founded on psychical causes as active in our civilized society as among the barbarous natives of British Columbia.

A remarkable feature of the potlatch is the custom of giving feasts going beyond the host’s means. The procedure at such occasions is also exactly regulated. The foundation of this custom is solidarity of the individual and the gens, or even the tribe, to which he belongs. If an individual gains social distinction, his gens participates in it. If he loses in respect, the stain rests also on the gens. Therefore the gens contributes to the payments to be made at a festival. If the feast is given to

⁸ From Boas, F. (1889). First General Report on the Indians of British Columbia. In British Association for the Advancement of Science (Ed.). *Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*. London: Burlington House. Written by Franz Uri Boas (1858 – 1942).

foreign tribes, the whole tribe contributes to these payments. The method by which this is done has been well set forth by Dr. G. M. Dawson⁹. The man who intends to give the potlatch first borrows as many blankets as he needs from both his friends and from those whom he is going to invite to the feast. Everyone lend him as many as he can afford, i.e., according to his rank. At the feast these are given away, each man receiving the more the higher his rank is. All those who have received anything at the potlatch have to repay the double amount at a later day, and this is used to repay those who lent blankets. At each such feast the man who gives it acquires a new and more honorable name.

Among the Snanaimuq I observed the following customs: The chief's son adopts, some time after his father's death, the latter's name. For this purpose he invites all the neighboring tribes to a potlatch. The Snanaimuq have a permanent scaffold erected in front of their houses, on which the chief stands during the potlatch, assisted by two slaves, who distribute the presents he gives away among his guests, who stand and sit in the street. As it is necessary to give a great festival at the assumption of the chief's name, the new chief continues sometimes for years and years to accumulate wealth for the purpose of celebrating this event. At the festival his father's name is given him by four chiefs of foreign tribes.

Second report of Franz Boas on the potlatch¹⁰ (1890)

The custom of giving great feasts, at which a large amount of property is distributed, is common to the Nootka and all their neighbors. The principle underlying the potlatch is that each man who has received a present becomes, to double the amount he received, the debtor of the giver. Potlatches are celebrated at all important events. The purchase-money of a wife belongs to this class also, as she is returned to the purchaser after a certain lapse of time (see below). After the death of a chief, his heir is not installed in his dignity until he has given a great potlatch. If he is to be the chief of the whole tribe, the neighboring tribes are invited to take part in the potlatch. The taking of a name and that of a dance [...] are also celebrated by a potlatch. This custom is practically the same among all the tribes of the north-west coast.

When a chief has to give a great potlatch to a neighboring tribe, he announces his intention, and the [illegible] resolve in council when the festival is to be given. A messenger is sent out to give notice of the intention of the chief to hold a potlatch at the agreed time. When all preparations have been finished, and the time has come, another messenger, called *ia'tsetl*, is sent out to invite the guests to come to the festival. The guests come in their canoes, and when not far from the village they halt and dress up at their nicest, smearing their faces with tallow and then painting with

⁹ Trans. Roy. Soc. Can. 1887, p. 80. [Note in the original. The work cited is transcribed elsewhere in this collection.]

¹⁰ From Boas, F. (1890). Second Report on the Indians of British Columbia. In British Association for the Advancement of Science (Ed.). *Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*. London: Burlington House. Written by Franz Uri Boas (1858 – 1942).

red color. Then the canoes proceed to the grand village in grand procession, their bows being abreast. At this time several songs¹¹ are sung, each tribe having its own song.

When they are seen to approach, the tribe who have invited them go down to the beach. The chief's son or daughter is attired in the dress and mask of the crest animal of the sept, and performs a dance in honor of the guests. The *ia'tsetl* next calls the name of the head chief of the visitors, and he comes ashore. Then the others are called according to rank. They are led into the chief's house, after having received one or two blankets when landing. On entering the house they are also given a few blankets. The guests are feasted first by the chief and then by all other members of the tribe who can afford it. Finally, after a number of feasts have been given, the chief prepares for the potlatch, and under great ceremonies and dances the blankets are distributed among the guests, each receiving according to his rank. At the potlatch certain songs are sung. Each chief has a song of his own that is only sung at his feasts. [...] After the death of a chief this song is sung; but after that the people are forbidden to use it for one year, when the potlatch is given in which the succeeding chief assumes his dignity.

Among the gifts bestowed at a potlatch is the right to perform certain non-religious dances that are only danced at such feasts. In such cases the original owner retains the right to the dance, although he has given the same right to a friend. In this respect the customs of the Nootka differ from those of the Kwakiutl, among whom a man who gives away the right to perform a dance loses the right to perform the same.

I will give an instance showing the way in which a certain dance may be passed from tribe to tribe. The Kayō'kath have a tradition that at one time their chief, when hunting, met a man who had descended from heaven beside a small lake on one of the islands near Kayō'kath. The man had ten mouths, each of different shape, which he showed in succession. He asked the chief whether he desired to have always a plentiful supply of salmon. The latter replied that he did not need any salmon, as his people used to gather an abundant supply of mussels, which had red flesh as well as the salmon, and that consequently he had no use for the latter. Then the stranger made the pond dry up, and ever since that time there have been no salmon at Kayō'kath. The chief, in memory of this encounter, danced [and sang a song] in potlatches with the mask representing the many-mouthed being. [...]

The chief of the Kayō'kath gave this song to the Ahan'sath at a potlatch, who, in their turn, gave it as a present to the Ts'ēcāth chief.[...] In the potlatch dances men, women, and children dance the same dances. It is stated that the Ahan'sath at one time made different dances for men, women, and children, but this was an exceptional experiment. In former times the privilege of performing a certain dance was rigidly guarded, and many wars were raged against tribes who performed a dance to which they had no right. [...]

¹¹ The original includes sheet music and lyrics for a number of potlatch songs. I have omitted them from this collection, as they were only to be sung or otherwise made known under specific conditions. I have, for the same reason, also excised details of rituals and dances that were not explicitly intended to be known by outsiders.

I may remark in this place that the copper plates which play so important a part in the customs of the northern tribes are not used by the Nootka.

Third report of Franz Boas on the potlatch¹² (1891)

SECRET SOCIETIES AND THE POTLATCH

The social organization, festivals, and secret societies of the Bilqula¹³ are [...] closely interrelated [...] and must be considered in connection. We have here to describe the potlatch, the Sisau'kH, and the Kū'siūt. [...] The Bilqula believe that the potlatch has been instituted by ten deities, nine brothers and one sister, the foremost among whom is Qē'mtsiōa, to whose care the sunrise is entrusted. He resides with the others in a beautiful house in the far east, and cries ō! ō! every morning when the sun rises. He has to take care that the sun rises properly. The first six of these deities are grouped in pairs, and are believed to paint their faces with designs representing moon, stars, and rainbow. [...] The seventh is Kula'qawa, whose face represents the blossom of a salmonberry bush. [...] The next in order, Kulē'lias ("who wants to have blankets first"), wears the design of the rainbow in black and blue. [...] The ninth, At'amā'k, wears on the head a mask representing a kingfisher, and is clothed in a birdskin blanket. The last of the series is a woman called Tl'ētsā'aplētlāua ("the eater"), the sister of all the others. Her face is painted with a bladder filled with grease. [...] She figures in several legends as stealing provisions and pursued by the people whom she has robbed.

The Sisau'kH, which is danced at potlatches and other festivals of gentes, is presided over by a being that lives in the sun. A man who had gone out hunting met the Sisau'kH, and was instructed by him in the secrets of the dance. When he returned, he asked the people to clean their houses, and to strew them with clean sand, before he consented to enter. Then he danced the Sisau'kH, and told the people what he had seen. He said that the being had commanded them to perform this dance and to adorn themselves when dancing with carved headdresses with trails of ermine skins, and to swing carved rattles. The man, later on, returned to the sun. Ever since that time the Bilqula dance the Sisau'kH. Besides this, it is stated that the Raven gave each gens¹⁴ its secrets.

Each gens has its peculiar carvings, which are used in the Sisau'kH only, and are otherwise kept a deep secret, *i.e.*, they are the sacred possessions of each gens. All gentes¹⁵, however, wear the beautiful headdresses and use the raven rattles, regardless of the carving they represent. Every time the sacred objects of a gens are shown to the people, a potlatch is given. The sacred objects, although the property of

¹² From Boas, F. (1891). Third Report on the Indians of British Columbia. In British Association for the Advancement of Science (Ed.). *Seventh Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*. London: Burlington House. Written by Franz Uri Boas (1858 – 1942).

¹³ The Bilqula, who are generally called Bella Coola, are the most northern tribe belonging to the Salish family. They are separated from the tribes speaking allied languages by the Chilcotin (of the Tinnex stock) in the interior, and on the coast by the Kwakiutl. [From an earlier passage in the original.]

¹⁴ A group of connected families.

¹⁵ Groups of gens.

the various gentes, must nevertheless be acquired by each individual. That is to say, every free person has the right to acquire a certain group of carvings and names, according to the gens to which he or she belongs. Slaves and slaves' children, also illegitimate children, could not become Sisau'kH. A person cannot take a new carving, but must wait until it is given to him by his relatives – father, mother, or elder brother.

Nusk'elu'sta, to whom I owe my information regarding the gentes, and who is a member of the gens Ialo'stimōt of the Talio'mH, stated that he had received the raven when he gave his first potlatch. At the second potlatch he received the eagle. He hopes that his mother will give him the whale at his next potlatch, and will at the same time divulge to him the secrets connected with it. In the course of time, he said, he might get even others from his brother; but if the latter's children should prove to be very good, and develop very rapidly, his brother would probably give his secrets to his children.

At festivals, when a person acquires a new secret, he changes his name. Each person has two names, a Kū'siūt name, which remains the same throughout life, and a Qē'mtsiōa name, which is changed at these festivals. Thus, Nusk'elu'sta's (which is his Kū'siūt name) present Qē'mtsiōa name is Atl'itlemnē'lus'aiH, but at his next potlatch he intends to take the name Kaliā'kis. These names are also the property of the various gentes, each gens having its own names. [...] When a man possesses several Sisau'kH secrets he will distribute them among his children. When a girl marries, her father or mother may, after a child has been born to her, give one or several of their Sisau'kH secrets to her husband, as his children make him a member of the gens. When a person gets to be old he gives away all his Sisau'kH secrets. After any secret has been given away, the giver must not use it anymore. The crest and the Sisau'kH carvings must not be loaned to others, but each person must keep his own carvings. The only exceptions are the carved headdresses and the raven rattles, which are not the property of any particular gens.

The laws regarding the potlatch are similar to those of the Kwakiutl. The receiver of a present becomes the debtor of the person who gave the potlatch. If the latter should die, the debts become due to his heirs. If the debtor should die, his heirs become responsible for the debt. Property is also destroyed at potlatches. This is not returned, and serves only to enhance the social position of the individual who performed this act. It is not necessary that all the property given by a person in a potlatch should be owned by him. He may borrow part of it from his friends, and has to repay it with interest. I was told, for instance, that a man borrowed a large copper plate and burnt it at a potlatch. When doing so he had to name the price which he was going to pay to the owner in its stead. Since that feast he died, and his heirs are now responsible for the amount named at the potlatch.

The Kū'siūt is presided over by a female spirit, called Anaūlikūtsai'H. Her abode is a cave in the woods, which she keeps shut from February till October, remaining all the while inside. In October she opens the door of her cave and sits in front of it. A woman is said to have been the first to find her. Anaūlikūtsai'H invited her into her cave and taught her the secrets of the Kū'siūt. She wore ornaments of

red cedar-bark around her head, wrist, and ankles; her face was blackened, her hair strewn with eagle-down. She commanded the woman to dance in the same way as she saw her dancing. She said, "Whenever a person sees me, your people shall dance the Kū'siūt. If you do not do so I shall punish you with death and sickness. In summer, while I am in my house, you must not dance the Kū'siūt."

Ever since that time the Bilqula dance the Kū'siūt. When a man has seen Anaūlikūtsai'ḥ sitting before her cave, he will invite the people to a Kū'siūt. A ring made of red and white cedar-bark is hung up in his house, and the uninitiated are not allowed to enter it. Only in the evening, when the dances are performed, they may look on, standing close to the door. As soon as the dances are over they must retire from the taboo house. Each Kū'siūt lasts three days.

The various dances performed by members of the Kū'siūt are also the property of the gentes, and the right of performing them is restricted to members of the gens. They must not be given to a daughter's husband, as is the case with the Sisau'ḥ dances (see above), but belong to the members of the gens alone. They may, however, be loaned and borrowed by members of the gens, who have a right to a particular dance, but who do not own it. Permission to use a mask or dance is obtained from the owner by payments. The owner may reclaim the dance or the borrower may return it at any time. Membership of the Kū'siūt is obtained through an initiation. At this time the novice is given his Kū'siūt name, which he retains throughout life. Each gens has its peculiar Kū'siūt names, which are inherited by young persons from their parents or from other relatives. Thus a young man who had the name of Pō'pō until he was about seventeen years old, obtained at his initiation the name of Tl'akō'otl.

I have not reached a very clear understanding of the details of the initiation; it seems that the dance is simply given to the novice in the same way as the Sisau'ḥ, this initiation being connected with a potlatch. But still it seems possible that he must "dream" of the dance which he is to perform. Only the highest degrees of the Kū'siūt have to pass through a religious ceremony of some importance. The highest degrees are the ɛlaqō'tla, [...] the Ō'leq, [...] and the Dā'tia. [...] These grades are also hereditary. A Kū'siūt novice may acquire them at once at his first initiation. [...]

CUSTOMS REGARDING BIRTH, PUBERTY, [...] AND DEATH

When the time of delivery approaches, the woman leaves the house and resorts to a small hut for the purpose. She is assisted by professional midwives. The child is washed in warm water. For ten days the mother must remain in this hut. Father and mother must not go near the room for a year (according to Nusk'elu'sta, for ten days), else the salmon would take offence.

The child is soon given its first name. On this occasion the whole tribe is invited to a feast, the name is made public, and the guests receive small presents. The child retains this name until it becomes a member of the Kū'siūt, when it is given its Kū'siūt name. This ceremony takes place after puberty has been reached. About this period the young man gives his first potlatch and assumes his Qē'mtsīoa name. [...]

When a person has died [...] his crest is carved on a memorial column, which also shows how many canoes, coppers, head-dresses, and slaves he had given away at potlatches. [...] Some time after the death of a rich or influential person his nearest

relative invites the whole tribe to a potlatch. On this occasion he sings a mourning song for the deceased and gives away presents to his guests. It was explained to me that this ended the mourning, and that it was “the same as giving away the bones of the deceased”

Franz Boas on the Kwakiutl potlatch¹⁶ (1897)

THE POTLATCH

Before proceeding further, it will be necessary to describe the method of acquiring rank. This is done by means of the potlatch, or the distribution of property. This custom has been described often, but it has been thoroughly misunderstood by most observers. The underlying principle is that of the interest-bearing investment of property.

The child, when born, is given the name of the place where it is born. This name (*g·î'nlaxlê*) it keeps until until about a year old. Then his father, mother, or some other relative, gives a paddle or a mat to each member of the clan and the child receives his second name (*nā'map'axlêya*). When the boy is about 10 or 12 years old, he obtains his third name (*ḡōmiatsexLä'yē*). In order to obtain it, he must distribute a number of small presents, such as shirts or single blankets, among his own clan or tribe. When the youth thus starts out in life, he is liberally assisted by his elders, particularly by the nobility of the tribe.

I must say here that the unit of value is the single blanket, nowadays a cheap white woolen blanket, which is valued at 50 cents. The double blanket is valued at three single blankets. These blankets form the means of exchange of the Indians, and everything is paid for in blankets or in objects the value of which is measured by blankets. When a native has to pay debts and has not a sufficient number of blankets, he borrows them from his friends and has to pay the following rates of interest:

For a period of a few months, for 5 borrowed blankets 6 must be returned (*lê'k·ō*); for a period of six months, for 5 borrowed blankets 7 must be returned (*mā'Laxsa lê'k·ōyō*); for a period of twelve months or longer, for 5 borrowed blankets 10 must be returned (*dē'ida* or *g·ēLa*).

When a person has poor credit, he may pawn his name for a year. Then the name must not be used during that period, and for 30 blankets which he has borrowed he must pay 100 in order to redeem his name. This is called *q'ā'q'oaxō* (selling a slave).

The rate of interest of the *lê'k·ō* varies somewhat around 25 per cent, according to the kindness of the loaner and the credit of the borrower. For a very short time blankets may be loaned without interest. This is designated by the same term.

When the boy is about to take his third name, he will borrow blankets from the other members of the tribe, who will assist him. He must repay them after a year, or later, with 100 per cent. interest. Thus he may have gathered 100 blankets. In June, the time set for this act, the boy will distribute these blankets among his own tribe, but a few more to the chief. This is called *Lä'X'uit*. When after this time any member

¹⁶ From Boas, F. (1897). *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*. Washington: Government Printing Office. Written by Franz Boas (1858 – 1942).

of the tribe distributes blankets, the boy receives treble the amount he has given. The people make it a point to repay him inside of a month.

Thus he owns 300 blankets, of which, however, he must repay 200 after the lapse of a year. He loans the blankets out among his friends, and thus at the close of the year he may possess about 400 blankets.

The next June he pays his debts (qoana') in a festival, at which all the clans from whom he borrowed blankets are present. The festival is generally held on the street or an open place near the village. Up to this time he is not allowed to take part in feasts. But now he may distribute property in order to obtain a potlatch name (p'ä'tsaxLäyē). This is also called Lā'X'uit.

At this time the father gives up his seat (Lā'Xoē) in favor of his son. After the boy has paid his debts, the chief calls all the older members of the tribe to a council, in which it is resolved that the boy is to receive his father's seat. The chief sends his speaker to call the boy, and his clan go out in company with the speaker. The young man – for henceforth he will be counted among the men – dresses with a black headband and paints long vertical stripes, one on each side of his face, running down from the outer corners of the eyes. The stripes represent tears. He gives a number of blankets to his friends, who carry them into the house where the council is being held. The speaker enters first and announces his arrival. The young man follows, and after him enter his friends, carrying blankets. He remains standing in front of the fire, and the chief announces to him that he is to take his father's seat. Then the boy distributes his blankets among the other clans and sells some food, with which a feast is prepared. His father gives up his seat and takes his place among the old men (Nō'matsēiL). The blankets given away at this feast are repaid with 100 per cent. interest. In this manner the young man continues to loan and to distribute blankets, and thus is able, with due circumspection and foresight, to amass a fortune. Sometimes it happens that the successor to a man's name (Lāwu'lqame) already has a name of his own. In all such cases (also when the name is acquired by inheritance) the successor gives up his name and property to his own successor.

Possession of wealth is considered honorable, and it is the endeavor of each Indian to acquire a fortune. But it is not as much the possession of wealth as the ability to give great festivals which makes wealth a desirable object to the Indian. As the boy acquires his second name and man's estate by means of a distribution of property, which in course of time will revert to him with interest, the man's name acquires greater weight in the councils of the tribe and greater renown among the whole people, as he is able to distribute more and more property at each subsequent festival. Therefore boys and men are vying with each other in the arrangement of great distributions of property. Boys of different clans are pitted against each other by their elders, and each is exhorted to do his utmost to outdo his rival. And as the boys strive against each other, so do the chiefs and the whole clans, and the one object of the Indian is to outdo his rival. Formerly, feats of bravery counted, as well as distributions of property, but nowadays, as the Indians say, "rivals fight with property only." The clans are thus perpetually pitted against each other according to their rank. [...]

I have referred several times to the distribution of blankets. The recipient in such a distribution is not at liberty to refuse the gift, although according to what I have said it is nothing but an interest-bearing loan that must be refunded at some time with 100 per cent interest. This festival is called p'a'sa, literally, flattening something (for instance, a basket). This means that by the amount of property given the name of the rival is flattened.

There is still another method of rising in the social scale, namely by showing oneself superior to the rival. This may be done by inviting the rival and his clan or tribe to a festival and giving him a considerable number of blankets. He is compelled to accept these, but is not allowed to do so until after he has placed an equal number of blankets on top of the pile offered to him. This is called dāpentg•ala and the blankets placed on top of the first pile are called dāpenō. Then he receives the whole pile and becomes debtor to that amount, i.e., he must repay the gift with 100 per cent interest.

A similar proceeding takes place when a canoe is given to a rival. The latter, when the gift is offered to him, must put blankets to the amount of half the value of the canoe on to it. This is called dā'gōt (taking hold of the bow of the canoe). These blankets are kept by the first owner of the canoe. Later on, the recipient of the canoe must return another canoe, together with an adequate number of blankets, as an "anchor line" for the canoe. This giving of a canoe is called sā'k•a.

Still more complicated is the purchase or the gift, however one chooses to term it, of a "copper". All along the North Pacific Coast, from yakutat to Comox, curiously shaped copper plates are in use, which in olden times were made of native copper, which is found in Alaska and probably also on Nass River, but which nowadays are worked out of imported copper. [...] The front of the copper is covered with black lead, in which a face, representing the crest animal of the owner, is graven. These coppers have the same function which bank notes of high denominations have with us. The actual value of the piece of copper is small, but it is made to represent a large number of blankets and can always be sold for blankets. The value is not arbitrarily set, but depends upon the abundance of property given away in the festival at which the copper is sold. On the whole, the oftener a copper is sold the higher its value, as every new buyer tries to invest more blankets in it. Therefore the purchase of a copper also brings distinction, because it proves that the buyer is able to bring together a vast amount of property.

Each copper has a name of its own, and from the following list of coppers, which were in Fort Rupert in 1893, the values attached to some¹⁷ of them may be seen:

Mā'sts'ōlem (=all other coppers are ashamed to look at it), 7,500 blankets

L'ā'xolamas (=steel-head salmon, i.e., it glides out of one's hands like a salmon), 6,000 blankets.

Lo'pELila (=making the house empty of blankets), 5,000 blankets. [...]

¹⁷ I've only transcribed the names of those for which blanket values were provided. The original list includes more coppers, with names that Boas translated as "about whose possession all are quarreling," "sea lion," "beaver face," "looking below," "moon," "a spirit," "day face," "bear face," "crow," "whale," "killer whale," and "war, against the blankets of the purchaser."

The purchase of a high-priced copper is an elaborate ceremony, which must be described in detail. The trade is discussed and arranged long beforehand. When the buyer is ready, he gives to the owner of the copper blankets about one-sixth of the total value of the copper. This is called “making a pillow” for the copper (q̄enul̄la); or “making a feather bed” (ta’lqoa) or “the harpoon line at which game is hanging” (dōx̄semt), meaning that in the same manner the copper is attached to the long line of blankets; or “taken in the hand, in order to lift the copper” (dā’g•ilēlem). The owner of the copper loans these blankets out, and when he has called them in again, he repays the total amount received, with 100 per cent interest, to the purchaser.

On the following day the tribes assemble for the sale of the copper. The prescribed proceeding is as follows: The buyer offers first the lowest prices at which the copper was sold. The owner declares that he is satisfied, but his friends demand by degrees higher and higher prices, according to all the previous sales of the copper. This is galled g•i’na. Finally, the amount offered is deemed satisfactory. Then the owner asks for boxes to carry away the blankets. These are counted five pairs a box, and are also paid in blankets or other objects. After these have been paid, the owner of the copper calls his friends – members of his own tribe – to rise, and asks for a belt, which he values at several hundred blankets. While these are being brought, he and his tribe generally repair to their house, where they paint their faces and dress in new blankets. When they have finished, drums are beaten in the house, they all shout “hī!” and go out again, the speaker of the seller first. As soon as the latter has left the house, he turns and calls his chief to come down, who goes back to where the sale is going on, followed by his tribe. They all stand in a row and the buyer puts down the blankets which were demanded as a belt, “to adorn the owner of the copper.” This whole purchase is called “putting the copper under the name of the buyer” (lā’sa).

In this proceeding the blankets are placed in piles of moderate height, one pile close to the other, so that they occupy a considerable amount of space. In Fort Rupert there are two high posts on the beach bearing carved figures on top, between which the blankets are thus piled [...]. They stand about 40 steps apart.

On the following day all the blankets which have been paid for the copper must be distributed by the owner among his own tribe, paying to them his old debts first, and, if the amount is sufficient, giving new presents. This is called “doing a great thing” (wā’lasila).

Coppers are always sold to rivals, and often a man will offer his copper for sale to the rival tribe. If it is not accepted, it is acknowledgment that nobody in the tribe has money enough to buy it, and the name of the tribe or clan would consequently lose in weight. Therefore, if a man is willing to accept the offer, all the members of the tribe must assist him in this undertaking with loans of blankets. Debts which are repaid in the wā’lasila were mostly contracted in this manner.

[THE SALE OF A COPPER IN THE WINTER OF 1894-1895]

In order to better illustrate this curious proceeding, I will describe the sale of a copper which took place in the winter of 1894-95.

First, a feast was celebrated, in which the Ma'malēleqala offered the copper M'axts'olēm for sale to the Kwakiutl. Mā'Xua, chief of the clan Maa'mtag•ila, invited all the tribes to his house. Then he spoke:

“Come, tribe, to my house. This is the house of the first Mā'Xua at G•agaxsdals. This is the feast house of Mā'Xua here. This is the house to which Mā'Xua invited at Ēg•isbalīs. This is the house to which Mā'Xua invited at Qalo'gwīs. This is the feast house of of Mā'Xua at G•a'qīs. This is the house to which my father invited at Tsā'xīs. I take the place of my father now. I invited you, tribes, that you should come and see my house here. I am proud to speak of my ancestor, the chief who in the beginning of the world had the name Mā'Xua.”

Then Mā'Xua turned to his own tribe and said:

“Yes, K•ēsōyag•līs. Yes, Mā'Xuag•ila. Let me speak of my ways, Wa, wa! thus I speak, my tribe.”

Then he turned to the other tribes and told them to sing, saying:

“Go on, tell the whole world, tribes! go on and sing; this was given to our ancestors in the beginning of the world by Kuēkuaxāōē.”

Now Mā'Xua stopped speaking, and Qoayō'Las, chief of the Ma'malēleqala of the clan Wā'las, spoke:

“Yes, Chef! It is true what you said. I thank you for your words, Chief! Our ways are not new ways. They were made by our chief (the deity) and marked out for us when he made our ancestors men. We try to imitate what our ancestors were told to do by the creator. Keep in your old ways, Kwakiutl; keep in the ways of your grandfathers, who laid down the custom for you.”

Then he turned to his own tribe and said:

“That is what I say, Wā'k•as. That is what I say, Nēg•ē'. The word of the chief shall not hurt me.”

Now he took the copper [...] and said:

“Now sing my song!”

His tribe sang, and after they had finished Qoayō'Las spoke again:

“Yes, my tribe! I can not help how I feel; I have nothing against the way, Kwakiutl, in which you treat me and my tribe. Now I will promise blankets to you, Kwakiutl, blankets to you, Guētēla, blankets to you, Q'ōmōyuē, blankets to you, Q'ōmk•ūtīs, blankets to you, Wālas Kwakiutl: this copper belongs to Ts'axts'agits'emqa, the son of Wālas Nēmō'gwīs. Now take care, great tribe! This great copper has a high price; its name is Mā'xts'olēm (the one of whom all are ashamed). Now I am going to lay it down before you, Kwakiutl. Do not let me carry it myself, lā'bid! Take it to the chiefs.”

Then lā'bid arose and spoke:

“Say this again, my chief! Now look out, chiefs of the Kwakiutl, this is the Sē'xtig•ila Mā'xts'olēm (the one who makes thirsty and of whom all are ashamed). This I will bring to you.

Then he stepped toward the Kwakiutl, and put the copper on the floor where they were sitting. Now Owaxā'lag•ilīs arose, took the copper, and spoke:

“Thank you, Wā’las NEMŏgwis. Come now, salmon, for which our forefathers have been watching. This is Mā’xts’ōLEM. I will buy this Mā’xts’ōLEM. Now pay me, Kwakiutl, what I loaned to you, that I may buy it quickly, in order to keep our name as high as it is now. Don’t let us be afraid of the price of Mā’xts’ōLEM, my tribe, wa, wa! Now put down the dishes, that our tribe may eat.”

Ōwaxā’lag • ilīs sat down, the young man distributed the dishes, and all the tribes ate. Now Mā’Xua stepped up again and spoke kindly to the eating people.

“Go on,” he said, “eat, Wā’las NEMŏgwis; eat, Hē’lamas; eat, NĒg • ē; eat you, Ma’malēleqala; eat, lā’qōlas; eat, G • ’ōtē, you NĒ’mqic; eat, Sē’wit’ē; eat, Ē’wanuX; eat you, lau’itsis; eat, Wā’k • as; eat, Pōtlidē, you, Mā’t’ilpē; eat, Wāts’ē; eat, Hē’was, you T’ena’xtax. Eat, all you tribes. Now it is done. I have already told you of my grandfather. This food here is the good will of our forefather. It is all given away. Now, look out, Kwakiutl! our chief here is going to buy this copper, and let us help him, wa, wa!”

Then spoke Hā’mesk • inīs and said:

“Your words are true, Chief! how true are your words. I do know how to buy coppers; I always pay high prices for coppers. Now take care, Kwakiutl, my tribe, else you will be laughed at. Thus I say, Ō’ts’ēstalīs; thus I say, Wa’nuku; thus I say, young chiefs of the Kwakiutl; thus I say, Tsō’palīs; thus I say, Ō’gwīla; thus I say, Ō’mx • ’it, young chiefs of the Q’ō’moyuē; thus I say, Qoē’mālaasts’ē; thus I say, Yēqawit, chiefs of the Q’ō’mk • ūtīs; thus I say, Qoayō’lilas; thus I say, Wā’kīdīs, young chiefs of the Wālas Kwakiutl. This is my speech for our children, Mā’Xuag • ila, that they may take care, wa, wa!”

Then Qoayō’lilas stood up again and said: “Thank you; did you hear, lā’bid? Ho, ho, ho, uō, uō, uō. (The “ho” means the lifting of the heavy copper from the ground; the “uō” is the cry of the Ts’ō’noqoa.) Now let me invite them, Ma’malēleqala; I believe they want to buy my copper. Now I will invite them.”

Then his tribe said, “Do it, do it,” and he continued:

“Now, Guē’tēla, behold the dance of la’qoag • ilayūkoa, the daughter of Wālas NEMŏgwis. Now, Q’ō’moyuē, see the dance of Āomōla, the daughter of Wālas NEMŏgwis. Now, Wālas Kwā’kiutl, see the dance of Mā’Xualag • ilīs, the son of Wālas NEMŏgwis. These are my words, wa, wa!”

Then all the guests went out. Later on Ōwaxā’lag • ilīs invited all the Kwakiutl, Ma’malēleqala, NĒ’mqic, lau’itsis, T’ena’xtax, and Mā’t’ilpē, because he intended to buy the copper Mā’xts’ōLEM that morning on the beach. Then all the tribes assembled. Ōwaxā’lag • ilīs stood on the beach and spoke. He said:

“Now, come, chiefs of all tribes. Yes, you come, because we want to do a great work. Now, I am going to buy the copper Mā’xts’ōLEM, of Wālas NEMŏgwis. Only don’t ask too high a price for it. And you, young chiefs of the Kwakiutl, take care and help me. Go now and bring the blankets from my house.”

Then the young men went and piled the blankets on the beach. Mā'Xua and Ōwaxā'lag • ilīs counted them. One man of the Ma'malēleqala, one of the Nimkish, one of the Lau'itsis, kept the tally¹⁸.

Mā'Xua spoke:

"It is my office to take care of the property of our chief. It was the office of my forefathers. Now I will begin."

Then he counted one pair, two pairs, three pairs, four pairs, five pairs, six pairs, seven pairs, eight pairs, nine pairs, ten pairs. As soon as ten pairs were counted, he said aloud, "ten pairs," and the counters repeated, "twenty blankets," and put two stones aside. When Mā'Xua had counted another ten pairs, the counters said, "forty blankets," and put two more stones aside. They continued to put aside two stones for each ten pairs of blankets [...]. Two men kept on piling up the blankets, and when they had piled up 1,000 blankets, Mā'Xua said aloud, "One thousand blankets." The blankets were piled up alongside of a carved beam standing on the beach [...]. When the pile was high enough, a new one was begun right next to the first pile.

Then Ōwaxā'lag • ilīs arose and spoke:

"Tribes, I buy the copper Mā'xts'ōlēm with these 1,000 blankets. I shall not give any more unless the chiefs of all the tribes should ask for more, wa! That is my speech, chiefs of the Kwakiutl."

Now he sat down and Wālas Nēmō'gwis arose. He said:

"Ya, Then Ōwaxā'lag • ilīs! Are your words true? Did you say it was enough?" Then he turned to his tribe and said, "Ya, Olsī'wit! Now rise, chief, and speak for me. That is what I say, lā'bidē."

Then Olsī'wit arose [...] and said:

"Are those your words, Kwakiutl? Did you say this was all that you were going to give for the copper? Are there 1,000 blankets?"

The counters replied, "Yes, there are 1,000 blankets."

Olsī'wit continued:

"Thank you, Ōwaxā'lag • ilīs, Chief. Do you think you have finished? Now take care, Kwakiutl! You, Chief, give twenty times ten pairs more, so that there will be 200 more." Then he turned to his tribe and said, "Chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala! Now, I have said my words, Chief Wālas Nēmō'gwis."

Then Ōwaxā'lag • ilīs arose and said:

"Your speech, Olsī'wit, is good. It pleases my heart." And he said to the young men: "Go and bring 200 blankets from my house."

They went at once and brought those blankets.

Then Mā'Xua arose and counted the blankets. He called out how many there were. He said:

"There are 1,200 blankets in a pile here, chiefs of all the tribes, wa, wa!"

Now Olsī'wit arose and said:

"Thank you, Kwakiutl. Verily, I got all I asked for in my speech and we Ma'malēleqala are pleased, wa, wa!"

¹⁸ Every tribe has a man to count blankets. This office is not hereditary. When coppers are traded, the song makers count blankets. [Note in the original.]

Again Wālas NEMŏ'gwis arose and spoke:

“Thank you, Ōwaxā'lag·ilīs, thank you, Chief. It will not be my desire if all the chiefs of my tribe ask for more blankets. I am satisfied.” Now he turned to his tribe and said: “Now we must speak, my tribe. Arise, G·ē'g·ESLEN. Speak, Chief! Speak more strongly.”

Then G·ē'g·ESLEN arose and said:

“How nice it is, tribes! I thank you for your words, Ōwaxā'lag·ilīs. Yes, Chiefs, that is our way, to which you must conform. You were not provident when you resolved to buy this great copper. My heart is well inclined toward you, Chief! You have not finished; you will give more. The price of the copper must correspond to my greatness, and I ask forty times ten blankets, that is 400 blankets more, Chief That is what I mean, forty. Wa, Chief. I shall not speak again if I get what I ask from you.” Then he turned to his own tribe. “Chief Wālas NEMŏ'gwis, I have done what you asked of me. You asked me to speak strongly to that chief, wa, wa!”

Then Ōwaxā'lag·ilīs arose and spoke. He said:

“Yes, Chief, your speech was good. You have no pity. Have you finished now asking for more, if I am willing to give your chief 400 blankets more? Answer me now!”

Now G·ē'g·ESLEN spoke:

“I shall not try to speak again.”

Ōwaxā'lag·ilīs sent two young men. They brought the blankets and put them down. Again Mā'Xua took the blankets and spoke:

“Ya, tribes! Do you see now our way of buying? The Kwakiutl, my tribe, are strong when they buy coppers. They are not like you. You always bring the canoes and the button blankets right away. Now there are 1,600 blankets in this pile that I carry here.” He turned to the Kwakiutl and said: “That is what I say, Chiefs of the Kwakiutl, to those who do not know how to buy coppers. Now I begin again.”

He counted the blankets and went on in the same way as before. As soon as ten pairs of blankets were counted, they said aloud, “ten pairs,” and the counters said aloud how many tens of blankets had been counted.

When he had counted all, Mā'Xua spoke:

“Wa, wa! Now I say to you, chiefs of all the tribes, it is really enough! I have pity upon my chief. That is what I say, chiefs.”

Then Ōwaxā'lag·ilīs arose and spoke:

“Wa, wa! I say it is enough, Ma'malēleqala. Now you have seen my name. This is my name; this is the weight of my name. This mountain of blankets rises through our heaven. My name is the name of the Kwakiutl, and you can not do as we do, tribes. When you do it, you finish just as soon as you reach the 1,000 blankets. Now, look out! later on I shall ask you to buy from me. Tribes! I do not look ahead to the time when you will buy from me. My chiefs! that is what I say, O'ts'ēstālīs; that is what I say, Wā'kīdis; that is what I say, Mā'Xualag·ilīs; that is what I say, Mā'Xuayalisamē. That is what I say for all of you from whom coppers may be bought, by the chiefs of these our rivals, the Ma'malēleqala, Wa, wa!”

Then Wālas NEMŏ'gwis arose and spoke:

“Yes, Chief, your speech is true, your word is true. Who is like you, Kwakiutl, who buy coppers and who give away blankets? Long life to all of you, chiefs of the Kwakiutl. I can not attain to your high name, great tribes.” Then he turned to his tribe and said: “That is what I have said, chiefs of the Ma’malēleqala, that we may beat these Kwakiutl. They are like a large mountain with a steep precipice. Now arise, Yā’qalēnlīs, and speak, Chief! Let me see you that I may look up to you, Chief! Now call your name, Ts’ō’noqoa, you, Chief, who knows how to buy that great copper. You cannot be equaled by anybody. You great mountain from which wealth is rolling down, wa, wa! That is what I say, my tribe!”

Then Yā’qalēnlīs arose and uttered the cry of Ts’ō’noqoa: “hō, hō, hō!” and he acted as though he was lifting the heavy weight of the copper from the ground. “You all know, Kwakiutl, who I am. My name is Yā’qalēnlīs. The name began at the time when our world was made. I am a descendant of the chiefs about whom we hear in the earliest legends. The Hō’Xhoq came down to Xō’xop’a, and took off his bird mask and became a man. Then he took the name Yā’qalēnlīs. That was my ancestor, the first of the Qoē’xsōt’ēnōx. He married lā’qoag•i•layūqoa, the daughter of Wālas Nēmō’gwis, the first chief of the great clan Wēwamasqem of the Ma’malēleqala. That is the reason why I speak. I know how to buy great coppers. I bought this copper Mā’xts’ōlēm for 4,000 blankets. What is it, Chief? What is it, Ōwaxā’lag•ilīs? Come! did you not give any thought to my copper here? You always say that you are rich, Chief. Now give more, that it may be as great as I am. Give only ten times 100 blankets more, Chief Ōwaxā’lag•ilīs. It will not be much, give 1,000 more for my sake, wa, wa. This is what I say, Hā’wasalal; that is what I say, Hē’Xuayus; that is what I say, Wawilapalaso; that is what I say for all of you, chiefs of the Ma’malēleqala, Wā, wā!”

Then Ōwaxā’lag•ilīs arose and spoke:

“Yes, yes, you are feared by all, Great Chief! Do not show mercy in your speech. Now I am going to ask all of you, chiefs of the Ma’malēleqala, will you stop talking if I give you these 1,000 blankets in addition to the 1,600 blankets on this pile? If you say it is not enough after I have added the 1,000 blankets, then I will not force the purchase of the copper. Now answer me, Wālas Nēmō’gwis. I have seen no one giving 1,000 blankets more. I should tell a lie if I should say I had ever seen it done, as you demand, wa! That is what I say, chiefs of all the Kwakiutl.”

Now Wālas Nēmō’gwis arose and spoke:

“Chiefs, it is not my desire; it is the desire of all those chiefs who asked for more; I have enough. Bring now the 1,000 blankets for which Chief Yā’qalēnlīs asked, wa, wa! That is what I say, Ma’malēleqala, wa!”

Now Ōwaxā’lag•ilīs sent the young men to bring these 1,000 blankets. They brought them and Mā’Xua arose. He counted the blankets and called out every ten pairs. Then he made a speech:

“Ya! tribes, have all the blankets been counted?”

The people replied, “Yes, yes. Do not maintain, Chief, that we lost run of the number of blankets.”

Then Mā’Xua continued:

“There are 2,600 blankets. I am a Maa'mtag•ila, whose strength appears when they buy coppers. Take care, chief Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs, else we shall be laughed at. Do not give in! Do not weaken, else you will not get that copper.”

Then Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose and spoke:

“Your words are good, Mā'Xua. It is good that you strengthen my heart. Now speak, Wālas NEMŏ'gwis! Speak, Chief, and tell me your wishes, else I shall be too much troubled. Now say your price and I will take it. That is what I say, Wākīdīs; that is what I say, Tsōpā'līs, wa, wa!”

Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs sat down, and the tribes were silent. Nobody spoke, and Wālas NEMŏ'gwis lay down on his back, covering his face with his blanket. For a long time nobody among the men spoke. Then Yēqōk'uā'lag•ilīs, the younger brother of Wālas NEMŏ'gwis, arose and said:

“Chiefs of the Kwakiutl, I know what makes my brother here sad. Try, chiefs, that your speech may please the heart of my chief here. That is what I say, chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala, Wa, wa!”

Then Ha'mts'it arose and spoke:

“Kwakiutl, I am afraid of the way in which my chief here is acting. He is making us asleep, and all the tribes are asleep. That is always the way of the great chief. Now, Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs, try to please him!”

Then Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose and said:

“Ha'mts'it! you said enough. Too many are your words. Let only him speak who knows how to buy that copper, Wālas NEMŏ'gwis! Do not let these children speak. That is what I say, Kwakiutl, Wa, wa! Now look about in my house, if you find something to please the heart of this chief. Go! young men.”

They went, and soon they came back carrying blankets, which they put down. Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose at once and asked the young men how many blankets they had brought: They replied:

“Six hundred blankets.”

He continued:

“Is it true what you said? Now, chiefs of the Kwakiutl, I thank you for your words. Mā'Xua! Chief! count them!”

Mā'Xua arose and counted the blankets. Then he said:

“Ya! tribes, have you counted these blankets, also? There are now 3,200. Look out! chiefs of the tribes! For I shall ask you to buy our coppers also! That is what I say, Nēg•ē; that is what I say, Ē'wanuXts'ē, wa, wa! that is what I say, chiefs of the Kwakiutl, wa, wa!”

Now Wālas NEMŏ'gwis arose and said: “Now take care, Ma'malēleqala! Now, I take that price for our copper. Now give the boxes into which we may put the blankets. We need 50 boxes, and each will be worth 5 pairs of blankets.”

Then Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose and spoke:

“Thank you, Wālas NEMŏ'gwis, for your speech. You say you take the price. Now go, chiefs of the Kwakiutl, and bring the boxes! They will be 500 blankets' worth, to be paid in canoes.”

Then the young men went and brought short split sticks. They brought 5 sticks. Mā'Xua took hem and spoke:

“Ya! tribes! Truly, you get easily what you ask for, chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala. This canoe counts for a box worth 150 blankets. This [other] canoe counts for a box worth 150 blankets.¹⁹ This canoe counts for a box worth 40 blankets, wa, wa! Enough, chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala. Now take pity on our chief here. That is what I say, Kwakiutl.”

Then Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose and spoke:

“Ya, son Wālas NEMŏ'gwis, and you, chiefs, arise, that I may adorn you.”

Then Wālas NEMŏ'gwis arose and spoke: [...] ²⁰ “Let him who brought our copper look at us! Come, chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala.”

Then all the thirteen chiefs stood in a row, and Wālas NEMŏ'gwis spoke:

“This, Kwakiutl, is the strength of the Ma'malēleqala. These whom you see here are your rivals. These are the ones who have the great coppers which have names, and therefore it is hard work for you to rival them. Look out! chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala! in case they should bring us the copper M'axts'olem, which we now sold, that one of you may take it up at once, or else we must be ashamed. That is what I say, chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala, Wa, wa! Now go on! Chief Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs!”

Then Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose and spoke:

“Yes, Wālas NEMŏ'gwis, and you other good chiefs who are standing over there. Now, chiefs of the Kwakiutl, scurry about in my house for something with which I may adorn the chiefs.”

Then the young men went. Soon they came back, carrying 200 blankets and two split sticks, on which five straight lines were marked with charcoal.

Then Mā'Xua arose, took the split sticks, and said:

“Thank you, chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala, for the way in which you act. It must be true that you are pleased with the way of our chief here. Now listen, chiefs! Adorn yourselves with this canoe, which is worth 50 blankets, and with these 200 blankets here. Now there are 4,000 blankets in all, Wa, wa! Let me say, it is done!”

Immediately Wālas NEMŏ'gwis made a speech, and said:

“I will take this price, tribes! Thank you, Chief Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs; thank you, Chief; thank you, Kwakiutl.”

Now Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs arose and spoke:

“Ya, Wālas NEMŏ'gwis. Have you taken the price, Chief?”

Wālas NEMŏ'gwis replied:

“I have taken the price.”

“Why, Wālas NEMŏ'gwis,” said Ōwaxā'lag•ilīs, “you take the price too soon; you must think poorly of me, Chief! I am a Kwakiutl; I am one of those from whom all your tribes over the world took their names. Now you give up before I finished trading with you, Ma'malēleqala. You must always stand beneath us, wa, wa! Now go, young men; call our chief here, that he may come and see the tribes. Bring lā'qoag•ilak^u..

¹⁹ The sentence is repeated in the original – whether intentionally or due to error, I am unsure.

²⁰ I've omitted a passage where each chief of the Ma'malēleqala is called by name, in the format, “Come, [chief's name]!”.

That name comes from the oldest legends. Now, take her clothes and you, Mā'Xua, give them away!"

Now Mā'Xua counted the blankets. There were 200 blankets of the fifth thousand. There were 4,200.

"Wa, wa! Chiefs of the Ma'malēleqala," said he.

Then Wālas Nemo'gwis spoke:

"Thank you, chiefs! Now, Ma'malēleqala, we will divide the property tomorrow, wa, wa!"

[HERE ENDS THE ACCOUNT OF THE SALE OF THE COPPER]

It was described above how a boy is introduced into the distributions of property going on among the tribe. It remains to state how he acquires his first copper. When the young man has acquired a certain number of blankets, one of his older friends invites him to take a share in the purchase of one of the cheaper coppers, which may have a value of, say, 500 blankets. The boy contributes 200 blankets as his share and the other man purchases it, announcing the young man as a partner in the transaction. The copper is delivered to the young man, who becomes a debtor to his partner for the amount of blankets contributed by the latter. He announces at once that he will sell the copper the following year, but that he is willing to deliver the copper on the spot. With these words he lays it down before the tribe. One of the chiefs of a rival tribe takes the copper and pays as a first instalment 100 blankets. Then the boy promises a distribution of blankets (tso'Xua) for the following year and loans out the 100 blankets which he has received.

The next year he calls in his outstanding debts and invites all the neighboring tribes to a feast, to which his own tribe contributes food and fuel. In the course of the festival, he pays to the chief who took his copper 200 blankets, being the value of the 100 blankets received the previous year, together with 100 per cent interest [...]. Then the purchaser pays the sum of 750 blankets for the copper, including boxes and belt, as described above. Of this amount, 700 are distributed in the following day in the prescribed fashion among the neighboring tribes. Now the young man proceeds to loan out his blankets until within a few years he is able to repay the share of his partner who first helped him to buy the copper. When the time has come for this transaction, his partner pays him double the amount of what he (the partner) has contributed, and the young man returns to him double of this amount.

The rivalry between chiefs and clans finds its strongest expression in the destruction of property. A chief will burn blankets, a canoe, or break a copper, thus indicating his disregard of the amount of property destroyed and showing that his mind is stronger, his power greater than that of his rival. If the latter is not able to destroy an equal amount of property without much delay, his name is "broken". He is vanquished by his rival and his influence with his tribe is lost, while the name of the other chief gains correspondingly in return.

Feasts may also be counted as destruction of property, because the food given can not be returned except by giving another feast. The most expensive sort of feast is the one at which enormous quantities of fish oil (made of the oolichan) are consumed and burnt, the so-called "grease feast". Therefore it also raises the name of

the person who can afford to give it, and the neglect to speedily return it entails a severe loss of prestige.

Still more feared is the breaking of a valuable copper. A chief may break his copper and give the broken parts to his rival. If the latter wants to keep his prestige, he must break a copper of equal or higher value, and then return both his own broken copper and the fragments which he has received to his rival. The latter may then pay for the copper which he has thus received. The chief to whom the fragments of the first copper are given may, however, also break his copper and throw both into the sea. The Indians consider that by this act the attacked rival has shown himself superior to his aggressor, because the latter may have expected to receive the broken copper of his rival in return, so that an actual loss would have been prevented.

In by far the greater number of cases where coppers are broken the copper is preserved. The owner breaks or cuts off one part after another until finally only the T-shaped ridge remains. This is valued at two-thirds of the total value of the copper and is the last part to be given away. The order in which the parts of the copper are usually broken off is shown in the accompanying illustration, indicated by the letters (A – D)



The rival to whom the piece that has been broken is given, breaks off a similar piece, and returns both to the owner. Thus a copper may be broken up in contests with different rivals. Finally, somebody succeeds in buying up all the broken fragments, which are riveted together, and the copper has attained an increased value. Since the broken copper indicates the fact that the owner had destroyed property, the Indians pride themselves upon their possession.

The rivalry between chiefs, when carried so far that coppers are destroyed and that grease feasts are given in order to destroy the prestige of the rival, often develop into open enmity. When a person gives a grease feast, a great fire is lighted in the center of the house. The flames leap up to the roof and the guests are almost scorched by the heat. Still the etiquette demands that they do not stir, else the host's fire has conquered them. Even when the roof begins to burn and the fire attacks the rafters, they must appear unconcerned. The host alone has the right to send a man up to the roof to put out the fire.

While the feast is in progress the host sings a scathing song ridiculing his rival and praising his own clan, the feats of his forefathers and his own. Then the grease is filled in large spoons and passed to the rival chief first. If a person thinks he has

given a greater grease feast than that offered by the host, he refuses the spoon. Then he runs out of the house (g•ēqemx'it = chief rises against his face) to fetch his copper "to squelch with it the fire." The host proceeds at once to tie a copper to each of his house posts. If he should not do so, the person who refused the spoon would on returning strike the posts with the copper, which is considered equal to striking the chief's face (k•i'lxa). Then the man who went to fetch his copper breaks it and gives it to the host. This is called "squelching the host's fire." The host retaliates as described above.

[SELECTED SCATHING SONGS]

The following songs show the manner in which rivals scathe each other. First Neqā'penk•em (= ten fathom face) let his clan sing the following song at a feast which he gave:

1. Our great famous chief is known even outside of our world, oh! he is the highest chief of all. (Then he sang:) The chiefs of all the tribes are my servants, the chiefs of all the tribes are my speaker. They are pieces of copper which I have broken.

(The people:) Do not let our chief rise too high. Do not let him destroy too much property, else we shall be made like broken pieces of copper by the great breaker of coppers, the great splitter of coppers, the great chief who throws coppers into the water, the great one who can not be surpassed by anybody, the one surmounting all the chiefs. Long ago you went and burnt all the tribes to ashes. You went and defeated the chief of all the tribes; you made his people run away and look for their relatives whom you had slain. You went and the fame of your power was heard among the northern tribes. You went and gave blankets to everybody, chief of all tribes.

2. Do not let us stand in front of him, of whom we are always hearing, even at the outermost limits of this world. Do not let us steal from our chief, tribes! else he will become enraged and will tie our hands. He will hang us, the chief of the tribes.

(Neqā'penk•em sings:) Do not mind my greatness. My tribe alone is great as four tribes. I am standing on our fortress; I am standing on top of the chiefs of the tribes. I am Copper Face, Great Mountain, Supporter, Obstacle; my tribes are my servants.

At another feast he let his people sing:

1. Do not look around, tribes! Do not look around, else we might see something that will hurt us in the great house of this really great chief.

2. Do not look around, tribes! Do not look around, else we might see something formidable in the great house of this really great chief. His house has the Ts'ō'noqa²¹. Therefore we are benumbed and can not move. The house of our double chief,²² of the really great chief, is taking our lives and our breath.

3. Do not make any noise, tribes! do not make any noise, else we shall precipitate a landslide of wealth from our chief, the overhanging mountain.

4. (Neqā'penk•em sings:) I am the one from whom comes down and from whom is untied the red cedar bark²³ for the chiefs of the tribes. Do not grumble, tribes! do

²¹ A fabulous monster. [Note in the original.]

²² The war chief and potlatch chief. [Note in the original.]

²³ The emblem of the winter ceremonial. [Note in the original.]

not grumble in the house of the great double chief, who makes that all are afraid to die at his hands, over whose body is sprinkled the blood of all those who tried to eat in the house of the double chief,²⁴ of the really great chief. Only one thing enrages me, when people eat slowly and a little only of the food given by the great double chief.

While these songs are merely a praise of the deeds of the singer, the following reply by Hē'nak • alasō, the rival of Neqā'penk • em is bitter to the extreme. In it the singer ridicules him for not yet having returned a grease feast.

1. I thought another one was causing the smoky weather? I am the only one on earth – the only one in the world who makes thick smoke rise from the beginning of the year to the end, for the invited tribes.²⁵

2. What will my rival say again – that “spider woman;” what will he pretend to do next? The words of that “spider woman” do not go a straight way. Will he not brag that he is going to give away canoes, that he is going to break coppers, that he is going to give a grease feast? Such will be the words of the “spider woman,” and therefore your face is dry and moldy, you who are standing in front of the stomachs of the chiefs.

3. Nothing will satisfy you; but sometimes I treated you so roughly that you begged for mercy. Do you know what you will be like? You will be like an old dog, and you will spread your legs before me when I get excited. You did so when I broke the great coppers, “Chief” and “Killer Whale,” and the one named “Point of Island” and “The Feared One” and “Beaver”. This I throw in your face, you whom I always tried to vanquish; whom I have maltreated; who does not dare to stand erect when I am eating; the chief whom every weak man tries to vanquish.

4. Now my feast! Go to him, the poor one who wants to be fed from the sone of the chief whose own name is “Full of Smoke” and “Greatest Smoke”. Never mind; give him plenty to eat, make him drink until he will be qualmish and vomits. My feast steps over the fire right up to the chief.²⁶

In order to make the effect of the song still stronger, an effigy of the rival chief is sometimes placed near the fire. He is lean and is represented in an attitude as though begging that the fire be not made any hotter, as it is already scorching him.

Property may not only be destroyed for the purpose of damaging the prestige of the rival, but also for the sole purpose of gaining distinction. This is done mainly at the time when houses are built, when totem poles are erected, or when a son has been initiated by the spirit presiding over the secret society of his clan. [...] It seems that in olden times slaves were sometimes killed and buried under the house posts or under totem posts. Later on, instead of being killed, they were given away as presents. Whenever this was done, the inverted figure of a man, or an inverted head, was placed on the pole. In other cases coppers were buried under the posts, or given away. This custom still continues, and in all such cases coppers are shown on the post, often in such a way that they are being held or bitten by the totem animals. At the time of the initiation of a member of the clan slaves were also killed or coppers

²⁴ This refers to the fact that he killed a chief of the Awīk • 'ēnōx in a feast. [Note in the original.]

²⁵ Namely, by the fire of the grease feast. [Note in the original.]

²⁶ The first grease feast went as far as the center of the house. As Neqā'penk • em did not return it, the second one stepped forward across the fire right up to him.

were destroyed. [...] The property thus destroyed is called the *ōmayū*, the price paid for the house, the post, or for the initiation.

The distribution or destruction of property is not always made solely for the purpose of gaining prestige for one's self, but it is just as often made for the benefit of the successor to the name. In all such cases the latter stands during the festival next to the host, or, as the Indian terms it, in front of him, and the chief states that the property is distributed or destroyed for the one "standing in front of him" (*lawu'lqamē*), which is therefore the term used for the chief's eldest son, or, in a more general sense, for the heir presumptive. [...]

MARRIAGE

Marriage among the Kwakiutl must be considered a purchase, which is conducted on the same principles as the purchase of a copper. But the object bought is not only the woman, but also the right of membership in her clan for the future children of the couple. [...] Many privileges of the clan descend only through marriage upon the son-in-law of the possessor, who, however, does not use them himself, but acquires them for the use of his successor. These privileges are, of course, not given as a present to the son-in-law, but he becomes entitled to them by paying a certain amount of property for his wife. The wife is given to him as a first instalment of the return payment. The crest of the clan, its privileges, and a considerable amount of other property besides, are given later on, when the couple have children, and the rate of interest is higher the greater the number of children. For one child, 200 per cent interest is paid; for two or more children, 300 per cent. After this payment the marriage is annulled because the wife's father has redeemed his daughter. If she continues to stay with her husband, she does so of her own free will (*wulē'l*, staying in the house for nothing). In order to avoid this state of affairs, the husband often makes a new payment to his father-in-law in order to have a claim to his wife. [...]

The return of the purchase money is called *qautē'x'a*, and the particular manner of return, which will be described here, *lene'mXs'a*.

The people are all invited to assemble in the house of the wife's father. When all the guests have assembled, the father-in-law of the young woman enters, accompanied by his clan. Four of them are carrying the mast of a canoe, one holding it at the top, another one at the butt, and two at intermediate points. They walk to the right and stand on the right-hand side of the door on the front side of the house, facing the middle.²⁷ Then the wife's father calls his son-in-law, who steps forward and stands in the right-hand rear corner of the house. The other speaker tells him that the mast represents lids of boxes [...] tied together [...], and that they contain everything that he owes his son-in-law. The latter replies, asking if the coppers, house, its posts, and his father-in-law's names are in it also. Even if the old man should not have intended to give all of this, he must comply with this demand and promise to give it all to his son-in-law.

²⁷ The positions in the house are always given according to the Indian method: The fire is the outer side (*lā'sak*), the walls the back side (*ā'la*). Thus right and left are always to be considered the corresponding sides of a person who is looking toward the fire from the front or rear of the home. [Note in the original.]

Next, the young man's wife is sent by her father to fetch the copper. She returns, carrying it on her back, and the young men of her clan bring in blankets. All of this is given to the young man, who proceeds at once to sell the copper off-hand. This is called "holding the copper at its forehead". [...] In such a case less than one-half of the actual price is paid for the copper. If it is worth 6,000 blankets, it will bring only 2,500 blankets. The buyer must pay the price on the spot, and the blankets which the young man obtains in this manner are distributed by him right away. By this distribution he obtains the right to live in the house which his father-in-law has given to him.

Although in most marriages the house and name of the bride's father are promised to be transferred to the young man, this is not necessarily the case. The dower agreed upon may consist only of coppers, canoes, blankets, and the like.

I learned about a curious instance how a man punished his father-in-law who had long delayed the return of the purchase-money and was evidently evading the duty of giving up his name and home to his son-in-law. The latter carved an image representing his wife and invited all the people to a feast. Then he put a stone around the neck of the image and threw it in the sea. Thus he had destroyed the high rank of his wife, and indirectly that of his father-in-law.

"When potlatches are observed"²⁸ (1896)

It has been from remote ages the custom of our aborigines, at least of those living near the northern coasts, to at first give their children filthy names, which they could not be otherwise than ashamed of in riper years, and endeavor by all means to obtain a better one.

This could be got in the following manner: A certain amount of goods had to be given to the chief and to the tribe as a potlatch, for which he or she obtained, not only a better name, but also a higher rank amongst their people. Along with the new name and rank was a dance for the occasion, and was the principal one that night, because it belonged to the new name and rank into which the party was initiated.

The means to obtain this had to be acquired with their own exertion, industry and bravery. A person who had some push about him soon got ahead and was respected by the whole village, while a lazy, shiftless person got neither name nor rank, and was looked upon as little better than a slave.

Girls, too, at the age of puberty had to give a potlatch, at which time she gave away the savings of years; that is, she had been saving up for years in anticipation of living to see that day. With the first appearance of her womanhood, she was shut up in a small room, which she was not allowed by any means to leave for one month. Her food was even passed into her room. When at liberty she called together the villagers, and to them gave away all she had of personal property. In return she got a better name, and a higher social position in the tribe, and at the same time had a hole

²⁸ From Deans, J. (1896). WHEN PATLATCHES ARE OBSERVED. *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, 18(6), 329-331. Written by James Dean (1827 – 1905). For ease of reading, I've modernized some of the idiosyncratic spelling and terminology in the original account.

punched in her lower lip, preparatory to wearing a lip piece or labret. These labrets, by the social usages of these people, had to be exchanged for bigger ones every time she made a potlatch, until, in very old women, their faces looked hideous. The Haida women's greatest ambition was to be like Cal-Cate-jude, the typical woman of the northern tribes, especially of the Haida.

The girl's room was generally a corner of the house partitioned off by blankets or calico. On the front of her room was hung one of her blankets with the crest sewed on it in beads, or with colored thread. The name given by the Haida to this ceremony is "Lull." When her lull is over, and she is giving her potlatch, they have the dance which belongs to her crest, and so ends her lull.

As soon as young men or women were able to save enough, they had themselves tattooed – the men on their breasts, arms and legs, the women on their legs, and I think, their shoulders only.

For each part of the body that was tattooed they had to give a potlatch of ten blankets, or fifty blankets for legs, arms and breast, or a money value of at least \$250. The figures tattooed on their bodies showed the crest, gens and social rank of the party, represented by animals, birds, fishes, sun, moon, and thunderbird. If the party tattooed belonged to the Raven phratry or brotherhood, he or she could only use the figures belonging to that phratry. The same may also be said of the Eagle phratry.

I here speak of the Haida people of Haida Gwaii and southern Alaska. These later sort of potlatches no longer exist, at least among the Haida Gwaii Haida.

This brings me to a third sort of potlatch. When a man or woman wished to build a house, they had to save up enough goods to give away when it was finished. Every part of a house had its name, and a potlatch was given for each part; so much for the posts, the boards and roof, beams, etc., etc. In building a house, the carved column, or as it is better known, totem pole – the Haida name is "gayring" – always received more attention than other parts, because of its connection with the family, social standing and history.

The gayring was prepared in the following order: First, a number of men were sent to the woodlands to choose a good and straight cedar tree, which was felled and stripped of its bark, then smoothed, hollowed out and floated to the village, where the carvers took charge of it.

Their first step was to measure it into divisions of four, five and six fathoms of six feet each, or 24 feet the shortest up to 60 or even more, the longest. A potlatch of ten blankets was given with each fathom; or, at the lowest estimate, a cash value of \$50 for each fathom, or \$250 for a gayring of five fathoms.

Connected with house building is the selection of a wife. Before her husband can claim her, he has to make a potlatch to the girl's parents of the value of fifty or one hundred dollars or more, according to [the] agreement.

The next and last sort of potlatch I shall mention is of a different sort, one which was all loss with no profit. [...] According to Indian ideas, any moral or material harm done to a man can be made good by an adequate potlatch. Thus, if a man is ridiculed by another, he gives away a number of blankets to his friends, and thus regains his former standing. For instance, the grandson of a chief, by unskilful

management, upset his little canoe near the shore, to which he had to wade. The grandfather felt ashamed on account of the boy's accident, and gave away a blanket to take away remarks on this subject.

In the same way, a man who feels injured by another will destroy a certain amount of property, then his adversary is compelled to do the same, else a stain of dishonor will rest upon him until he destroys the same amount of property – or, if he refuses to do so, all his lifetime. I have heard of a case in which a man fancied [that] another man had in some way or other injured him; so in order, as he thought, to punish his adversary, he destroyed all the property he could spare. His adversary quickly responded by destroying double the amount, which the other was unable to do, and so the whole village laughed at him.

All of these potlatches, except the first mentioned, have, as far as I know, long been discontinued. That one is still held by sufferance. Several years ago all potlatches were, by act of Parliament, declared illegal, and all who held them were liable to fine and imprisonment. This has been done lately on the Nords, where a chief had a potlatch and where, just now, the Indians threaten to set the law at defiance, and hold them. A deputation has been sent by the northern aborigines to Victoria, seeking redress and a refunding of the money unjustly taken from them by an obnoxious law. It has been to the interest of several parties to have these potlatches abolished, and false representations have been made to the Indian Department.

Potlatches are time-honored festivals of our aborigines, and probably existed before the adoption of Christianity.

What right have we Canadians to try and stop these poor people having a reunion occasionally? If the Indians were the ruling power, and said to us, "you must stop your feasts and holidays or we will imprison you and enact heavy fines," how would we like it? Methinks I hear you all say, "Not at all – we have a right to all feasts and holidays as long as we behave ourselves." The aborigines, on the same condition, have the same rights. Parties writing from the north against their continuance, say they knew several people who lost their lives by attending potlatches, by being left alone in the woods. If any did so, they must have been Humatas, under training, and not at all connected with potlatches.

In conclusion, let me say a potlatch is simply this: A party has a little wealth which he wishes to dispose of to advantage, by not only doubling it, but by getting a new and better name, as well as a higher social standing. He invites his friends. When they come he gives all he has to all who choose to accept it, with the understanding, by both giver and receiver, that all has to be returned double as soon as possible.

If anyone who had got some of the property given away, died, those who inherited his name and property had to return all according to agreement, or rather social usages of these people.

The Potlatch Economy²⁹ (1898)

Mrs. Harlan I. Smith³⁰, a New York bride, who spent her honeymoon among the British Columbia Indians thus relates her experiences: [...]

As we were nearly six months in the Northwest, visiting a number of places, I shall attempt to mention only a few of the most striking incidents that I witnessed at Fort Rupert, where I spent the month of June. [...] The place is called Fort Rupert because the Hudson's Bay Company once located a fort there, which has long ago been abandoned. A dismantled cannon, a portion of a stockade fence, the aged fort carpenter, who stayed behind with his Indian wife, and a few [Métis] are left to tell the tale.

The missionaries tried to convert these Indians, but were practically driven out, and finally gave them up to their own old religion, with its dances, theatricals, drumming and singing. [...]

The native homes are made very large, some of them being 70 feet wide and 120 feet long. They consist of a single room that is occupied by several related families, in a communal sort of way. They squat around on the dirt floor, in the respective corners which they have chosen, cooking over an open fire, the smoke from which escapes through the cracks on the roof. Around the three sides of the house is a platform, about four feet wide, and raised a short distance from the ground. Upon these platforms they sleep, sometimes boxing in their beds like the berths on a sleeping car. These are most important places, for when one of the Indians gets angry it is to this place he retires until recovered. He sometimes takes to his bed when feeling very sad over the death of a friend.

THE QUEER HOUSES

The walls of the houses are built of plank, as is also the roof, but the planks of the latter are hollowed out and laid like the Swiss tile roof. These planks are split out of immense cedar trees by means of a wooden wedge driven with stone hammers. They are often smoothed with adzes³¹, the blades of which were formerly made of stone. Since the coming of the Hudson's Bay Company they have been able to get old files and other bits of iron from which to make the blades, so that now stone is not used.

In one of the houses I saw piled thousands of woolen blankets and several shied [sic.] pieces of copper. I learned the blankets were being collected in order that the owner could give a potlatch, which means that he would loan them out at interest.³²

²⁹ From Mrs. H. I. Smith. (1898, October 26). WITH COAST INDIANS. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

³⁰ Helena Elizabeth Oakes Smith (1872 – 1947), wife of Harlan Ingersoll Smith (1872 – 1940), a noted archaeologist. Harlan I. Smith is most famous for his work on the Jesup North Pacific expedition, conducted in British Columbia and Washington State between 1897 and 1899.

³¹ A tool like a curved axe that is used in wood-working.

³² A second source disagrees: "The potlatch and the lending of property at interest are two entirely distinct proceedings. Property distributed in a potlatch is freely given, bears no interest, cannot be collected on demand, and need not be repaid at all if the one who received it does not for any reason wish to requite the gift. When the recipient holds a potlatch he may return an equal amount, or a slightly larger amount, or a smaller amount with perhaps the promise to give more at a future time.

Part of the blankets were his property, having been secured by selling his other possessions. A large proportion, however, were received from others through the potlatch system and not a few of them came from his relatives and dependents. Each small single blanket is valued at half a dollar of our money, and is kept stored away for this one purpose, not being used as other blankets.

THEIR BANKING SYSTEM

The coppers are of no particular value from our standpoint, but represent, as nearly as I can explain it, the same thing as do our gilt-edge promissory notes upon which interest has long accrued. When a copper is first made it is not of much value and is sold for a small number of blankets. When it is sold the second time its value is increased, and the owner receives a much larger number of blankets.

So it is sold and resold, each purchaser paying for it, until at last thousands of blankets³³ are given for one of these coppers, which to use is worth only a few cents for the metal in it. Of course, it is a great honor for one of these Indians to be able to buy such a copper, and to do it he is willing to sell all his possessions³⁴, scrimp his necessities and borrow blankets of his relatives and friends that he may gain this honor, and accompany the buying with due feastings and ceremony.

The man who sells the copper comes into possession of many blankets, which he usually potlatches. To potlatch is another great honor, and they accumulate blankets in every possible way for this purpose. When a big potlatch is to be given the people gather from all the surrounding tribes. They come many miles in their fine large canoes, always singing, and I have often watched them miles out at sea paddling to the rhythm of their songs, which are truly fascinating.

After all the expected guests have arrived, they are assembled in the main place of the village, an open space near the water, around which logs are placed to form a square. The people sit on the ground inside this square, using the logs as the back of a chair. The blankets to be potlatched are placed in the center. Then the

The feeling at the bottom of the potlatch is one of pride, rather than greed. Occasionally men have tried to accumulate wealth by means of the potlatch and by lending at interest, but the peculiar economic system has always engulfed them, simply because a man can never draw out all his credits and keep the property thus acquired." Curtis, E.S. (1915). *The North American Indian, Volume Ten*. US: Edward S. Curtis.

³³ "Probably the greatest price ever paid for a copper was twenty thousand blankets, which amount, in the form of blankets, canoes, sloops, and cheaper coppers, was paid in the spring of 1909 for the copper Ma'mu'quli'la ("taking property out of the house"). The canoes, sloops, coppers and coin were worth nine thousand blankets, and of the eleven thousand actual blankets which should have been in evidence there were only two thousand, the remaining nine thousand being represented by the transfer of debts". *Ibid*.

³⁴ "A "copper" is a piece of metal some eighteen inches long and twelve inches wide, roughly fashioned in something the shape of a human head and neck, with mouth, nose and eyes marked upon it. There are only three original "coppers," and they are very ancient, their origin going far back beyond the Indian recollections; consequently they are of immense value in Indian eyes, and to possess one of them an Indian would give anything he owns. One peculiar thing is that one owner must sell if he is offered sufficient price for the "copper" he owns, the value apparently rising so many blankets each time one changes hands. One of these "coppers" is now worth some 5,000 blankets – a pretty considerable sum. There are also imitation "coppers" – that is, quite newly made – but they are not very valuable." WEIRD INDIAN CUSTOMS. (1894, April 18). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

speaker of the village, who is always a good orator and well paid for his services, takes up his position beside the blankets, and in the name of the owner makes long and vigorous speeches³⁵.

HIGH RATES OF INTEREST³⁶

Afterwards the blankets are distributed or loaned out, usually to be returned at the end of a year with 100 per cent. interest. So that one who borrows ten blankets in a year's time gives back twenty. For shorter time a smaller percentage is charged. A young boy, starting out in life, is an exception. He will borrow 100 blankets, thus incurring a debt of 200 blankets at the end of the year. As soon as he receives 100 blankets he potlatches them to his friends, who return the loan within a few months. Now he will have 200 blankets, which he immediately reloans, so at the end of the year he may collect 400 blankets, leaving himself the possessor of 200 blankets after paying his original debt. [...]

When I first came among these Indians I was surprised to find them so independent and with so much time to waste sitting around or laying wrapped in their blankets in the public squares. But I soon learned the reasons. First, their clothing costs them very little, as the women weave the blankets, mats, baskets, hats, etc., and second, their food practically costs them nothing.

Every morning when the tide is far down the women of the village start out, some walking with their baskets on their backs, some in the small canoes, to gather clams, crabs, sea urchins and mussels, and in a short time they have secured more than one day's food. [...]

I found these Indians of the Far Northwest very interesting, friendly people, and so far as my experience goes, entirely trustworthy. They never disturbed our tent or the blankets, rifles or provisions, which are a great temptation. They seem very contented and happy, being entirely satisfied with their mode of life, with its dances, feasts and religious ceremonies, which seem so strange to us.

³⁵ "Dr. Boaz spoke of the Indians' economic system, based on certain standards of value. Lacking any system of writing, these business operations had to be transmitted in public in order that everyone should know what everyone owed. So the whole family or the whole tribe was called together to witness the transaction. This gave rise to the potlatch. "The Dominion law which prohibits potlatch means the cancellation of all debts," said the lecturer, deploring the popular misconception of the object of the potlatch, and the legislative evil to which it had given rise. The objection on the part of the ignorant to an Indian custom which was instituted for the purpose of liquidating debts was regrettable." SAYS POTLATCH IS NOT EVIL. (1922, August 30). *The Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

³⁶ "There are several rates of interest. Five pairs of blankets lent for about six months are repaid with six pairs, and this is called *tlikyoyu* ("lend with"). *Tita* is interest at one hundred percent on any amount from one pair to twenty, to be repaid in not less than one year, and perhaps – as when the debt is to be discharged at the time the lender must give a marriage dowry – not before the expiration of four or five years. *Tahsitsunt* ("take hold of the food"), or *kahqahot* ("sell a slave"), is interest at two hundred per cent on a loan for an indefinite period of four or five years. [...] There is constant borrowing at these exorbitant rates of interest. The explanation of the fact that the mass of people have never found themselves bankrupt and the wealth of the tribe accumulated in the hands of a few men is that no one can compel payment of a debt without first showing good cause for the demand, and such cause can be found only in the expressed determination to perform some kind of public ceremony at which the property will be redistributed. Thus any property paid as principal and interest will revert quickly to the people". Curtis, E.S. (1915). *The North American Indian, Volume Ten*. US: Edward S. Curtis.

A missionary on the potlatch³⁷ (1899)

The Indian potlatch represents a most difficult problem, not only to solve for the betterment of the race, but even to understand. Indeed, no one who has not been born and reared as an Indian among Indians practicing it can rightly comprehend what it all means. Though I cannot lay claim to this privilege (!), yet I have had the potlatch under close observation for sixteen years, and have studied it on the spot, both in theory and practice, as far as one may do so without actually making one.

But while considering myself thus qualified to speak on the subject, I cannot say that I have completely exhausted it, for there are ramifications connected with it which, I must confess, seem to baffle all effort at investigation.

I think it important, however, to lay before you as much as I know concerning this custom, for it seems to be that upon the thorough eradication of its principles from the Indian mind depends, humanly speaking, the permanency of the results of our work. This I hope to make evident as I proceed.

I would first of all say what the potlatch is not. It is generally described as a custom, but it is not a custom in the ordinary sense of the word; it is much more. We cannot label it as a habit or usage; it is something quite different; it is very far from being a festival, although to the outsider it may appear as such; it is not a religious rite or ceremony, even though there may seem to be a strain of ancestral worship in it; it is neither an amusement nor an entertainment, however much those who practice it may seek to represent it in that light.

Now, if it may not be classed as a custom, practice or habit; if it may not be regarded as a festival, religious rite or ceremony; if it be neither an amusement nor an entertainment, what is it? I reply it is a systematized form of tribal government based upon the united suffrages of the clans.

Potlatch is not merely the making of a feast where a dance is given and presents made to those attending. If that were all, it would be harmless enough, but that is only the outward expression of it. The potlatch is political as far as this life and this world concern the Indian, and the event seen by the public is in reality an election.

The articles distributed with so much display as free gifts (with the exception of blankets and calico torn up into small strips) are all returnable within a year or two. They are not gifts, as many people imagine, but vote-acknowledgments – a public recognition of the rank or social status of the voter (who records his vote by his presence) by the potlatcher who is a candidate for some position, favor or honor in his clan.

But before proceeding further, it is necessary to offer some information as to the constitution of Indian society. You are all aware that it consists of three classes – the nobility, gentry and common people. These are organized into families (or houses), clan-sections, clans, tribes (communities or villages), and confederacies.

³⁷ From McCullagh, J. B. (1899). *The Indian Potlatch*. Toronto: Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. Written by James Benjamin McCullagh (1854 – 1921), missionary.

A *family* or *house* is a portion or branch of a clan-section. It has its own crest and sub-chief, subordinate to the clan totem and clan-sectional chief, and of itself or in combination with other kindred families it forms a complete clan-section.

A *clan-section* is a company of one or more families having the same totem and totemic name, and forming one division of the tribe.

A *clan* is the aggregate of kindred clan-sections having the same totem and totemic name.

A *tribe* is a community of two or more different clan-sections residing in one place bearing a common territorial name, and governed by the chiefs of the clan-sections in council assembled.

A *confederacy* is an alliance of several tribes for offensive and defensive purposes, and is governed by the united suffrages of the clans in public assembled.

The principal clans of the Nishga Confederacy are the Lak-Gibu (*Lupians*), the Ganhada (*Ranians*), the Lak-Shkik (*Aquilians*), and the Gishgahas (*Cannabians*).

Each tribe on the Naas is composed of a clan-section from each of the above-named clans, so that for the transaction of business (which is chiefly dynastic) in any tribe on the river, it is necessary to summon the other tribes and thus bring together all the clan-sections of each clan in public assembly. And this is the *raison d'être* of the potlatch.

Indian affairs are, as I have said, principally dynastic, that is, they have to do with hereditary rights and titles, successions to chieftainships among the chiefs, to a higher social standing among the gentry, and to the "going up one" in the family circle among the common people, for everyone is somebody's junior, and wants to become somebody's senior.

These successions often carry with them substantial emoluments in the way of hunting and fishing rights over certain lands and streams, and are not infrequently a bone of serious contention, sometimes ending in bloodshed.

Then in each clan-section there are many vacant places, filled by men of renown in the good old times when the Indians were numerous, but now retaining only the name. To fill these vacant places and revive the old names is the one ambition of the surrounding members of the clan-section families, and this, like other successions, can only be accomplished by obtaining the united assent of the clans.

Thus there is only one topic of interest in life to these people, only one object for which to live and only one scope for their natural activity, viz., the glorification of self. In each Indian town you will find the clan-sections living together on apparently very good terms, but in reality holding each other down or staving each other off with all the cunning imaginable. Jealousy of one another is the characteristic feature of Indian life, and so socialistic are their ideas that no individual dare improve his condition above the general average, while at the same time each clan-section is consumed with a burning desire to make a better show than any other.

You are all, of course, aware that members of the same clan may not intermarry. Such a thing, according to Indian ideas, would be an abomination. But it may not have become evident to all of you that, notwithstanding this law, the majority of Indian marriages are very close as to family affinity. In most families I find it has

been the custom of the men for generations to select their wives from one particular clan-section of another but still the same clan, because of equality in rank or from other social considerations. And this may be one reason why the Indians do not increase.

Marriage never unites the man and the woman; from first to last the parties belong to different clans and maintain respectively their own social positions. Children are counted in on the mother's side as her elder brother's family, belonging, of course, to her clan. And all rights, titles and property descend from uncle to nephew or niece, and not from father to son. The idea of a widow laying claim to her late husband's property or a son to his father's, would be absurd to the Indian mind. But it is very hard to suppress nature, especially when it is human; for, in spite of all, the paternal or filial instinct crops out at times and sets up serious complications in this social machinery.

No better description could be given of the Indian people than that supplied by the name they give themselves – *Alu-gigiat*. Truly they are a *Public-people*, for they have no private business, no private rights and no domestic privacy. Every right is *holden* (that is the meaning of the word "Yuqu," which the white man, judging from outward appearance, calls potlatch (*i.e., giving*) and every matter regulated by a public manifestation of assent on the part of the united clans. And this public expression of assent, made by the clans and acknowledged by the individual, is what we call potlatch. Even babies are legitimized, so to speak, in this way, the naming of children recorded, and their admission to tribal privileges signaled by the same means.

You will observe, therefore, that according to the constitution of the tribes and the distribution of clans, potlatch, or a system analogous to it, is a necessity, from the Indian point of view, in order to preserve the unity, distinctions and traditions of the race; for one clan-section may not assent to an act except in concert with the other sections; if it do[es], the act in question is only recognized within that section. And if an individual assumes any right to which he may be entitled, without a public manifestation of assent on the part of the clans, he finds himself in the position of a miner who stakes off a claim without recording it; the next individual in the line of succession may, on going through the usual formalities, jump the other's claim. Sometimes the rightful claimant of a privilege is too poor to call the clans together for their assent, in which case someone else of kin who is better off asserts a counterclaim, sends out a runner, calls the clans, and takes the other's place. When you hear of Indians killing each other, or attempting to do so, it is because of some such reason as this. There lies extant in this system an unlimited possibility of serious trouble, but it is not to be found in the mere giving of a feast or dance, nor even in the distribution and destruction of property, nor in the eating of dog or human flesh; the evil and the roots lie deeper and quite apart from these things.

You will further notice that, although not an idol itself, the potlatch puts all the idols of heathendom in the shade, for not only does it swallow up the sustenance of an entire community, but the community itself, and only says "Shimoigit!" (Hail, chief!) in return. It consumes five clear months out of every twelve in simply gorging,

sleeping and dancing; the most that any of its votaries can earn is all too little for it; the money that ought to be spent upon the necessaries of life is squandered on this idol, which is feted and glutted to its heart's content, while the poor, the aged, the feeble and the sick lie in poverty, filth and rags – dying for want of a little nourishment.

It is a pitiable sight to behold sick folk, invalids, delicate children and babies traveling to and fro over fifty miles of waste ice and snow, the thermometer perhaps below zero at the time, for the sole purpose of paying and receiving homage before this idol. I have seen dying persons and children suffering from measles hauled about the country in mid-winter on sleds, camping out in the snow at night, in order to be present, or that on whose tender mercies they were dependent might be present at potlatch; and I have seen them taken back from potlatch in their coffins.

I will now give you a brief list of the various functions whereat the presence of the clans is considered necessary:

1. On the birth of a child, except [when] the parents choose to have it regarded as illegitimate, so to speak, the sections of both clans – the father's and mother's – must be assembled, feted and presented with suitable acknowledgments of their rank, etc.

2. The naming of a child is another public function. If a boy, his ears are pierced, and if a girl, her under lip. But this piercing is dying out. The ceremony cannot be performed privately nor yet within the family circle of one clan section, but must take place at some public gathering of importance, and the social status of each person present must be recognized in a suitable manner.

3. When the child has reached the age of seven or eight years it must be signalized or distinguished according to its ancestry, and introduced to the public wearing some particularly prized headdress, an heirloom if possible; a number of blankets and a quantity of print calico are then torn up and distributed, the pieces varying in size according to the rank of the recipient. This is called "Si Halaid".

4. When the child is ten or twelve years of age, it is brought forth for a public recognition. A feast is made on a small scale, and a dance given, and again property is distributed. The child is presented arrayed in tribal regalia, and publicly assumes the charge of some family emblem in the shape of a toy of the monkey-on-the-stick order, which is called a "Naknog". This function is therefore known as "Naknogs".

5. Girls, on attaining the age of puberty, are set apart to fast four days. The first food they are allowed to taste after this fast is at a feast where all the clan sections of the village are represented. After the feast the attendance of the clans is duly acknowledged by a distribution of gifts. This formality is termed "Ginētqu," i.e., *an arising*, after which the girl is considered marriageable.

6. Most Indians are distinguished by tattoo markings on their bodies, the imprinting of which is a great event. These markings generally represent some bird, animal or reptile connected with the totem of a clan or crest of the family, and on the occasion of the tattooing it is usual to take up some further articles of ancestral regalia and another "naknog," besides the assumption of a large amount of self-importance, while a distribution of property is made on a larger scale than hitherto.

Only adults are permitted to go through this ceremony, as it leads to a position of some dignity in the public estimation. The custom is called “Dumyē,” i.e., *a starting out*. A year afterwards a feast is given when the marks are publicly shown and declared “gwalgwa,” i.e., *dried or healed*.

7. In a few years’ time the person, if sufficiently well off to do so, goes through a similar ceremony called “O’sk,” probably meaning *motion onward*, at which what the white man would call “a big potlatch” is made. The right to wear some important crest is established on this occasion with a further addition of regalia and, perhaps, more tattoo markings.

8. After an Indian has preformed “O’sk” he may have to work hard for several years in order to be able to take the next step, which is called “Oiag,” i.e., *an arriving*, meaning, I suppose, an arriving at the position of full membership in the clan. It is much the same as Dumyē and O’sk, but on a larger scale, as to the acknowledgments made to those assembled. Further clanship privileges and dignity are conferred or assumed, and the individual emerges a duly enfranchised member of the Confederacy.

As such he is now free to take special degrees of honor such as Mitlā, Lū’lim, Ulalā and Unanā.

The Mitlā is a very simple dance affair, containing nothing objectionable from a moral point of view.

The Lū’lim is a dog-eating degree, when the candidate, having made himself sufficiently mad in the woods – naked and fasting for several days – joins the ceremonial dance and tears a dog to pieces with his teeth before the assembled company, after which he distributes as much property as he is able.

The Ulalā is a cannibal degree, that is to say, the eating of human flesh is its leading feature. It is not so bad as it used to be when slaves were killed, I am told, and dead bodies exhumed for the purpose. The modern method is to get together as much property as possible, fix the date for the dance, then disappear into the woods for a few days cloaked in a bearskin with a bellows-whistle under each arm, and then when the dance is on, turn up in a fine frenzy and start in biting those present. On some the biter only leaves the marks of his teeth, from others he will draw blood, while perhaps from others, if he can afford it, he will tear a piece of flesh away. After this beastly fit of voluntary insanity (the highest ambition of the young men!) he will distribute his property among those he has bitten, according to the nature of the bite inflicted. It is now two years since the last Ulalā dance was held on this reservation. Let us hope it may never be revived.

The Unanā is a crockery-breaking honor. The candidate, having been artistically painted, kilted and feathered, is armed with a club, works himself up into a towering rage, and then proceeds on his mission of destruction, stepping like a high-mettled charger. Entering into each house he goes foaming about breaking basins, plates, lamps, or anything else he sees, and having completed his tour makes a grand display of recompensing the owners. Men who have gone through these degrees are not to be lightly esteemed; they are generally very proud and puffed up with the glory they have acquired.

9. Another legal formality of importance is the Llin. If from any cause an Indian has not been able to go through the various formalities already enumerated, he is not considered a member of Indian society proper, and as he cannot go back to childhood and take them *seriatim*, he is allowed to present himself *in toto* by means of this provisional statute called Llin, which consists in obtaining the united assent of the clans in the usual way. Many Indians have renounced Christianity and civilization by this means. If a man puts away his wife, or a woman leaves her husband, the divorce is completed by either or both parties going through the Llin, after which they are at liberty to marry whom they please. And here I might observe that if our civil law recognizes the validity of Indian marriages contracted according to Indian custom, I do not see how it can ignore the validity of this custom. I mention this as against, not in favor of such recognition. Even an Indian who has been married according to English law may put away his wife, go back to the heathen community, perform the Llin, take another wife and go about freely without any fear of our law³⁸ interfering with his liberty. This is one reason why the civilized Indians wish to see the potlatch abolished.

10. And now we come to what is generally known as *the* potlatch, but which is no more potlatch than any one of those functions I have already mentioned. The Nishga term is Yuqu, i.e., *a holding*, and the ceremony is performed in connection with the death of a chief or other individual of rank for the purpose of continuing his name and position in the clan by his heir. It differs in no way from O'sk or Oiag – a feast and distribution of property, after which the defunct chief's nephew is acknowledged as chief. It is also considered necessary for a chief to present himself every four or five years in this manner in order to continue the holding of his chieftainship by a renewal of the public expression of assent.

The building or rebuilding of a house is also considered a necessary occasion for making a potlatch, because it entails the holding of a public position. There is no such thing as *giving* a potlatch, as a white man gives a dinner or a ball just because he wishes to be sociable. A potlatch must be for a purpose, and if there be no *legal* reason (according to Indian law) for giving it, it cannot be given. Only as a candidate for some public position can an Indian appear before the electorate of the Confederacy by making a potlatch.

11. There is another formality connected with the Yuqu, called Hōōks. A chief usually gives a Hōōks a year before his potlatch comes off, but as far as I can see it has no special significance except, perhaps, that of putting the electorate in a good

³⁸ “Under the British North American Act, the Dominion Parliament has assigned to it the exclusive right to legislate upon the subject of marriage and divorce. Previous to confederation the civil courts in the Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island had jurisdiction over the matters of divorce and they were not disturbed by the Act of Union. British Columbia, also, prior to its admission into the federation [in 1871], possessed a court of like jurisdiction. In all the other Provinces and the Territories, divorce can only be obtained by special legislation of the Dominion Parliament. Petitions for divorce are first enquired into by a special committee of the Senate, under the ordinary rules in taking evidence which obtain in courts of law; and there after the matter is dealt with in the shape of a private act of Parliament.” DIVORCE COURTS. (1897, January 22). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 7.

humor. There is generally a good deal of folly indulged in at a Hōōks. There is also liable to be considerable wanton (from our point of view) destruction of property if the friends of the chief giving the Hōōks take it into their heads to do him honor. This they do by making him presents of articles of clothing, etc., but instead of putting them in his hand they put them in the fire, where they are quickly consumed. The chief then and there makes return presents, also putting them in the fire, amid rounds of applause. To the Indian mind this is all *comme il faut*.

Having thus touched upon the various ins and outs of the potlatch system, let us consider its influence upon the Indians.

Among those who practice, its influence is baneful in the last degree; it puffs up while exhausting, and its victims while being destroyed think they are being established; it presents an outward altruistic appearance, but is essentially egotistic; those who practice it think they are the pick of benevolence, whereas in reality they are most selfish; it is fatal to all idea of thrift and comfort in family life – to be thrifty is to be bad, to be economical is criminal; it is destructive of individual liberty, and, consequently, of the development of the race; it is inimical to all social progress and education; although not a religious system it is intensely repugnant to religion, and the civilization of the Indian is an abomination to it; it produces such a strange condition of society that if we can get in five years' work among the people in twenty years we may claim to do well; it places our best actions in a false light – while we think we are showing kindness and charity to the poor and needy, we are in reality paying homage to exalted personages; our greetings, salutations and smiles very often appear in the same light; our efforts for the salvation of souls are nothing less than a hunt for men of title with which to adorn our missions, while everything containing the element of a free gift – and much of our work is of that nature – is liable to appear in the light of a “bid” for favor.

To a people socially organized on potlatch principles it would seem that everything should be presented upside down from our point of view in order to appear right side up to them – refuse a thing, and it at once becomes an object of desire; offer it freely and it is worthless, or you have an ulterior motive for offering it.

As to the Nishgas themselves, divest their minds of this way of thinking and you have really the nicest and best-natured people imaginable.

I must now say a few words about the effect of the potlatch system upon those Indians who have come out on the side of religion and civilization.

If, after an Indian leaves the Confederacy to join a mission, the potlatch would let him alone, all would be well. But it does no such thing. If the man be a chief, the potlatch immediately usurps his chieftainship, promotes another chief in his place, takes away his name and title, and ignores him. This is very hard for some men to bear, not so much because of the humiliation as because of the injustice.

If when a Christian dies the potlatch would leave the matter alone, much heart-burning would be avoided. But it does no such thing. If the deceased has been a person of any social position, some heathen clansman is sure to make a potlatch for the corpse in order to take that position, thus raising trouble among the Christian relatives.

If the potlatch would leave their young men alone, the Christian Indians would not be very much opposed to it. But it will not leave them alone; it inveigles them into heathenism, helps them to go through with the Halaid or Llin, and ties them up to debts from which they may not be able to get free for years.

The civilized Indian occupies a strange position. As far as his affairs are concerned the white men – missionaries, Government officials and others, think of him and act towards him as being one with them in their laws and in the rights emanating from those laws (c.f. the Indian Act), but with the Indian himself it is different. He can only conceive of himself in his new estate according as he finds himself supported for or against what he considers to be his rights and wrongs. If, when he is made to writhe under a sea of injustice, and complains to us only to be snubbed, or to have his grievance made light of from our failure to comprehend them, is it to be wondered at that he feels we have no interest in his welfare? The civilized Indian finds himself in a majority of two to one on the Naas, and yet he cannot get a hearing. He has appealed vainly to the authorities to be relieved from the tyranny of the potlatch, but he has not been understood, and it has not been thought advisable to give him relief, hence it is that the potlatch in a modernized, though no less injurious form, is now becoming as it were a necessity among the civilized Nishgas.

I do not mean to say the Government has made no attempt to help in this matter; it has done so, but in the most deplorable manner possible. It has passed a law (49 V., c. 43, s. 114)³⁹ prohibiting the potlatch on pain of six months' imprisonment, but this law has never been enforced, and this has had a very demoralizing effect upon the Indians both Christian and heathen. This is where my personal protest comes in.

As to the law (59 V., c. 27, s. 6)⁴⁰ in question forbidding Indians to tear up blankets and distribute property, it should never have been passed; first, because there is really no moral harm in tearing up a blanket; secondly, because tearing up blankets and giving away presents are not the disturbing factor of the potlatch; and thirdly, because tearing up blankets and distributing property are not in themselves

³⁹ "1. Every Indian or person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the 'potlatch,' or the Indian dance known as the 'tamanawas,' is guilty of a misdemeanor, and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months. 2. Every Indian or person who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian to get up such a festival or dance, or to celebrate the same, or who assists in the celebration of the same, is guilty of a like offence, and shall be liable to the same punishment." [From a small appendix in the original.]

⁴⁰ "Section one hundred and fourteen of *The Indian Act* is hereby repealed and the following substituted therefor:- Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating, or encourages, either directly or indirectly, another to celebrate, any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same, and every Indian or other person who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months; but nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition or the giving of prizes for exhibits thereat." [From a small appendix in the original.]

an obstacle to Christianity and civilization. The fact is the law should not have been aimed *altogether* at the heathen Indians; it should have been partly in favor of and partly in restraint of the civilized community on whose petition the legislation was made.

A chief wishing to become Christian and civilized should have his rights assured to him by law – the potlatch should not be allowed to deprive him of his rights.

The Christian dead should be made sacred against all potlatch interference.

An Indian, having once left the Confederacy and taken up his position on the side of law, order and civilization, should not be allowed to publicly renounce and so bring into contempt his profession of Christianity and civilization by means of the potlatch.

No Indian married according to English law should be allowed to put away his wife and marry another woman according to potlatch authority. The woman should be restrained in like manner.

These are the lines upon which the law against potlatching should have been framed, and on which it might, with great advantages to the cause of education and civilization, be amended.

It is the duty of everyone who has the welfare of the Indian at heart to protest against the present unsatisfactory state of affairs. If the existing law is to be retained, enforce it; if not, take it off the statute book. But if it may not be repealed, let it be amended; and if it be amended, let it be so amended that it shall touch the core of the evil and ensure relief where relief is wanted, and restraint where restraint is required.

“The Thompson Indians of British Columbia”⁴¹ (1900)

About fifty years ago or more, according to the Indians, the giving of “potlatches,” a custom previously unknown to them, came into vogue among the Upper Thompsons, while the Lower Thompsons had adopted the custom even earlier than that. A chief, so called on account of his wealth, gathered a large number of people at his house, and, after feasting them on horse-flesh, distributed numerous presents among them, thereby gaining a great name for liberality and wealth. Cixpēntlem, a chief who died about eight years ago, was famous for often giving this kind of potlatch. It is said that he was able to give oone every two or three years on a very large scale, and that either he or his father was the originator of the custom. The giver of the presents distributed at these potlatches neither received nor expected any return presents. Before the custom of the potlatch was known, only a man who was possessed of much wealth gave feasts to his friends, keeping an open house, while two or three of his wives were employed most of the time in cooking. If a stranger

⁴¹ From Teit, J. & Boas, F. (Ed.). (1900). *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia. Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History, Volume II*. United States: American Museum of Natural History. Written by James Alexander Teit (1864 – 1922) and edited by Franz Boas (1858 – 1942).

came along, he was invited in, and on departing was given some small present, thereby spreading the fame of his entertainer.

The potlatch as described was succeeded about thirty years ago by the potlatch of the present day, which, among the Thompsons, is a small and local affair compared to that of the Coast tribes; in fact, I doubt if there is much similarity between them. The Indians state that the custom was at its height about ten or fifteen years ago, since which time it has been on the wane; nevertheless, seldom does an autumn or winter pass without some man or woman of the tribe giving a potlatch. Anyone can give a potlatch who is possessed of sufficient wealth to do so. The potlatches of the present day are mostly given by one individual to another of the same tribe, to one who is considered wealthy, and likely to give a return potlatch at some future day. Sometimes, however, they are given to a member of another tribe. This kind of feast is perhaps best described by an illustration.

We will suppose that O. has determined to give a potlatch to S. O. sends a messenger to S. to announce his intention. The messenger, mounted on a horse with good saddle and bridle, and with some tobacco rolled up in a new pair of blankets tied to the saddle, arrives at the home of S. and delivers his message, adding: "These presents are from O. to you as a surety of the truth of my message, and he awaits your coming in a few days. The tobacco is for your friends to smoke." He then delivers the horse and all articles attached to it to S. The messenger often wears two suits of clothes. In such case, he divests himself of the outer one, and presents it to S. as a gift from his master; but sometimes it is the custom for the young men to attack him and take the clothes off without ceremony. S. then invites his friends to accompany him. Each of them gives him presents of more or less value. Then he mounts his host's messenger on another horse, attaching an exact equivalent of the articles received, and gives him another suit to put on over his ordinary clothes. This is a return present to his master.

S. and the rest start on horseback for O.'s house. They take with them two or three pack-horses loaded with presents, and other horses, also intended as presents. On the morning of the day on which the guests are to arrive at O.'s house, the messenger leaves them, and hurries to his master to tell him that the guests will arrive that afternoon. At the same time he delivers the return present of the horse with the attached articles, saying, "These are surety of S.'s speedy arrival." Young men and women are then sent out to meet the guests, and to treat them to refreshments or a meal on the road, which they are supposed to need after their journey.

In the afternoon the guests appear. Drawing up in line some distance off, they beat their drum to give notice of their arrival and commence to sing. A man, called the "speaker," is then sent out to invite them to take possession of the long, half-open lodge which has been prepared for their accommodation. There they are met and welcomed by their host, or the host's speaker, who makes a speech to his chief guest, S. This compliment is returned by the latter making many flattering remarks to his host. Supper is then spread for the guests on rows of large table-mats around which

fifty or more individuals squat at a time. After the meal is over, O. and his friends also partake of supper.

Huge log fires are then lighted between the long lodge of the guests and that occupied by the host and his friends. A present of tobacco is then made by O. to his guests for them to smoke, after which S.'s speaker gives away the presents which S. has received from his friends. With each present he makes an oration, and occasionally causes much laughter by alluding to the article in a jocular style; or, holding it up before all the people, he says, "This is from S. to O., because he has seen him." The host's speaker repeats his words, and then the article is handed over. These presents, though nominally given to O., are really intended for O.'s friends who have given him presents. Between the giving of presents, the donating party generally extemporize a song, accompanying it with the beating of drums and dancing. Sometimes the principal of the donating party dances to the accompaniment of drum and song. Any person of the opposite side who praises the dancer is entitled to a present. The chief or best singers sit in a circle round the drummer or leader of the songs.

The next night O. gives presents in the same manner. The first of these are given to S.'s friends, and are about equal in value to those received by O.'s friends the night before. In this way the friends of each party are requited for the presents which they have given to their respective leaders. The principal presents are then given to S. by O., which ends the potlatch. These latter presents are generally repaid the next year, when S. invites O. and his friends to a return potlatch. On the morrow the remaining food is divided among all present, as are also the cups, pates, knives, spoons, mats, etc., which were used during the feast. The articles principally interchanged as presents are horses and blankets, money, guns, clothes and food. [...]

At such feasts it was formerly considered necessary for the host, in order to preserve his good name, to supply the company with fresh meat. Accordingly large numbers of horses were killed and eaten. Within the last twelve years, however, cattle have been slaughtered instead, or a party of hunters have gone into the mountains beforehand to obtain venison for the company.

Sometimes a man would offer a present to the person who sang the best song. He himself was generally the judge; but sometimes it was decided by vote of the people assembled. Both men and women competed. Some accompanied their singing with a drum. Nowadays the present is generally five dollars in cash. Any kind of song may be sung, and in any language.

Another custom which still obtains, is that of one individual giving presents to another, either as a mark of good will or as a sign of recognition. This is particularly the case between friends or blood relations living at some distance from each other. It is also often done when one meets a distant relative or friend for the first time, especially if he visits one's house. In every case an exact equivalent as a return present is expected at some future date. Every Indian is welcome at another's house to eat a meal without any charge, even if he be an enemy; and as long as one has a morsel to eat, he will share it with his friends.

TALES OF THE POTLATCH

Tsimshian tales⁴² (1894)

INTRODUCTION

The following texts were collected in Kinkolith, at the mouth of the Nass River, during the months of November and December, 1894. [...] The texts are in the Nass River dialect of the Tsimshian language. The dialect is called by the natives Nísqa'É. The texts were obtained from four individuals – Philip, Moses, Chief Mountain, and Moody. By far the greater number of them are myths of the tribe. [...]

GROWING-UP-LIKE-ONE-WHO-HAS-A-GRANDMOTHER

(Told by Moses)

There was a boy who had lost his father and his mother; only his mother's brother, the chief of the village, remained. One day this chief was purifying himself by drinking a decoction of devil's-clubs. He did so repeatedly because he intended to give a potlatch. One evening he went down to the beach; there he sat down and looked up to the sky. Behold, fire came down from the sky like a shooting star. It came right down. A tree was standing behind the house of the chief, and a branch was standing out from the tree. The fire came right down to it and hung on the end of the branch. The chief saw it. He went up to the house and sent for his people. When they entered, he said, "Copper is hanging on the branch of a tree. The young people shall go and knock it down. If one of you young men hit it, he shall marry my daughter."

Early the next morning they went up behind the house of the chief. The old men also went to look. The young men took stones, and threw all day long until their hands were quite sore; then they stopped for a while and ate. Then they went up again and tried to knock the copper down, but they did not succeed. It grew dark. Then the poor little boy went down to the beach in front of the house and sat down near a canoe, where he urinated. Then he saw a man approaching who said, "What are the people talking about?"

The boy replied, "A copper hangs on a tree and the people tried to knock it down, but they did not succeed."

"Go and try to hit it yourself," said the man. Then he took up a stone and gave it to the boy. He took up another one and gave it to him. Then he said, "You shall knock it down. Take first this white stone, then this black stone, then this blue stone, and finally this one." The poor little boy took them, and then the man said, "Do not show these stones to the people."

On the following morning the people went again and began to throw. The poor little boy went up with them and said he would throw, too. Then the young men rose and pushed him, but the wise men stopped them and said, "Let him throw too." Then the young men sat down.

⁴² From Moses and Boas, F. [Trans.] (1902). *Tsimshian Texts*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

The poor little boy rose and picked up a stone. He swung it in his hands so that it whistled. It whistled four times, then he let it go. He almost hit the copper. He threw again and almost hit it. He threw the black stone first, then the white one, then the blue one. He almost struck it. Finally he threw the red stone. It hit the copper right on its end. The poor little boy had hit it, and it fell down.

Then all the young men ran up to it, everyone claiming it. But the poor little boy did not mind. They took it along and ran with it into the house of the chief, intending to marry his daughter, but he who had hit it was standing behind all these liars. Then the chief said, "Wait a while."

When it was evening, the growling of a white bear was heard behind the house of the chief. The chief said, "Whoever kills the white bear shall marry my daughter." Then all the young men rose and ran out very suddenly because the chief had said, "Whoever kills the white bear shall marry my daughter." The young men did not sleep because they wanted to pursue the white bear.

In the evening the poor little boy again went down to the beach. He sat down there, and again a person approached him who asked, "What are the people talking about?"

The poor little boy replied, "Last evening a white bear appeared behind the town. Whoever catches it shall marry the daughter of the chief."

Then the man, who was standing near the poor little boy, said, "Ask for a bow and arrow. You shall shoot it."

Then the poor little boy went up. When it grew dark, all the young men were in the house of the chief. The latter took down to the fire a quiver holding bows and arrows. He gave one bow and two arrows to each man. Then the poor little boy, the chief's own nephew, went down to the fire too. His father and his mother were dead, therefore he was poor. Only his old grandmother took care of him.

He also asked for a bow and two arrows. Then all the young men made fun of him; but the wise men said to the chief, "Give a bow to the poor little boy." The chief did so and he took it. It was evening, and a little before daybreak the white bear appeared again behind the town. All the young men ran out.

A long time after they had left, the poor little boy ran out, too. It was as though a fly were flying. The wasp pitied him, and therefore the poor little boy was able to transform himself into a fly. Before the young men could reach the white bear, the poor little boy had passed them. He hit it and it lay there. His arrow passed right through it. Then he took the arrow, and fat was seen right across the nock of the arrow. Then the poor little boy returned.

Now all the young men reached the bear and took it, though the poor little boy had killed it. Then they rubbed their arrows with blood, intending to say that they had shot it. They lied because they wished to marry the daughter of the chief. Then they carried the white bear into the house of the chief.

One young man went down to the fire and said, "Look at my arrow! I shot the white bear."

The chief said, "Give me all your bows and arrows that I may examine them and discover who killed the white bear."

They gave them to him and he examined them. Then he demanded the arrow of the poor little boy, and behold, he had shot the white bear. Then they were all very much ashamed; the chief also was much ashamed. He did not speak, because the poor little boy had first knocked down the copper that was on the tree behind the house of the chief, and then he had also shot the white bear. All the young men, and also the chief, were ashamed, because the poor little boy had accomplished this.

Then the chief made up his mind. He was ashamed, and therefore he sent his slave ordering the people to move away from the village. The great slave ran out, and with a loud voice ordered the people to move. They heard it, and early in the morning they moved. Not a single person stayed behind. They all went by canoe. Only the chief's daughter and the poor little boy were left, and with them the old grandmother. These three stayed behind.

The old grandmother had a few pieces of dried salmon, but the chief's daughter would not eat. She fasted. The poor little boy did the same.

The princess slept in the rear of the house, while the poor little boy slept near the fire. They lay down, and he thought of their poverty. It grew dark, and it grew daylight again. The poor little boy left the house. Near the end of the town there was a great river, and a trail led up the river. The poor little boy went along this trail. He went a long time and came to the shore of a great lake. A grassy opening extended to the water of the lake. There he stood and shouted. The water rose and behold, the one that had charge of the lake emerged. When it saw the poor little boy standing near the water, it came ashore quickly toward the place where the poor little boy was standing.

It was a great frog. It had long claws of copper. Its mouth was copper, and so were its eyes and its eyebrows. It came near the poor little boy and almost caught him. Then the boy started to run. It almost caught him, but the boy escaped, and the great frog returned. It could not overtake the poor little boy. The poor little boy ran right to the place where a large cedar tree stood. Then he went out to the woods where the princess and the old grandmother were.

Now they had almost nothing to eat. He went about among the empty houses, and there he found a stone ax; after a while he found a handle. Then he tied the ax to the handle. He sharpened it on his whetstone, and in the evening he went to cut a tree. He worked at it the whole day. In the evening it fell. Then he cut up a small tree, making wedges. When he had finished them, he took them to the large tree. Then he found a stone hammer. He tied it to its handle and split the heart of the large tree. He spread it out wide enough so that a man could pass through it. Then he split a small tree. He selected one that was not very tall. Then he placed these trees across the trail. There were two sticks that he had cut. These he put across the crack of the large tree. Then he stopped.

He went home and found the princess and the old grandmother. He did not speak and did not eat. It grew dark, and before daylight he rose.

He went and came to the shore of the great lake. He stood near the water and shouted four times, looking up to the sky. The water rose again and, behold, the great frog emerged. Its claws were copper. Copper was its mouth, its eyes, and its eyebrows.

It went quickly toward the shore, but the poor little boy did not mind. When it had almost reached him, he ran away. The frog almost scratched his back. Now he arrived at the place where he had placed the tree across the trail, and he slipped through.

Then the great frog also struggled to get through, trying to catch the poor little boy. It tried to squeeze through the crack of the tree. When the poor little boy saw this, he returned, took his stone hammer, and struck the sticks with which he had spread the tree out of the crack. They flew out and the great tree closed, killing the great frog. It could not get out again.

When the poor little boy saw that it was dead, he put in the wedges and opened the great tree. Then he took out the dead frog. He laid it on its back and skinned it. He left the claws on the skin. He finished, took the skin, and threw away the flesh. Then he took the skin in order to practice. He put his arms and legs into it, and laced the chest. Then he went to the shore of the great lake and dived.

He walked on the bottom of the great lake and caught a trout. Then he returned. He went ashore carrying a small trout. Then he took the skin off. He took good care of it. There was a tree that had a long branch. He hung the skin of the great frog on it. Then he went home. The princess was still asleep. The poor little boy stepped very softly and entered the house. He laid down the little trout in front of the house. Then he entered secretly and lay down.

Early in the morning the princess rose. She heard a raven crying on the beach. When she heard it, she said to the poor little boy, "See why the raven is crying on the beach."

The poor little boy rose and went out. He went to the front of the house and, behold, a little trout was lying on the sand. The poor little boy took it and went up with it, and he entered and spoke to the princess, "The raven found a little trout"; but he himself had caught it at the bottom of the lake. The poor little boy had acquired for himself supernatural power, but he did not want the princess to know it, and she did not know it.

It was evening again, and the poor little boy made ready to go. But the princess did not eat the little trout; only the poor little boy and his grandmother ate what the raven had found in the morning. Then they lay down. The princess lay in the rear of the house, and the boy lay near the fire.

In the evening the poor little boy rose and went out again. Then he found the great skin of the frog and put it on. Again he went to the shore of the great lake and dived. He walked about on the bottom of the lake and caught a trout, a little larger one. Then he went ashore again. Again he put off the skin and hung it on the branch of the tree. He went home again and laid it on the sand in front of the house. The poor little boy entered secretly and lay down.

When the day broke, a raven was crying on the beach. The princess heard it and said to the poor little boy, "Go and hear why the raven is crying on the beach."

The poor little boy went down again, although he himself had caught in the lake what the raven found on the beach. He went down and took it. Then he returned again and entered. He laid it before the old grandmother, who split it and roasted it;

but the princess did not eat, only the old grandmother and the poor little boy ate of it. He did so every night. Then he finished catching trout in the lake.

One night he went out again and found the skin hanging on the branch. He put it on and went down the river, the outlet of the great lake, at the bottom of the water. He went down to the sea; then he walked about on the bottom of the sea and caught a salmon. Before daylight he laid it down in front of the house. Then he went up the river again under the water. He went ashore out of the great lake and took off the great frog's skin and hung it up. He went home and arrived before daylight. He entered secretly and lay down.

When the day broke, the princess rose. Again she heard the raven crying on the beach; there were even two ravens. She called the poor little boy, saying, "See why the ravens are crying on the beach."

Again he rose and went down. There was the salmon that he himself had caught in the sea. He took it and went up. He entered, carrying it, and laid it down near the old grandmother. She split it and roasted one-half. When it was done, she addressed the princess, wanting her to eat of it, and she ate with them. The poor little boy and the old grandmother ate one end; the princess ate the other end. He did so every night. Then the princess noticed that the skin of the poor little boy began to be very clean.

One night she did not sleep, but she watched him until midnight. He was no longer a boy, but a youth. Now she saw that he was very clean. She saw that long after dark the poor little boy rose. She was still watching when he re-entered. She was unable to sleep, and a little before daylight the poor little boy entered the house. He lay down again, but the princess did not sleep.

Now it was daylight, and the raven cried on the beach. Then the princess herself rose and went out. She went down to the beach. Behold, a large salmon lay in front of the house on the sand. The princess herself took it, and she entered, carrying it, while the poor little boy was still lying down.

She said, "Rise!" Then the poor little boy rose. The princess said to him, "I wish to question you." The poor little boy sat down near to her, and the princess said to him, "I know that you found the trout and the small salmon. The raven did not find them on the beach. Now I have found a large salmon. I know that you have got many trout. You killed them. My grandmother dried many salmon, and I have found this large salmon."

Then the poor little boy said, "It is true. My uncle treated us thus. He deserted you and me and my grandmother. We were without food, therefore I went into the woods. I came to a large lake. Then I shouted, and a great frog emerged. It swam ashore and I killed it. I skinned it, and I put on its skin. Then I caught trout and salmon and I became very clean. Now I am great. You have taken notice of me."

The princess replied, "You shall marry me," and he agreed. He married her and he was now a man; he was no longer the poor little boy.

He caught many salmon, and the house was full. Then he filled another house. He went into the sea, and caught bullhead. He dried many. Then he went to catch halibut, and they dried many. He obtained every kind of fish, and caught a great

many. Four houses were full of provisions. Then he went to catch seals, and he caught a very great number. He put them into another house. Now he went to catch porpoises, and placed them in another house. Then he went to catch sea lions, and they obtained a great many large water animals. Many houses were full of sea lion grease, because the sea lions are very large. Then he got whales. He obtained very many.

Now they had two children, and for a long time he caught animals with his hands. Suddenly he became very tired. He told his wife, and she began to worry, and rebuked her husband, saying, "Please stop;" but he caught four large whales and there was a smell of grease all along the beach in front of their houses. The butts of the trees where he had carried up the meat and the fat of whales were full of grease. Bones were lying about in front of his house, and the grease from the whales covered the water of the sea.

Now, many of the people who, with his uncle, had deserted him were dead. His uncle was a very great chief. Now his uncle thought that his daughter, the poor little boy, and the grandmother were dead, and he spoke to his people. The chief had lost many of his people, because there was no food. Many of them and all the children were dead.

One day, early in the morning, some people started to look after the princess, the poor little boy, and the grandmother. They were traveling in four canoe. They were approaching the place. When they were still far from the shore, they saw grease on the surface of the water. They noticed it. When they approached the shore, they saw several houses full of dried salmon, trout, halibut, and bullhead, and others in which was the grease of seals, of porpoises, of sea lions, and of whales. He had very much, because he had caught four whales. He had caught very much with his hands.

Then his uncle's people landed. They told him that many of the tribe were dead. They entered his house and he fed them. Then they ate dried salmon, fat of the seal, and fat of the porpoise and of the whale. Then he presented them with dried halibut, bullhead, and trout. He gave presents to those whom he had invited in. He gave them fat of the seal, porpoise, sea lion and whale. Then they started and left him.

They landed at the place where the chief was living. Then the people came to the beach and told him that the town of the young man was full of dried trout, salmon, halibut, and bullhead, and of fat of the seal, porpoise, sea lion, and whale, that the butts of the trees smelled of the meat of the whale, sea lion, porpoise, and seal that was lying about, and that four houses were full of dried trout, halibut, and bullhead.

When the chief heard this, he was very glad, and he was also glad when he heard that his daughter had two children. He said to his people, "Let us move again." The great slave went out and ordered the people to move back to the place where the princess and the poor little boy were living. The old grandmother had died. Then the people moved, and they stayed at the place that they had once left. Then the boy gave them much dried trout, salmon, halibut and bullhead.

He did what was just right. Then his uncle's people were glad. They were saved, because they now ate dried trout, salmon, halibut, and bullhead, and he also gave them a little fat of the seal, porpoise, sea lion, and whale; and his uncle's people were

very glad, because they were saved. And all the people said that the poor little boy, when grown up, should be their chief.

The boy always went out to sea to catch seals for his uncle's people, and he always told his wife that it was very hard to take off the frog blanket. Then his wife worried and cried when she lay down.

Now the people brought many elks and slaves. They brought enough elks to fill two houses. And he bought them with trout and dried halibut and salmon and bullhead; he bought many slaves.

Then he gave a potlatch. He invited all the people from other places. Then he accomplished what he intended to do. The people went into his house, and he placed the elks and all his other goods and his slaves in the middle of the house. Then he said to his uncle, "You shall distribute them." His uncle agreed, and told him to put on the skin of the white bear. He also wore the great copper that he had thrown down from the tree when he still was the poor little boy. He placed the great copper on his head. Then he walked to the middle of the house and stood near the pile of elk skins; then he sang. When the song was ended, the chief said, "Now I will call your name;" and he named him *Growing-up-like-one-who-has-a-grandmother*. When he had finished, he put off the great copper that he had used, and he put off the skin of the white bear, and he gave away the slaves to all his guests, and he gave them elk skins. When he had finished, they started away.

After he had finished, he again put on his frog blanket, intending to catch seals for food for the people. He found it very difficult to take off his frog blanket. Then he went to bed and told his wife, and she began to cry.

He said, "When I put it on again, I shall not be able to take it off, and if I do so, I may not return; I shall only bring seals and halibut and place them in front of the town. I shall not come ashore again, and I shall stay in the sea. All the year round I shall secretly put ashore seals, halibut, salmon, porpoises, sea lions, and whales as food for my children." He said so every day.

One morning his wife went down to the beach in front of the town, and he was lost. He did not come ashore again. He stayed at the bottom of the sea. Therefore the woman, every morning when she rose, went down to the beach and cried, accompanied by her two children. They saw two halibut, and they took them up to the house.

One morning she went out again, crying, and she looked seaward, crying, because her husband was lost in the sea. Then she saw two seals. *Growing-up-like-one-who-has-a-grandmother* had given them as food to his children.

Another morning she went down. She went down, crying, every morning. She saw a porpoise. She carried it up.

Another morning she went down with her two children, and she saw a sea lion. She went down and carried it up. Thus her children had always enough.

Another morning she went down, and when she ceased crying she saw a great whale. Then she did not go down again, because she could not carry the whale. She said to her father's people, "Fasten this whale to the house. The father of these children sent it here. He also sent the sea lions, the porpoises, the seals, and the

halibut. He told me what he was going to do, because he could not get off his frog blanket, and now he really lives in the sea.”

LITTLE-EAGLE: A LEGEND OF THE EAGLE CLAN

(Told by Moses)

There was a large town. A chief was its master. He was the commander of all the men. His child was a noble prince. The child did not eat, but made bows and arrows all the time. Now the salmon arrived. Then the chief said to his people, “Catch salmon and dry them.” The people did so. They dried many salmon.

Then the prince took one salmon. He put it on the sand, and gave it to an eagle to eat. One eagle came, and then another one, and they ate the salmon. Many eagles did so. They ate all the salmon, and then they flew away again.

The prince pulled out their feathers and gathered them. Then he was glad, and the eagles were also glad. The prince made arrows; he made many boxes full of them. He used the feathers of the eagles for making his arrows, fastening them to the shaft, and therefore his arrows were very swift. He gave salmon to many eagles. When the salmon were at an end, he stopped.

The prince did not eat. He only made arrows. Now it came to be winter. For about three months the Indians ate only dried salmon and berries mixed with grease and elderberries and currants. They ate all kinds of berries. Now the salmon was all used up. They did not give any salmon to the prince.

When the salmon was all used up, the great chief felt sad. He said to his great slave, “Go out and order the people to move.” The great slave ran out, crying, “Move, great tribe!” The people did so. They moved in the morning. They left the chief’s son and his little grandmother, and one little slave, who was still quite small. He was weak. There was no salmon. They only left him his boxes filled with arrows. But his mother buried a clam shell in which she had placed some fire and one-half of a large spring salmon. Then she told the little grandmother where she had hidden the fire and the salmon.

Now the people went aboard [boats] and moved away. Only the prince and his little grandmother and the little slave were left. They had no food. Then the little old woman took the coal and made a fire. They did not eat for a whole day, and for a long time they had no food. Then the prince went out. Early in the morning he sat outside. It was low water. Then an eagle was screeching on the beach.

The prince called his little slave: “See why the eagle is screeching on the beach.”

The slave ran down and came to the place where the eagle was sitting. When he was nearby, the eagle flew away and, behold, a little trout was lying on the sand. Then the little slave shouted, telling the prince, “A little trout, my dear, lies on the beach.” Thus spoke the little slave.

Then the prince said, “Take it.” The little slave carried it up, and the prince ordered him to roast it. The slave roasted it, and when it was done, he and the little old person ate it. The prince did not eat anything. Only the old person and the slave ate it.

Night came and morning came; then the prince went out again. Again he heard the eagles screeching on the beach. He sent down his little slave, who found a

bullhead (sculpin). Then he told the prince, who ordered him to take it up. The little slave took it, and they roasted it. They did so for many days, and the eagles gave them trout and sculpin. Then they had enough to eat.

One morning the prince went out and he saw two eagles sitting on the beach screeching. He sent his little slave, who went down. He looked, and behold, there was a salmon. Then he shouted and said, "There is a large salmon, my dear!" And the prince said, "Take it." The little slave said twice, "I can not take it." The prince went down himself and carried it up. They did so several days, finding salmon on the beach. They dried them.

Another morning the prince went out again, and, behold, there were three eagles. They made much noise. The little slave went down, and, behold, there was a large spring salmon. Again the little slave said he could not carry it, and the prince went down himself. He took it up, and the little old person, his little grandmother, split it. They did so many days. They dried spring salmon. They had very many now.

Another morning the prince went out again. The eagles had given them all kinds of fish, and their houses were full of dried salmon. The slave was quite large when all the salmon were gone.

One morning the prince went out again, and, behold, he saw an eagle far out on the water. He sent his slave down. The little slave had grown to be a little stronger. Behold, there was a large halibut. The little slave shouted, "There is a large halibut, my dear!" The prince said, "Take it;" but the little slave replied, "I can not carry it." The prince went down himself and dragged it up. The little grandmother split it, and they were satisfied. They did so for many days, and dried many halibut. Another house was full of dried halibut. Now they had caught all the salmon and all the halibut.

One morning the little prince went out again, and looked out. Behold, there were quite a number of eagles. He sent his little slave down. The slave went down, and when he came there, behold, there was a large seal. Then the little slave shouted twice, "There is a seal on the beach!" Again the prince went down. He took the seal and dragged it up to the house. He split it. Then they put the fat into a box and dried the meat. They did not take the bones. They did so many days, and filled another house.

Another morning the prince went out again and looked down. Behold, there were many eagles. Then the little slave went down again. He was now quite strong, because he had much to eat. When he got there, behold, there was a large porpoise. The little slave shouted twice. Then the prince went down and dragged it up to the house. They cut it and put the meat away. They filled another house.

Thus the eagles returned the food that the prince had given to them in the summer. The eagles reciprocated. They pitied the prince because he had pitied them in summer. The eagles were glad, and therefore they fed the prince.

One morning the prince went out, and, behold, there were many eagles. He sent the little slave down, and when he went down and reached there, behold, there was a large sea lion. Again the little slave told him. He shouted twice and told him. The prince heard it and went down, and, behold, there was a large sea lion. Then he

returned. He twisted cedar twigs and tied the sea lions to the shore. When the tide rose, they drifted ashore, and when the water fell, they lay on the beach. Then he cut them. The sea lions were very large and had much fat and much meat. They did this for many days. Then they had a great plenty.

One morning the prince went out again, and there were very many eagles; not merely a few. There were a great many eagles on the water. They were flying ashore with a great whale. It lay there. Two nights and two days passed, and there lay another great whale. Then they cut it. (In olden times the Indians chopped the blubber of whales with stone axes in the same way that we chop wood.) Then they chopped the blubber of the whale. Then the blubber came out where they hit it with the ax. Hohoho! They had a great deal, because the whale was very large. The eagles gave the prince and the little grandmother and the slave four whales.

Now the people of his father, who had left him, were dying. The eagles had finished giving food to the prince, and his houses were all full. The grease covered the sea in front of his house. Then the prince shot a gull. He skinned it and put on its skin. He took a piece of seal, not a large piece, and flew away. He went up above to see his father's tribe who had left him. He flew a long time, and, behold, he saw a canoe coming. The gull flew over the canoe, in which there were a number of men. Then the gull dropped the slice of seal into the canoe, and one of the hunters took it. It was very strange that a gull should drop a piece of dried seal into the canoe.

They returned and landed. Then they told what had happened. The chief said to the man and to the slaves, "Go and look for my son." They left after he had told them. In the morning the man and some slaves started in a canoe. They paddled, and arrived at a point of land in front of the old village. Behold, the water ahead of them was covered with grease. It came from the place where they had left the prince.

The man and the slaves paddled on. They went ashore at the place where the prince was staying. Behold, they had done a great deal. The houses were full of salmon and spring salmon and halibut and seals and porpoises and sea lions and whales. Then they were much astonished. The slaves stretched out their hands and dipped up the grease from the surface of the water. Then they ate it.

The prince did not tell them to land, but after a while they landed. Then they ate salmon, and they ate spring salmon and halibut and seal and porpoise and whale. Now the prince said, "Don't take anything home." Thus he spoke to the man and to the slaves. "Eat as much as you want, and then leave. Don't tell at home what you have seen." But one slave hid two pieces under his skin shirt. He dropped two pieces of seal in there because he thought of his child. The prince did not give the man and the slaves food. Then he sent them back. Then they reached the town from which they had started.

The prince had said to them, "Tell them that I am dead, and do not say that I have plenty to eat." The man and the slaves landed a little before dark. They went up to the house and entered the chief's house. The chief asked, "Is my son still alive?" And the man replied, "I think he has been dead for a long time."

The slaves and their families were living in one corner of the chief's house. Now they lay down. Then the slave took out a slice of seal meat and gave it to his wife, and

he gave another one to his young child. The child ate it, but it did not chew it, and swallowed it at one gulp. The piece of seal choked the child. It almost died, because the seal meat was choking it. The child's mother put her hand into its mouth, trying to pull out the piece of seal, but she could not reach it. Her hand was too short. Then she cried. Now the chief's wife rose and went to the crying woman. She asked her, "Why do you cry?"

The slave's wife replied, "My child is choking. We do not know what is obstructing its breath."

Then the chieftainess put her hand into the mouth of the child. Her fingers were long. Her hand reached down, and she felt the slice of seal. Then she took it out. She knew what it was. Behold, it was seal meat. Then she told the chief, and he asked, "Where did that come from?"

He saw that it was boiled seal meat, therefore he asked. Then they told him that the old town was full of the meat of trout and salmon and spring salmon and halibut and seals and porpoises and sea lions and whales; that there were four whales, and that the water was covered with grease. They said that the town was full of provisions. Then the chief and the chieftainess and all the princes' uncles could not sleep. One of his uncles had two daughters who were exceedingly pretty.

Early in the morning the chief said, "Order the people to return to the place where we left the prince." He did so on account of the information he had received. Then they arrived, and behold, they saw grease covering the water. Then boards were put across the middle of the canoe, and the children were placed on them. He thought, "My nephew shall marry my daughters."

Many canoes were approaching the land. The prince went out. He did not allow them to land. He took one box out and opened it. He took a bow and arrows out of it and shot at the canoes. He did not desire them to come, because they had deserted him. Therefore he was very angry. But finally the people landed and went up. They made little sheds, and he gave food to his father and mother. He pitied them, therefore he did so. When they were approaching the shore one woman stretched out her hands to eat the grease that she saw on the water. Therefore the prince, the chief's son, was ashamed. He did not marry her, but he married the younger one.

The people went ashore. Then the prince invited them into his house. The people went in and he gave them meat of trout and salmon and spring salmon and halibut and seals and porpoises and sea lions and whales. He gave them to eat. Then his father's people were very glad, and the people gave the prince elk skins and all kinds of goods, canoes, and slaves.

Now the prince came to be a great chief. He had four houses full of elk skins, many slaves, and many canoes. He was a great chief. When his father died, he gave a potlatch. He invited all the people in, and gave away many elk skins and slaves, because his father had been a great chief. After he had given this potlatch his mother died. Then he gave another potlatch. Again he invited all the people, and gave them elk skins and slaves and canoes. He became a great chief, because he fed the eagles, and the eagles had pitied him. Therefore he became a great chief. His name was Little-Eagle.

SHE-WHO-HAS-A-LABRET-ON-ONE-SIDE

(Told by Moses)

There was a town. There was a chief and a chieftainess. They had a son. He was almost grown up. He had four friends, who were always near him. They were playing all the time. Once upon a time one of them went out of the house. He saw a little slave girl coming along the street. She entered the last house of the town. There she sat down near the fire. Then the wife of the owner rose, took the back of a salmon, and gave it to the little slave girl, but she did not accept it. The little slave girl rose and left the house. She entered another house, and again sat down near the fire. The wife of the owner rose and gave her the backs of salmon to eat, but she did not accept them. She left the house. She did so in every house.

The friends of the chief's son who had gone out re-entered and said to the prince, "A little slave girl is coming along the street." Then his friends spoke: "Why don't you marry her when she comes in here?"

When she came near the chief's house, they took a mat and spread it in the rear of the house. The prince sat down on it. Then the little slave girl entered. Her head was very large. She was not at all clean.

One of the prince's friends said, "Sit down over here." Then the little slave girl walked to the rear of the house and sat down by the side of the prince. His friends started a large fire. Her hands, her feet, and her whole body were covered with scabs. The prince's friends saw it. Then the chieftainess rose. She took some dry salmon, roasted it at the fire, and when she was done she broke it to pieces and put it into a dish, which she placed before the boy and the little slave girl. Then they ate.

When the dish was empty, one of the friends stepped up to them, intending to take the dish. Then the little slave girl took one large scab from her body and put it into the dish. She said, "Place it in front of the chief."

One of the men did so. The great chief looked at it. Behold, it was a large abalone shell. Then the chief was very glad.

The chieftainess took another dish, and she put into it crab apples mixed with grease. Another man placed it in front of the prince and the little slave girl. (In olden times the people used to call this [ceremony taking a] "slave wife".) When they had eaten, she took off another scab, and, behold, there was a large abalone shell. That is what was on her body. She placed it in the dish, and then she said, "Place it before the chieftainess."

A man did so. Then the chief and the chieftainess and the prince were very glad when they knew that she was not a slave, as the prince's friend had said.

Now they finished eating. In the evening a woman came to the house and pushed aside the door. She stood in the doorway and said, "Did not She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side enter this house?"

One of the prince's friends said, "Come in, come in! She has married the chief's son."

The woman replied, "Indeed, my dear, then take good care of her." Thus said the woman who was standing in the doorway. She continued, "My people will come to visit the chief's son to give food to him. They will bring much food – boxes of grease,

boxes of crab apples mixed with grease, boxes of cranberries, soapberries, and dried meat, and much fat.”

It grew dark. Early the next morning there was a fog on the river. Then many canoes that were full of boxes approached. One canoe was full of boxes of crab apples, one was full of berries, another one was full of soapberries, another one full of meat, still another one full of fat, and two canoes were full of elk skins, marten skins, and copper plates. They put them into the house of the chief, which was entirely filled by the goods. Then the chief and the chieftainess were very glad.

Now the prince was a great chief. The name of She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side's mother was Evening Sky. She was a supernatural being. Nobody could see her. Her people lived far away from all other people on the other side. They were not Indians; therefore, they had much wealth and much food.

Now the prince invited the people in. Then they came, and his father's house was filled with them. Crab apples and grease were given to eat, and various berries and meat and fat. When they finished eating, they brought out soapberries. After the feast, on the next day, the people were again invited in. Then the prince put into the middle of the house elk skins, copper plates, slaves, and canoes, which he was going to use in the potlatch. He distributed them among the people. After he had finished, the people went back and returned to their own towns. He did so for many days. He gave many potlatches. Then he came to be a great chief. Then he married again. He had two wives. (In former times they called this [having] “one wife on each side”.)

Then the prince started in his canoe to visit the town of the Chilkat. The elks came from this place. The inlanders kill them. The prince intended to buy elk skins for copper plates and seal meat. Now he arrived at Chilkat. Then he bought elk skins, and he took another wife.

Now She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side was left behind. The prince had a brother who was very awkward. The prince went to Chilkat very often. Then She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side said to the awkward man, “You shall go to Chilkat, too.”

The awkward man answered, “I have nothing to sell.”

Then She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side said, “I will give you something that you may sell there. Take red paint along.” Thus spoke She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side to the awkward man. “You shall buy weasel skins for the little box full of red paint, but don't let your brother see it when you arrive there. When you arrive at Chilkat, walk about, and when you see the young women, then put your finger into the red paint and put it on their faces.”

He did so. When all the young men and the young women saw it, they were anxious to buy it, and they asked him, “Is it expensive?” And they asked the great awkward man, “What do you want in exchange?”

He replied, “I want weasels.”

Then the men and the women brought weasel skins, and the awkward man bought them. He had a whole box full of weasel skins. Then he had sold all his red paint.

When the prince saw him, he made fun of his own brother. Then they returned and arrived at their own town.

In the evening She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side questioned the awkward man, her brother-in-law, and he showed her what he had purchased.

Early the next morning She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side said to the awkward man, “Go to the place where the water runs down. I shall go to meet you there.”

She intended to leave her husband, because he did not take her along when he went to Chilkat. Therefore she was ashamed. She took the awkward man and washed him in order to purify him. Then she intended to marry him. She was going to leave the prince who had first married her.

Then the awkward man went out, as She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side had told him. He went to the place where the water was running down, and he stayed in the water for a long time. Then She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side came. There were four deep water holes in the creek. She washed him in the first hole, then in the second one, in the third one, and in the fourth one. Then his skin was very clean, and he became a beautiful man.

After he was purified, he married She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side. Then her mother, the Evening Sky, came again, bringing many elks, copper plates, canoes, slaves, and much food. Then the great awkward man invited all the tribes, intending to give a potlatch. Then he did so. Then the former husband of She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side was ashamed because the awkward man was going to give a potlatch. He was no longer awkward, because he had been purified, because She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side had washed him.

Now the tribes came. Then they ate all the food. The days after they finished eating, all the tribes went into his house. They put the elks, the copper plates, slaves, and canoes in the middle of the house. Then the great awkward man, the husband of She-who-has-a-labret-on-one-side, came. He wore a blanket made of weasel skins set with abalone shells. He used a weasel hat. Then he entered and stood in front of the elk skins. Then they sang. After they had finished singing, they stopped, and he gave away abalone shells, copper plates, elks, slaves, and canoes. Then the tribes were glad, and the awkward man became a great chief.

“The Gambier boulder”⁴³ (1902)

Near by the village of Stapas (Gambier Island, Howe Sound) stands a large isolated boulder. This rock a very long time ago, the old Indians believe, was a big potlatch-house, owned by Mink⁴⁴ and his sister Skunk⁴⁵. It was transformed into a huge boulder after the occurrences of the events in the following story.

One day Kaiq (Mink) called his sister Smemetsen (Skunk) to him and bade her store up all her tsu’som – the offensive yellow fluid which the skunk secretes for its defense against its enemies – in a number of boxes. Smemetsen did as she was

⁴³ From Hill-Tout, C. (1902, July 11). The Gambier Boulder. *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 6. Written by Charles Hill-Tout (1858 – 1944) from material obtained in his anthropological research.

⁴⁴ *Putorius (Lutreola) vison* [Note in the original.]

⁴⁵ *Mephitis mephitica* [Note in the original.]

instructed, and filled several boxes with the pungent fluid. These Kaiq fastened down in an air-tight manner, and stored them in a pile in one corner of the house.

After this he sent out invitations to all the animals and birds and fish of the district to come to a big potlatch he was going to hold. On the day appointed the guests gathered in Kaiq's potlatch-house. The building was big enough to hold them all easily, but unfortunately for the Whale, the doorway was too narrow to get through.

Kaiq, prepared for this dilemma, requested him to put his head and shoulders in, and remain in that position. With some difficulty the Whale complied with Kaiq's request, and jammed himself in so tight that later, when he wished to retire, he was unable to do so.

Now, the Mink was on very bad terms with his neighbors the Wolves – indeed, he mortally hated the whole Wolf family, and had actually killed one of them a few days before the feast. He now takes the tail of the dead Wolf and winds it round his head like a wreath, and opens the proceedings with a dance.

The song which Kaiq sings as he dances is all about the tsu'som of his sister, Skunk. The visitors presently remark to one another, "What a dreadful song Kaiq is singing." Kaiq, however, continues to sing and dance, making his way gradually round the building towards the corner where the boxes of tsu'som are stocked. When he is close to the boxes Skunk quickly opens them, as she had been previously instructed by Kaiq, and lets the tsu'som escape.

No one suspects the vile purpose the two have in view. They think they are unpacking their blankets and other presents to give them. But presently the pungent, suffocating effluvium fills the whole building, and they realize, too late, what has been done. Unable to get out because of the huge form of the whale blocking the doorway, after many frantic struggles they nearly all succumb to the terrible choking stench, four of them only escaping alive. These are little Louise (Metcin), who crawled into a crack in the building and thus avoided the effects of the effluvium; little Wren (Qit), who escaped through a knot-hole in the side of the building; Cod (Ai'et), who also managed to save his life by throwing himself into the water, and who has had in consequence to live ever since at the bottom of the sea; and Mallard, the duck, who flew up to the roof, and thence out through the smoke-hole, in consequence of which all Mallard ducks since that time always fly skyward when they first rise on the wing.

After this trick of Kaiq and his sister, his tla'anukautu'q [potlatch-house] with all its contents was transformed into a big boulder, and the tail of the whale may be seen, as the old Indians think, to this day stretching out as a lateral projection beyond the center of the rock.

“Kwakiutl Tales”⁴⁶ (1910)

KUNO’SILA

Tradition of the ^εNE’mgēs
(Dictated by ^εNEmō’gwis, 1900)

When Thunderbird came down, he sat on a rock on the beach of the house at Thunderbid-Place.

“What are you doing here?” was said to him.

“I merely desired to come.”

“It would be well if you became a man, that I may be your brother,” was said to him.

“What is it? I am a man,” he said, and opened his Thunderbird mask.

“Welcome! Let us go to your house on the ground at this empty space.”

Then he built a house. Gradually they became more and more, and they came to be many. The name of his clan was The-First-Ones. There are now four clans.

Then he went back to the place he had come from, and he just left his children when they were chiefs. He just told his children again at the last:

“I shall only make a noise sometimes when (it happens wrongly to) [sic.] one of you (dies); and there will also be that kind of noise when one of those dies who will take the place of those who are now born.”

Then those who took his place became men, and they were full-grown men.

Thus Chief-Host came to be a chief. He was a chief after him. (Kunō’sila.)

Then he who took his place just went about visiting northward to the Bella Bella. He went there to get married. Then he obtained at once (the copper [named]) Causing-Destitution; and he came to have the names of the Bella-Bella, NEqa’mx•a and Qēwilemga; and he obtained the large copper at the same time.

Then he sold his copper. He came and sold it to those living at Flat-Place. He came and offered it for sale to the Kwakiutl. Then the owner of the copper was killed. The man who owned the copper was named Wā’xwid. Then he was killed on account of his copper.

He was poled after by the Kwakiutl, and was reached at XudZELĀ’laba^εlas. He took refuge there, carrying along his copper, Causing-Destitution. It was a fathom and a half in size. Then he pushed it into the ground, for he was unwilling that the Kwakiutl should obtain it. Therefore he just hid it in the ground.

Then Wā’xwid was speared. He was speared with a lance with a point, and he was dead. He fell down, and his companions were struck dead. Then they were gone. The width of the chest of the dead chief Wā’xwid was four fathoms. His copper was highly prized. Its price was ten slaves and ten canoes and ten lynx blankets.

Then he was mourned by his tribe. They came and lived at Foundation. It came to be summer, and his tribe were catching salmon – sockeye salmon. The orphans had

⁴⁶ From Boas, F. [Ed.] (1910). *Kwakiutl Tales*. New York: Columbia University Press. Written by Franz Boas (1858 – 1942).

no canoe, and they just walked wherever they went. They walked twice, going to the salmon-trap.

They were of his family who took the place of the dead Wā'xwid. Then his child received the name Wā'xwid, and Wā'xwid married the aunt of the orphans. From time to time Wā'xwid lent his canoe to the orphans to use it. They felt grateful for it. The orphans were grateful to Wā'xwid when they used his canoe. He would give deer for blankets to the orphans, and the orphans were made to go out hunting in a canoe by Wā'xwid.

"Take care," the orphans were told by Wā'xwid, "I was told sometimes by my dead father of the copper hidden in the ground at XudZELĀ'laba^ēlas, this your place where you shall go to."

Then they went. They just took hold of the end of the little harpoon-handles which they used in spearing at the salmon-weir. They just carried what they caught in their hands. Then the orphans went again, and they struck with the butt-ends of their harpoon-handles against the ground. What kind of noise should there be? It sounded like metal.

"Come, slave," said the younger brother, "come, let us look at this, (and see) if it is the thing to which our stepfather refers."

Then they dug, and behold, it was Causing-Destitution. A fathom and a half was the size of the copper. Then they stood it on its edge on the ground, and it stood up large, what they had found. Then they broke off cranberry-bushes to measure with them the size of the copper. They just made a model of it. They did not take it, because they could not carry it. Then the orphans spoke strongly to each other.

"Where shall it go?" said the older one. "Shall it not go to him, our uncle, O^xSEM?"

"What do you mean?" said the younger one. "I do not wish it to go to him."

"How do you feel towards him?" said he [the older one] on his part.

"Let it go to Wā'xwid," said the younger one. "He is the only one who from time to time lends us his little canoe. He is the only one who gives us (things) to wear on our backs, and our aunt is also the only one who gives us to eat."

Thus said the younger one.

"Our uncle is bad. Let us go towards the sea and home," said the older one.

Then they carried between them the model, and the orphans arrived at the house. Wā'xwid was lying on his back. There were only two persons in the house, he and his wife. He suspected them already, because they were very happy, and they looked pleasant, and they were laughing; while before their faces looked downcast whenever they came (home).

Then the orphans went into the room. Their aunt tried to give them to eat, that they might eat after having been away; but they did not eat, for they were proud of their find. Then they called their aunt into the room.

"Come," they said to her, "that we may talk to you about what your husband told us. We come from finding it. Evidently this is it," they said. "We are not willing that it should go to another one than your husband, on account of our feeling."

"Indeed, children," she said on her part, "indeed, that which I refer to is there."

“Let your husband come in.”

“Come, slave,” she said to her husband, “and listen to our masters.”

Then he went in, and the younger brother jumped out and took his model. He came and brought the model of the large measured copper.

“This will go to you,” was said to Wā’xwid by the orphans. “I obtained by luck the copper of your dead father of which you spoke. This copper will be carried on the back in the house by this Means-of-trying-to-obtain-Copper-Woman. She is of the family of Taking-Care-of-Coppers.” Taking-Care-of-Coppers was the name of the older brother.

Then Wā’xwid sang his sacred song. He went on the roof of his house and sang his sacred song. The people asked each other the reason of why he should sing his sacred song. It had been found. The orphans had found Causing-Destitution. Thus said the tribe. Then their uncle O’xSEM felt badly, because it did not go to him. Then canoes, lynx blankets, marmot blankets, blankets sewed together, sea-otters, and mink blankets were given to the orphans. Then the orphans became chiefs. The name of one of them was Taking-Care-of-Coppers. Their stepmother, who was their aunt, was called Means-of-trying-to-obtain-Copper.

Then he was given a canoe. He did not just walk; he traveled by canoe. Then he poled, going to his house at Flat-Place. Then Wā’xwid and O’xSEM hit each other with (sharp) words, on account of the copper. Then they vied with each other for the chief’s place; and Wā’xwid climbed (a tree) on the opposite side from his house, and sat down on top of it.

Then Wā’xwid spoke from the top of the tree.

“Who is our chief, Plants?”

Thus he asked the trees.

Then he was answered, “You are the chief.”

Thus was said to Wā’xwid.

“Not a chief, however, is the one in the next house.”

Thus was said to Wā’xwid.

Then O’xSEM was ashamed, because he was not a chief. Then Wā’xwid invited (people) in, and he gave a potlatch, and he sold his copper Found. Causing-Destitution was named “Found,” and then the copper had two names. It was called Causing-Destitution because there was nothing that was not paid for it. It made the houses empty. Twenty canoes was its price; and twenty slaves was its price; and also ten coppers tied to the end was its price; and twenty lynx-skins, and twenty marmot-skins, and twenty sewed blankets, was its price; and twenty mink blankets, was its price; and one hundred boards was its price; and forty wide planks was its price; and twenty boxes of dried berries added to it, and twenty boxes of clover, and also ten boxes of hemlock-bark, was its price; and forty boxes of grease was its price; and one hundred painted boxes was its price; and two hundred mats was its price; and dried salmon not to be counted was its price; and two hundred cedar blankets was its price; and two hundred dishes was its price. That was the amount of its price. And that was given away by Wā’xwid to the tribes. Then Wā’xwid was chief.

Those were the children who followed Kunoʔsila. Then the child of Wāʔxwid had a son, and he was also a chief. Then, on account of the jealousy (brought down) against him, the ʔNEʔmgēs sat down (and deliberated) who should strike him first. Then his house was attacked by the ʔNEʔmgēs. He was killed, and he was dead. He was robbed of his goods, which were the reason of the deed; of his slaves, his canoes, his salmon-traps, his boxes, his box-covers, of whatever he valued, and of the woman's property, of bracelets, of copper bells and small coppers, and of dentalium bracelets. Then they got possession of his copper.

It went to Oʔmalemēʔ, the chief, who now had the copper. It was obtained by killing. They obtained the salmon-weir and the salmon-trap, and the place of tying up canoes, and the names. This was obtained by killing Chief-Host.

A little child, however, a boy (his son), was alive.

An old man tried to hide the copper, the young brother of the one who was killed and who had owned the copper. He pushed it under his blanket, down his back. Then the copper was searched for. It was not found. Then the old man was taken hold of.

"Tell about the copper, else you will die," he was told.

They were about to strike him.

"I do not know about it," he said on his part.

"Don't deny it," he was told, and he was threatened with a stone dagger, "else you will die." Thus was he told. "Go on, die," was said to him. Thus was he threatened.

"You are a bother," he said. He broke his belt and threw lengthwise the copper. "Take this," he said.

Then the ʔNEʔmgēs left and went home to their village. They had obtained the copper. The past chief lay there dead. Then the ʔNEʔmgēs mourned for their chief, and they felt regret for the loss of their chief. Then the dead chief was put away (buried). For two days he had been lying dead on the rocks. Then the dead chief disappeared.

The child was not able to go about. He was just trying to walk, and he was hidden after the killing. Then the child, the one who had been a little child, grew up. He built a house. He put up a pole on which Kunoʔsila, the one who was his ancestor, was sitting. He held a whale by its tail in his talons.

Then he gave a potlatch to the tribes, and he came to be a chief. Then he was treated as a chief by the ʔNEʔmgēs. Then they repented for what they had done, because they had killed his father. He gave property to all the tribes, and the tribes went home. [...]

NOMASĒʔNXĒLIS (OLDEST-ONE-IN-THE-WORLD)

Tradition of the L!aʔL!asiqwela.

(Recorded by George Hunt.)

Oldest-one-in-the-World and his tribe lived at Red-Sand-Beach; and Oldest-One-in-the-World had for his princess Many-colored-Woman, and the woman was blind. Many-colored-Woman had twelve slaves; and she would always go to ʔNEʔwēʔd, where there is wild rice. For a long time she was in the habit of going there; and a long pole stood outside of the house of Chief Oldest-One-in-the-World, and on top of

the long pole an eagle was sitting; and it screeched all the time whenever Many-colored-Woman went out paddling with her twelve slaves. Thus Many-colored-Woman knew which way they were going, on account of the princess-pole.

One day the sea was very smooth, and Many-colored-Woman asked her slaves to go to ^εNE^εwē'd. The slaves were content. They had been paddling a long time when Many-colored-Woman questioned her slaves, and said:

“O slaves! Why does it take so long before we arrive at ^εNE^εwē'd?”

Thus she said.

One of them spoke, and said, “O mistress! We cannot make any headway against the tide.”

Thus he said.

Then Many-colored-Woman spoke again, and said, “O slaves! What are you doing?”

Thus she said, and took away their paddles and threw them into the water. Then she knew that they were intending to paddle away with their mistress.

Now they were just drifting about on sea. They were overtaken by night, and day came. Then it was foggy, and Many-colored-Woman could not hear her princess-pole. Then they just went to sleep again.

They were again overtaken by night; and in the morning, when daylight came, they heard their canoe, when they were waking, going through something like ice. They looked, and saw that there was much charcoal. Then they found that it was the place named Charcoal-at-North-End-of-World. They went through it, for there was a strong tide. Therefore they went through the charcoal.

Night came again; and in the morning, when day came, one of them heard the canoe again running through something. He raised his head and looked, and he saw sand floating on the sea; and they knew now that they were at the place named Floating-Sands.

That is where the charcoal of all the fireplaces of the houses of the villages goes from all around the world. It drifts to the place named Charcoal-at-North-End-of-World, and the sand that is dry on the surface drifts to Sand-floating-on-the-Sea. There all the driftwood goes that comes from all around our world.

It is said they passed right through it, and again night came. In the morning, when day came again, one of the slaves saw that it was shallow where they were drifting along. Their canoe almost went aground on the sand. They passed over this place; and when evening came, they saw a country far off. It was just as though the land was drawing the canoe towards it. The slaves did not feel like sleeping, because they felt glad on account of the islands that were in sight.

Then they all felt giddy, and they all went to sleep. In the morning, when daylight came, Many-colored-woman wakened her slaves, for she had heard that the canoe was knocking against something like land.

One of the slaves raised his head, and he saw that there was a fine sandy beach, and many houses were there. Then the slave wakened his fellow-slaves; and as soon as they were all awake, they saw a handsome young man coming towards the visitors.

As soon as the man arrived at the side of the canoe, he went straight to the place where Many-colored-Woman was sitting, and he took hold of her hand.

The man asked Many-colored-Woman, "What brought you here, my dear?"

Thus he said.

Many-colored-Woman replied at once, and said, "Oh, my dear! This is what brought me here: I came to have you for my husband, my dear!"

Thus she said to him.

Immediately the handsome man spoke thankfully on account of what Many-colored-Woman had said; and the man said, "Let us go up from the beach to my house."

Thus he said to her.

Then they went up from the beach, and Many-colored-Woman held the hand of the man. Now the wise one among the slaves spoke to the handsome man.

He said, "Oh, my dear! Take good care of this woman. She is the princess of Oldest-One-in-the-World. She is blind."

Thus he said to him.

Immediately they went up from the beach and entered through the snapping door of the house. As soon as they had gone in, the handsome man spoke, and said to Many-colored-Woman, "Welcome, my dear! Go and bathe in the pond of water of life in the house."

Thus he said.

Immediately Many-colored-Woman spoke gratefully on account of what he had said. She came to the corner of the large house, and the man asked Many-colored-Woman to take off her blanket. Many-colored-Woman took off her blanket and her apron, and the man took her on his arms and made her sit down in the water of life.

Then the man said, "Oh, my dear! Now dive. Dive four times."

Thus he said.

Immediately Many-colored-Woman dived; and as soon as she came up again, she was able to see our daylight. She dived again, and she continued to dive until she had done so four times. As soon as she had finished, she was a young woman, and she was no longer blind. Immediately Many-colored-Woman was called out of the water by her husband. Then Many-colored-Woman was able to see everything in the house. It is said that the two posts in the rear of the house were thunderbirds, and sea-bears were under the two thunderbirds; and it is said the cross-piece over the thunderbird posts was a sea-lion, and the posts on each side of the door of the house were each one sea-lion, and the cross-piece of the post was one sea-lion; and she also saw a carved figure standing at the right-hand side of the door of the house.

As soon as the slaves of Many-colored-Woman came in, the carved figure spoke, and said, "Oh chief, Abalone-Shell-of-the-World! O chief! Treat those well who come into your house, chief." (This is the in-dwelling power of Chief Wealthy.)

Then she saw many feast-dishes – four seal dishes and the same number of killer-whale dishes, and four whale dishes, and four sea-otter dishes.

Now, Abalone-Shell-of-the-World and Many-colored-Woman were living as husband and wife. They had not been married long when Many-colored-Woman was

with child, and she gave birth to a small boy. Abalone-Shell-of-the-World at once named his son Copper-Maker.

Many-colored-Woman did not know who the old man was who was always lying in the rear of the large house. She asked her husband, and said, "Who is that ugly old man lying in the rear of the house?"

Thus Many-colored-Woman said to her husband.

Abalone-Shell-of-the-World laughed, and said, "Oh, my dear! That is Wealthiest, Copper-Maker. He is my father."

Thus he said to her.

Then Many-colored-Woman was happy, because she knew that her husband was an important person.

Then she was again with child, and it was not long before she gave birth to a little boy. Abalone-Shell-of-the-World at once named his son Seaside-of-the-World. Then Many-colored-Woman was very glad on account of her two children; and it was not long before she was again with child, and she gave birth to a little boy; and Abalone-Shell-of-the-World gave one of his own names to his son. Then he had the name Copper-Surface. Now she had three children.

Now, Many-colored-Woman had forgotten her parents on account of her children. After a long time she was again with child, and she gave birth to a boy, and she called her son Place-of-Desire. A long time passed, and the four children of Many-colored-Woman grew up.

One day the four children were left alone, because she had gone out to dig clams. The four boys played, and Place-of-Desire fell down where Copper-Maker was lying on his back. Then Copper-Maker became angry at Place-of-Desire, and he said, "Oh children! Go away. The reason why you came here is not known, children."

Thus said Copper-Maker to his grandchildren.

At once the eldest of the brothers spoke and said to his younger brothers, "Don't play. The word that the old man said to us is important."

Thus he said, and they went out of the house.

As soon as Many-colored-Woman came home, the eldest one called his mother out of the house.

He said, "O mother! How did you come into this country?"

Thus he said to her.

At once Many-colored-Woman replied to their words, and said, "O children! My slaves paddled away with me, and I was carried by the tide to this place where we are now."

Thus she said.

The children said at once that they would go to see their grandfather; and Many-colored-Woman advised her children, and said to them, "O sons! The name of my father is Oldest-One-in-the-World, and the long pole with an eagle sitting on top of it stands outside his house. The eagle screeches all the time;" and she told them about the shallow water, and the floating sand on the sea, and the drifting logs floating on the sea, and the Charcoal-at-North-End-of-World. (She continued,) "These you will meet if you are minded to go to see your grandfather."

The eldest son spoke at once, and said to his mother, "We will escape, for I do not want our father to know it. We will only say that we will go to see the world."

The children got ready at once. They took the old canoe and caulked it; and as soon as the old canoe was finished, they got ready; and Abalone-Shell-of-the-World questioned his sons, and said, "Oh sons! What are you getting ready for?"

Thus he said to them.

The oldest one spoke, and said, "Oh, we are getting ready for this; we want to go and see the world."

Thus he said.

Then Abalone-Shell-of-the-World just laughed, and said, "My sons, don't conceal your wishes; just tell me that you are going to see your grandfather, Oldest-One-in-the-World. You shall use the self-paddling canoe."

Thus he said to them.

Then he – namely, Abalone-Shell-of-the-World – took the four baskets, and put into them all kinds of things, and he put them aboard the self-paddling canoe. Then he told Many-colored-Woman that she should also come aboard; but she was unwilling, and she just sent her children (and told them) to go and just leave her.

They started at once, and they steered towards the sun. Then they met what Many-colored-Woman had referred to – what had been seen by her at the places where she had been paddling. Three days after they had left their father, they heard an eagle screeching. Then the four sons of Many-colored-Woman felt glad.

It was evening when they arrived at Red-Sand-Beach, and they went in their canoes right to the beach of the large house in front of which a pole was standing, on top of which the eagle was sitting. At once Place-of-Desire was sent by his elder brothers.

Place-of-Desire at once went to look at the large house. There was no one sitting in the house. Then he went to look at a small house. There he saw two old people, husband and wife.

Place-of-Desire questioned the man, and said, "Oh, my dear! Where is Oldest-One-in-the-World?"

Thus he said.

Place-of-Desire said at once, "O old man! We are the children of Many-colored-Woman, your princess."

Thus he said.

The old man at once became angry on account of the word of Place-of-Desire; and he said, "Oh, what is your word? Why do you come and make fun of my princess?"

Thus he said, while he was beginning to strike Place-of-Desire with the tongs. Then he drove him away.

Then Place-of-Desire went down to the beach, and told his elder brothers. As soon as Place-of-Desire had gone out of the house, the wife of Oldest-One-in-the-World spoke, and said, "Oh, my dear! Don't be inconsiderate (in your mind). Do look at him, if he should come again who came in before. It might be true that he came from our daughter, Many-colored-Woman."

Thus she said to him.

As soon as she had finished speaking, the four children of Many-colored-Woman came in. Immediately, Oldest-One-in-the-World spread out a mat, and the four young men went there and sat down on it. Then Oldest-One-in-the-World split some boards.

At once it was heard by his tribe, and they came immediately to discover why Oldest-One-in-the-World was splitting wood. Then the tribe saw the four children of Many-colored-Woman sitting there.

Oldest-One-in-the-World spoke, and praised his children. Then Oldest-One-in-the-World asked them to build a fire in his large house. The young men went at once and built a fire in the middle of it; and as soon as the fire in the large house began to burn, the tribe went in, and also the four children of Many-colored-Woman went into it.

When the tribe had gone into the house, the oldest of the four young men said to the tribe of his grandfather that they should go and bring the four baskets out of the canoe. At once they went, but in vain. It was not long before they came back. They were not able to lift them.

Then Place-of-Desire was just sent by his elder brothers to go and bring the four baskets. It was not long before he came, carrying, the four baskets. Immediately they opened out what was contained in them, and the house was almost filled⁴⁷ with all kinds of property.

The eldest of the brothers, Copper-Maker, spoke at once, and said, "O old man! This is sent to you by Many-colored-Woman. This is what is piled up here in the house, that you may invite with it your tribe."

Thus he said.

Then, on account of this, they all believed that they were the sons of Many-colored-Woman; and it is said that Oldest-one-in-the-World was the first one to give a potlatch. Then he gave a feast with the food that was sent to him by Many-colored-Woman; and then he came and showed the large house, and the carvings, and the four seal dishes, and the killer-whale dishes, and the others.

And this was first given by Copper-Maker; and Seaside-of-the-World came next, and after that came Copper-Surface, and then the youngest one, Place-of-Desire; and then Oldest-One-in-the-World distributed coppers among his tribe, and he was the first who handed down coppers.

The four sons of Many-colored-Woman never went back, and Many-colored-Woman never came back to her country.

Some say that Many-colored-Woman did come back, and that the self-paddling copper canoe came back, and that it stayed in our country.

That is the end. [...]

⁴⁷ Boas inserts a [not] editorially at this point, but this makes little sense given the rest of the sentence and the story's implications of abundance.

MĀ'LELEQALA
Tradition of the Mālēleqala.
(Told by Lābid, a Ma'mālēleqala.)

Mā'lēleqala knew that Q!ā'nēqēlak^u was coming south after having left his brother ʔnemō'gwis, and that he was transforming the world. He also knew that the Deluge, which was sent by the Chief in Heaven, was coming, and that people were preparing for it.

Mā'lēleqala's house was on the island T!ōx^uSEXLalak^u, opposite Fort Rupert. He put down large trees like the logs of a log cabin, and caulked the openings with clay. When the Deluge came, it covered his house, but he remained inside without being hurt. When he thought that the Deluge had subsided, he and his younger brothers, Hā'nal!ēnox^u and GāLEmaxs^oala, went out, and they found the country was dry again. They saw much driftwood, and people were lying on it, holding on to it. Then GāLEmaxs^oala took a long hook and pulled the logs ashore. They became their tribe. Hā'nal!ēnox^u had bow and arrows. He put a string at the bow end of his arrows and shot at the drifting logs. Then he pulled them ashore. For this reason the members of the Hā'nal!ēnox^u clan show a bow and arrow at their festivals.

Mā'lēleqala wished to travel, but he had no canoe. He felled a cedar-tree and burned it out inside. At the same time he placed stones on each side, so that the fire should not burn through the sides of the wood. Thus he continued until he had made a serviceable canoe.

Then he started looking for a place in which to build his house. He came to Fort Rupert (Tsa'xis). There he built a house at lālek!uxla. A shell-heap may be seen at this place.⁴⁸ His brothers accompanied him.

Now they were waiting for Q!ā'nēqēlak^u to come.

One day when they were out in their canoe, they were met by another canoe. A man was aboard. When he came near, he asked, "What are you doing here?"

Mā'lēleqala replied, "What do you mean? Do you mean my canoe that is on the water, or do you mean the red cedar-bark on my head?"

Q!ā'nēqēlak^u replied, "I mean the cedar-bark on your head. I like it."

Mā'lēleqala was not quite sure whether it was Q!ā'nēqēlak^u who had come.

Then Q!ā'nēqēlak^u continued, "You and all your descendants shall be the first to receive red cedar-bark in the winter ceremonial."

Q!ā'nēqēlak^u went on. He had just come from Gwa'dzē^e, where he had put the people to rights. As soon as Q!ā'nēqēlak^u had left, Mā'lēleqala called his tribe in the evening, and he told them of what had happened. For this reason a meeting is always held before the winter-dance, in which the plans for the ceremonial are discussed.

Late at night the supernatural power appeared, singing like a bird. Then they prepared for the dance of Mā'lēleqala's daughters, whose names were Q!wāq!wALEmg • ilayūgwa and Wilx • stasīlayūgwa. They made torches and assembled

⁴⁸ It is about half a mile west of Fort Rupert. [Note in the original.]

in front of the houses. The people carried large planks, on which the girls were dancing one after the other. The people sang. [...] ⁴⁹

The people raised the torches high up while they were singing; but when they did not close their song with the burden “awāya,” the two girls disappeared one after the other, and their father said that they had been taken away by the supernatural power. They stayed away for a long time, and for this reason the novices continue to do so at present. (The people really hide the dancers, so that the uninitiated may think that they have been taken away by the spirit, but they always stay in the house where they are in hiding.)

One day the two girls went out. They saw something dark in the air. They did not know what it was. When it approached, they saw that it was a large bird which carried something in its talons. When it came still nearer, they saw that it was the thunderbird carrying the double-headed serpent (sīsiuL). The bird dropped it near the girls’ and when the double-headed serpent touched the ground, it became a salmon. It was quite small.

Q!wāq!walemg•ilayūgwa went to pick it up, but as soon as she came near it, it disappeared. Then Mā’lēleqala took a piece of wood, and went into his room, where he carved an image of his daughter, which he intended to take her place.

While he was engaged in this work, the daughter of the lost woman climbed to the roof of the house and pulled one of the boards aside. Thus she was able to look into her grandfather’s room, where she saw the image, which looked just like her mother.

Her grandfather called her, and said, “Yes, it is your mother. Come and look at her.”

The girl came down from the roof, went into her grandfather’s room, and the old man strangled her because she had seen what he was doing. He wrapped her up in skin, and made a hole under the fireplace, where he buried her. For this reason the preparations for the winter ceremonial are still kept secret, and whoever sees the secrets without permission is killed.

In the evening began the winter-dance (kwē’xala). The people took their boxes and carried them into the house for their chief. There they sat down quietly. Then a speaker arose and called Hā’nal!ēnox^u to go and take the boxes. He took one of them up, went around the fire, and put it down behind the fire. Then there began to be a noise in the house, and the people sang:

“The great one is going to be Thrower with her throwing-stick. This great Yā’lag•ilīs. Hâ.” [...]

After they had finished singing the song, they beat time, and various dancers came in one after another – the Thunderbird, the Grizzly Bear, the Dzo’noq!wa, the Raven, the Foold-Dancer, the Sea-Monster dancer [...], the Hoḡ^uhok^u, and the Wasp Dancer. Everyone performed his dance and uttered his cries.

After this the people sang the following song:

“Ah, great one, this great Yā’lag•ilīs, great Winā’lag•ilīs; great one who will take up with his hands. Ā hā’yâhânō. Wonderful power of madness. That is the way

⁴⁹ I’ve omitted song lyrics untranslated in the original.

your father did, madness. Almost discernible is the means by which yours would have caused to go, with which yours would have hung (??). This, because I really said ghost (= nearby), bring close by, sitting on fire (= ghost), trembling with hands in dance (= ghost dancer).” [...]

On the fourth night they beat time again to bring back the women who had disappeared. The old man, who would not let the people know what had happened, because he was ashamed, first showed the face of the carving he had made, pretending that it was his daughter. He had hidden some people behind the house, who imitated his daughter’s voice and the voices of the spirits. Then a large board was let down from the roof, on which the figure was seated. It seemed to move about like a living person. The younger sister came back safely when the performance of bringing back the novice was held. During this ceremony the figure was shown again and disappeared again; and the people said that the woman had gone back with the spirits, and that she would never return.

It is said that this whole performance was made in accordance with the advice of Q!ā’nēq^εēlak^u. Therefore the winter ceremonial is performed in this manner.

Now, Mā’lēleqala resolved to leave the place where he had lost his daughter. He went to Pā’tawē, just east of Fort Rupert. There he built a large, strong house and gave a festival to all the tribes, among whom he distributed qō’xqowis (a bush with cotton-like tips) and pearl shells (k•ōgwîs). Here his family increased.

One day his children were playing in a cave on the beach, at which high water is under water. The children had put down mats, and were imitating the work of their mothers, when the tide rose and cut off their retreat.

Mā’lēleqala heard them crying, but was unable to save them, and they were drowned. While there, he found a stick with a copper attached to it, which had drifted ashore with the tide.

He made a copper place out of it, sold it, and gave a great potlatch. This was the first potlatch. Great-Smoke-Face (^εwā’las Kwa’x•ilanōkumē^ε) was the son of Mā’lēleqala. Once he put a copper plate down at the place where the people were in the habit of drawing water, so that the first person to draw water in the morning should find it. He was very wealthy. His descendants [include] [...] lābid or Kwa’x•ilanōkumēdzē, who told this story.

Tekanhionwake's "The Potlatch"⁵⁰ (1913)

"Potlatch" is a Chinook word meaning "a gift." Among the Indian tribes of British Columbia it is used as the accepted name of a great feast, which some Indian, who is exceedingly well off, gives to scores of guests. He entertains them for days, sometimes for weeks, together, presenting them with innumerable blankets and much money, for it is part of the Indian code of honor that, when one has great possessions, he must divide them with his less fortunate tribesmen. The gifts of money usually take the form of ten-dollar bank notes, and are bestowed broadcast upon any man, woman or child who pleases the host by either dancing the tribal dances very beautifully, or else originates an attractive dance of their own.

Young Ta-la-pus sat on the highest point of rock that lifted itself on the coast at the edge of his father's Reserve. At his feet stretched the Straits of Georgia, and far across the mists of the salt Pacific waters he watched the sun rise seemingly out of the mainland that someone had told him stretched eastward thousands of miles, where another ocean, called the Atlantic, washed its far-off-shore, for Ta-la-pus lived on Vancouver Island, and all his little life had been spent in wishing and longing to set his small, moccasined feet on that vast mainland that the old men talked of, and the young men visited year in and year out. But never yet had he been taken across the wide, blue Straits, for he was only eleven years old, and he had two very big brothers who always accompanied their father, old chief Mowitch, on his journeyings, for they were good fishermen, and could help in the salmon catch, and bring good *chicamin* (money) home to buy supplies for the winter.

Sometimes these big brothers would tease him and say, "What can you expect? Your name is Ta-la-pus, which means a prairie wolf. What has a prairie wolf to do with crossing great waters? He cannot swim as some other animals can. Our parents gave us better names, 'Chetwoot,' the bear, who swims well, and 'Lapool,' the water fowl, whose home is on the waters, whose feet are webbed, and who floats even while he sleeps. No, our young brother, Ta-la-pus, the prairie wolf, was never meant to cross the great salt Straits."

The little Ta-la-pus would creep away to his lonely rock, trying to still the ache in his heart, and forcing back tears from his eyes. Prairie wolves must not cry like little girl babies – and sometimes when his heart was sorest, a clear, dazzlingly bright day would dawn, and far, far off he could see the blur of the mainland coast, resting on the sea like an enormous island. Then he would tell himself that, no matter what his name was, some day he would cross to that great, far country, whose snow-crowned mountain peaks he could just see merging into the distant clouds.

Then, late in the summer, there came one marvelous night, when his father and brother returned from the sockeye salmon fishing, with news that set the entire Indian village talking far into the early morning. A great Squamish chief on the

⁵⁰ From Tekanhionwake (as E. Pauline Johnson). (1913). *The Shagganappi*. Toronto: Ryerson Press. Written by Tekanhionwake, alias E. Pauline Johnson (1861 – 1913).

mainland was going to give a potlatch. He had been preparing for it for weeks. He had enjoyed a very fortunate fishing season, was a generous-hearted man, and was prepared to spend ten thousand dollars⁵¹ in gifts and entertainment for his friends and all the poor of the various neighboring tribes.

Chief Mowitch and all his family were invited, and great rejoicing and anticipation were enjoyed over their salmon suppers that night.

“You and the boys go,” said his wife. “Perhaps you will be lucky and bring home *chicamin* and blankets. The old men say the winter will be cold. Grey geese were going south yesterday, three weeks earlier than last year. Yes, we will need blankets when the *ollalies* (berries) are ripe in October. I shall stay at home, until the babies are older. Yes, you and the boys go.”

“Yes,” responded the chief. “It would never do for us to miss a great Squamish potlatch. We must go.”

Then the elder son, Chet-woot, spoke joyously:

“And, mama,⁵² we may bring back great riches, and even if the cold does come while we are away, our little brother, Ta-la-pus, will care for you and the babies. He’ll carry water and bring all the wood for your warmth.”

The father looked smilingly at Ta-la-pus, but the boy’s eyes, great and dark, and hungry for the far mainland, for the great feasts he had heard so much of, were fastened in begging, pleading seriousness on his father’s face. Suddenly a whim seized the old chief’s fancy.

“Ta-la-pus,” he said, “you look as if you would like to go, too. Do you want to take part in the potlatch?”

Instantly Chet-woot objected.

“Papa, he could never go, he’s too young. They may ask him to dance for them. He can’t dance. Then perhaps they would never ask us.”

The chief scowled. He was ruler in his own lodge, and allowed no interference from anyone.

“Besides,” continued Chet-woot, “there would be no one to fetch wood for mama and the babies.”

“Yes, there would be someone,” said the chief, his eyes snapping fiercely. “*You* would be here to help your mama.”

“I?” exclaimed the young man. “But how can I, when I shall be at the potlatch? I go to *all* the potlatches.”

“So much more reason that you stay home this once and care for your mama and baby sisters, and you *shall* stay. Lapool and little Ta-la-pus will go with me. It is time the boy saw something of the other tribes. Yes, I’ll take Lapool and Ta-la-pus, and there is no change to my word when it is once spoken.”

Chet-woot sat like one stunned, but an Indian knows better than to argue with his father. The great, dark eyes of little Ta-la-pus glowed like embers of fire; his young

⁵¹ Fact. This amount has frequently been given away. [Note in the original.]

⁵² The Chinook for father and mother is “papa” and “mama,” adopted from the English language. [Note in the original.]

heart leaped joyously. At last, at last, he was free to set foot in the country of his dreams – the far, blue, mountain-circled mainland.

All that week his mother worked day and night on a fine new native costume for him to wear on the great occasion. There were trousers of buckskin fringed down on each side, a shirt of buckskin, beaded and beautified by shell ornaments, a necklace of the bones of a rare fish, strung together like little beads on deer sinew, earrings of pink and green pearl from the inner part of the shells of a bivalve, neat moccasins, and solid silver, carven bracelets.

She was working on a headdress consisting of a single red fox-tail and eagle feathers, when he came and stood beside her.

“Mama,” he said, “there is a prairie wolf skin you cover the babies with while they sleep. Would you let me have it this once, if they would not be cold without it?”

“They will never be cold,” she smiled, “for I can use an extra blanket over them. I only use it because I started to when you were the only baby I had, and it was your name, so I covered you with it at night.”

“And I want to cover myself with it now,” he explained, “its head as my headdress, its front paws about my neck, its thick fur and tail trailing behind me as I dance.”

“So you are going to dance, my little Ta-la-pus?” she answered proudly. “But how is that, when you do not yet know our great tribal dances?”

“I have made one of my own, and a song, too,” he said, shyly.

She caught him to her, smoothing the hair back from his dark forehead.

“That is right,” she half whispered, for she felt she did not want anyone but herself to know his boyish secret. “Always make things for yourself; don’t depend on others, try what you can do alone. Yes, you may take the skin of the prairie wolf. I will give it to you for all time- it is yours.”

That night his father also laid in his hands a gift. It was a soft, pliable belt, woven of the white, peeled roots of the cedar, dyed brilliantly, and worked into a magnificent design.

“Your great-grandmother made it,” said the chief. “Wear it on your first journey into the larger world than this island, and do nothing in all your life that would make her regret, were she alive, to see it round your waist.”

So little Ta-la-pus set forth with his father and brother, well equipped for the great potlatch, and the meeting of many from half a score of tribes.

They crossed the Straits on a white man’s steamer, a wonderful sight to Ta-la-pus, who had never been aboard any larger boat than his father’s fishing smack and their own high-bowed, gracefully-curved canoe. In and out among the islands of the great gulf the steamer wound, bringing them nearer, ever nearer to the mainland. Misty and shadowy, Vancouver Island dropped astern, until at last they steamed into harbor, where a crowd of happy-faced Squamish Indians greeted them, stowed them away in canoes, paddled a bit up-coast, then sighted the great, glancing fires that were lighting up the grey of oncoming night – fires of celebration and welcome to all the scores of guests who were to partake of thee lavish hospitality of the great Squamish chief.

As he stepped from the great canoe, Ta-la-pus thought he felt a strange thrill pass through the soles of his feet. They had touched the mainland of the vast continent of North America for the first time; his feet seemed to become sensitive, soft, furry, cushioned like those of a wild animal. Then, all at once, a strange inspiration seized him. Why not try to make his footsteps "pad" like the noiseless paws of a prairie wolf? "pad" in the little dance he had invented, instead of "shuffling" in his moccasins, as all the grown men did? He made up his mind that when he was alone in his tent he would practice it, but just now the great Squamish chief was coming towards them with outstretched greeting hands, and presently he was patting little Ta-la-pus on the shoulder, and saying, "Oh, ho, my good tillicum Mowitch, I am glad you have brought this boy. I have a son of the same size. They will play together, and perhaps this tenas tyee (little chief) will dance for me some night."

"My brother does not dance our tribal dances," began Lapool, but Ta-la-pus spoke up bravely.

"Thank you, O Great Tyee (Chief), I shall dance when you ask me."

His father and brother both stared at him in amazement. Then Chief Mowitch laughed, and said, "If he says he will dance, he will do it. He never promises what he cannot do, but I did not know he could do the steps. Ah! he is a little *hoolol* (mouse) this boy of mine; he keeps very quiet, and does not boast what he can do."

Little Ta-la-pus was wonderfully encouraged by his father's notice of him and his words of praise. Never before had he seemed so close to manhood, for, being the youngest boy of the family, he had but little companionship with any at home except his mother and the little sisters that now seemed so far behind him in their island home.

All that evening the old chiefs and the stalwart young [Indians] were gravely shaking hands with his father, his brother Lapool, and himself, welcoming them to the great festival and saying pleasant things about peace and brotherhood prevailing between the various tribes, instead of war and bloodshed, as in the olden times. It was late when the great supper of boiled salmon was over, and the immense bonfires began to blaze on the shores where the falling tides of the Pacific left the beaches dry and pebbly.

The young men stretched themselves on the cool sands, and the old men lighted their peace pipes, and talked of the days when they hunted the mountain sheep and black bear on these very heights overlooking the sea. Ta-la-pus listened to everything. He could learn so much from the older men, and hour by hour he gained confidence. No more he thought of his dance with fear and shyness, for all these people were kindly and hospitable even to a boy of eleven.

At midnight there was another feast, this time of clams, and luscious crabs, with much steaming black tea. Then came the great Squamish chief, saying more welcoming words, and inviting his guests to begin their tribal dances.

Ta-la-pus never forgot the brilliant sight that he looked on for the next few hours. Scores of young men and women went through the most graceful figures of beautiful dances, their shell ornaments jingling merrily in perfect time to each twist and turn of their bodies. The wild music from the beat of Indian drums and shell

“rattles” arose weirdly, half sadly, drifting up the mountain heights, until it lost itself in the timber line of giant firs that crested the summits. The red blaze from the campfires flitted and flickered across the supple figures that circled around, in and out between the three hundred canoes beached on the sands, and the smoke-tipped tents and log lodges beyond the reach of tide water. Above it all a million stars shone down from the cloudless heavens of a perfect British Columbian night. After a while Ta-la-pus fell asleep, and when he awoke, dawn was just breaking. Someone had covered him with a beautiful, white, new blanket, and as his young eyes opened, they looked straight into the kindly face of the great Squamish chief.

“We are all weary, ‘tenas tyee’ (little chief),” he said. “The dancers are tired, and we shall all sleep until the sun reaches midday, but my guests cry for one more dance before sunrise. Will you dance for us, oh, little Ta-la-pus?”

The boy sprang up, every muscle and sinew and nerve on the alert. The moment of his triumph or failure had come.

"You have made me, even a boy like me, very welcome, O Great Tyee," he said, standing erect as an arrow, with his slender, dark chin raised manfully. "I have eaten of your *kloshe muck-a-muck* (very good food), and it has made my heart and my feet very *skookum* (strong). I shall do my best to dance and please you."

The boy was already dressed in the brilliant buckskin costume his mother had spent so many hours in making, and his precious wolfskin was flung over his arm. The great Squamish chief now took him by the hand and led him towards the blazing fires round which the tired dancers, the old men and women, sat in huge circles where the chill of dawn could not penetrate.

“One more dance, then we sleep,” said the chief to the great circle of spectators. “This tenas tyee will do his best to amuse us.”

Then Ta-la-pus felt the chief’s hand unclasp, and he realized that he was standing absolutely alone before a great crowd of strangers, and that every eye was upon him.

“Oh, my brother,” he whispered, smoothing the prairie wolf skin, “help me to be like you, help me to be worthy of your name.”

Then he pulled the wolf’s head over his own, twisted the fore legs about his throat, and stepped into the great circle of sand between the crouching multitude and the fires.

Stealthily he began to pick his way in the full red flare from the flames. He heard many voices whispering, “tenas,” “tenas,” meaning “he is little, he is young,” but his step only grew more stealthy, until he “padded” into a strange, silent trot in exact imitation of a prairie wolf. As he swung the second time round the fires, his young voice arose, in a thin, wild, wonderful barking tone, so weird and wolf-like that half the spectators leaped up to their knees, or feet, the better to watch and listen.

Another moment, and he was putting his chant into words:

“They call me Ta-la-pus, the prairie-wolf, And wild and free am I.
I cannot swim like Eh-ko-lie, the whale, Nor like the eagle, Chack-chack, can I fly.
I cannot talk as does the great Ty-ee, Nor like the o-tel-agh⁵³ shine in the sky,
I am but Ta-la-pus, the prairie-wolf, And wild and free am I.”

With every word, every step, he became more like the wolf he was describing. Across his chanting and his “paddling” in the sand came murmurs from the crowd. He could hear “tenas, tenas,” “to-ke-tie tenas” (pretty boy), “skookum-tanse” (good strong dance). Then at last, “ow,” “ow,” meaning “our young brother.”

On and on went Ta-la-pus. The wolf feeling crept in to his legs, his soft young feet, his clutching fingers, his wonderful dark eyes that now gleamed red and lustrous in the firelight. He was as one inspired, giving a beautiful and marvelous portrait of the wild vagabonds of the plains. For fully ten minutes he circled and sang, then suddenly crouched on his haunches, then, lifting his head, he turned to the east, his young throat voiced, strange note, wolf-like he howled to the rising sun, which at that moment looked over the crest of the mountains, its first golden shaft falling full upon his face.

His chant and his strange wolf-dance were ended. Then one loud clamor arose from the crowd. “Tenas tyee,” “Tenas tyee,” they shouted, and Ta-la-pus knew that he had not failed. But the great Squamish chief was beside him.

“Tillicums,”⁵⁴ he said, facing the crowd, “this boy has danced no tribal dance learned from his people or his parents. This is his own dance, which he has made to deserve his name. He shall get the first gifts of our great potlatch. Go,” he added, to one of the young men, “bring ten dollars of the white man’s *chicamin* (money), and ten new blankets as white as that snow on the mountain top.”

The crowd was delighted. They approved the boy and rejoiced to see the real potlatch was begun. When the blankets were piled up beside him they reached to the top of Ta-la-pus’ head. Then the chief put ten dollars in the boy’s hand with the simple words, “I am glad to give it. You won it well, my tenas tyee.”

That was the beginning of a great week of games, feasting and tribal dances, but not a night passed but the participants called for the wild “wolf-dance” of the little boy from the island.

When the potlatch was over, old Chief Mowitch and Lapool and Ta-la-pus retruned to Vancouver Island, but no more the boy sat alone on the isolated rock, watching the mainland through a mist of yearning. He had set foot in the wider world, he had won his name, and now honored it, instead of hating it, as in the old days when his brothers taunted him, for the great Squamish chief, in bidding good-bye to him, had said:

“Little Ta-la-pus, remember a name means much to a man. You despised your name, but you have made it great and honorable by your own act, your own courage. Keep that name honorable, little Ta-la-pus; it will be worth far more to you than many blankets or much of the white man’s *chicamin*.”

⁵³ Sun. [Note in the original.]

⁵⁴ Friends, my people. [Note in the original.]

BANNING THE POTLATCH

“The moral improvement of the Indians”⁵⁵ (1880)

The moral improvement of the Indians will not, we hope, be forgotten. Giveaways and drunkenness amongst them in the outlying districts will, we are told, be stopped. Good; but while looking after those who reside beyond the city, let those who reside within the city not be forgotten. Here, in Victoria, is the fountainhead, so to speak, of the liquor supply. The source must be destroyed if the stream is to be dried up. Energetic measures adopted for the government of the Indians settled or residing here would put a stop instantly to nine-tenths of the drunken orgies called potlatches along the coastline. Here, within striking distance of the Indian superintendency, is the spot where lurks the evil that requires to be extirpated.

“Difficulties he had to contend against”⁵⁶ (1880)

The pulpit of St. John’s was occupied on Sunday morning by the Rev. Mr. Hall, who gave an interesting account of his missionary labors at Fort Rupert. The difficulties he had to contend against arose from the practice of potlatch, from the medicine man, and from drink. [...] The potlatch was represented to be no gift, but loans to be repaid with interest, payments of which were sometimes extended over three or four years.

“There is another evil”⁵⁷ (1880)

There is another evil intimately associated with, and in a sense underlying, the Indian liquor traffic as at present carried on along the coast. We refer to the practice commonly called *potlatching*. The highest – shall we say noblest? – ambition of the coast Indian would appear to be to accumulate the largest possible number of blankets for the purpose of holding a *potlatch* and giving them away. It is this ambition that has much to do with inducing the Indian to engage in the liquor traffic, as the most ready means of amassing the coveted blanket wealth. It is this ambition which even tempts him to the still more ignoble length of sending his wife or daughter to our towns in order that the wages of her shame may add to the pile of his blankets!

Having by such means succeeded in accumulating, say, one thousand blankets, the tribe is called together, and a *potlatch* held, and the now blanketless hero struts his brief day, a grandee among his fellows. But his glory, so ingloriously won, is short-lived. His pile of blankets has been o’ertopped by another; and, at the next grand feast

⁵⁵ From THE INDIAN QUESTION. (1880, January 23). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ From FORT RUPERT MISSION. (1880, March 23). *Daily Colonist*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ From OUR HERITAGE – WHAT ARE WE DOING TO PRESERVE IT? (1880, August 6). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

of the tribe, he must endure the extreme mortification of seeing himself publicly degraded by the first cut of the beaver being passed to his rival.

This fires his soul with jealous hate, and arouses his ambition to a still higher (?) pitch. He stalks forth with a dark frown on his brow and bitter hatred in his heart, and betakes himself with renewed vigor to the liquor traffic, while he sends off both wife and daughter to dens of infamy in order that they may aid him in winning back his lost distinction. And thus the foolish, and in its consequences ruinous, strife goes on. That this custom conduces to the liquor trade by creating a fresh incentive to push it, and that these two together constitute an almost insuperable barrier to missionary work, there can be no doubt.

“Very strong feelings”⁵⁸ (1882)

A few days ago the chiefs representing and speaking for the seventeen tribes of Indians located at Victoria, Saanich, Cowichan, Somenos, Penelecot, Chemainus, Hantem, Nanaimo, Comox, New Westminster and Squamish, met in council at the Nanaimo Camp, for the purpose of taking into consideration the recent order issued by the Indian Department stopping potlatch feasts after six months from date of notice. Each chief spoke at some length detailing the views of his tribe, which was in every instance adverse to discontinuing the potlatch feasts.

It was unanimously decided not to give up the feasts, for it was a long established custom and they had very strong feelings in regard to the observance of these feasts. The chiefs argued that their people were enjoying themselves in their own peculiar way, without doing any injury to the Government or white people, and they could not see by what right the Government had interfered. If the Government attempted to stop the feasts by force, it will cause trouble, but if the Government wish the Indians to stop feasting they should provide schools to teach the young Indians different views.

The chiefs suggested that the Government, instead of trying to stop the harmless feasts, should take steps to completely stop the liquor traffic among the Indians, for the liquor does a great deal more harm among the Indian tribes than the feasts ever did. The chiefs claim that the feature of the potlatch which gives food and clothes to the old and infirm Indians is commendable, and very pointedly ask if the Government are willing to provide necessaries for the old and infirm Indians.

The above are the main points of conference or council, and it will be seen that the Indians are not inclined to give up their old established custom without a severe struggle. They argue that the custom will die a natural death with the present generation, as the younger members of the tribe have got the same strong feelings in regard to potlatches (give away feasts) that the middle-aged and old men have.

⁵⁸ From The Feast of Potlatch. (1882, November 15). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3.

“A source of misery to them”⁵⁹ (1882)

Editor Free Press – Will you allow me to take exception to some remarks that appeared in a recent issue of your valuable paper in regard to the “Indian Potlatch”?

If the Indians are wards of the Government, surely it becomes the Department to stop any custom that is destructive and demoralizing, and which thwarts all efforts to improve them as the “Potlatching System” undeniably does. And to leave the question of whether the feasts shall be discontinued to the Indians themselves – as you suggest – would be like a wise father submitting important questions to his untaught children, and being guided by them.

For many years it was thought at Nanaimo that the feasts would die out, but after a struggle of twenty years it has killed the school out, and has a firmer hold on the people than it did then, disproving your theory that it would likely die out of itself in a short time, aided by the teaching of the schools.

But the reasoning of the Indians is very inconsistent with the facts of the case, and shows much craft, saying “if the Government attempted to stop the feasts by force it will cause trouble, but if the Government wish the Indians to stop feasting they should provide schools to teach the young Indians different views.” Have not the Government and churches tried that course for many years? But the fathers and mothers who continued the “potlatching” positively refused to allow their children to attend school. The suggestion of the Indians that the Government should take steps to completely stop the liquor traffic is a good one and should be noticed by the Department.

But does not the potlatch system lead to drinking? Is it not at those gatherings that most of the whisky troubles have taken place? Cowichan for instance. While I fully believe that the Department should assist the old and infirm Indians, I deny the statement of the Indians that the potlatch has any feature about it which helps the old or infirm – but it is a source of misery to them. Their friends, instead of administering to their sick, keep all they can get to make a grand show with at a feast, and go abroad sometimes, leaving their sick to die alone.

But sir, unless you live among them you can scarcely know the amount of debauchery and degradation which are caused by these feasts. How parents sell their children, brothers their sisters, and husbands their wives – what for? To make money to get a “potlatch”!

Whisky is a great curse to those Flat-head tribes. But it is not the only source of all their misery, which is seen by the facts among the Northern Indian tribes, where there is no whisky – but where the potlatch is still kept up. The Indians are nearly as miserable and debauched as are the Flatheads. And it is impossible to carry on a school or to elevate them where the potlatching is continued. But in every instance where the practice has been given up, the people have immediately made rapid strides toward civilization. But not a single tribe has advanced who have retained it.

⁵⁹ From Green, A. E. et al. (1883, February 10). Indian Potlatches. *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3. Written by Alfred Eli Green (1851-1914), from Greenville Mission, Nass River, B.C., Dec. 14th, 1882.

Having lived among the Indians for nearly nine years; three years of that time having been spent in teaching the Nanaimo Indian School, and having visited nearly all those places represented by the chiefs in the meeting reported in your paper of November 15th, I know from personal experience of what I write.

A. E. GREEN.

[REPLY BY THE EDITOR OF THE FREE PRESS]

Our northern correspondent is somewhat in error. We did not advance any arguments in favor of a continuance of these potlatch feasts, for it is our firm opinion they should be done away with. We simply took exception to the arbitrary stature of the order, i.e., that no potlatches should be held after six months from the date of the order. It is just such arbitrary measures that have caused the great troubles among the Indians of the neighboring Republic. We stated that the practice of “potlatching” was rapidly dying out, and that by a judicious system of teaching it would die a natural death in a few years. The effect of the teachings in the Metlakatlah, Fort Simpson and other missions, is a practical example of our argument. At the Potlatch held at the Nanaimo camp last summer, not a single case of drunkenness came under the cognizance of the police – and they were on the alert all the time. We would not for a moment uphold the system of “Indian potlatches,” and as to what was said at the meeting of the chiefs, our information was obtained from several of the chiefs themselves. -Ed. FREE PRESS.

“Second reading of Bill (No. 87)”⁶⁰ (1884)

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD in moving the second reading of Bill (No. 87) further to amend the Indian Act, 1880, said: [...] The third clause provides that celebrating the “Potlatch” is a misdemeanor. This Indian festival is a debauchery of the worst kind, and the departmental officers and all clergymen unite in affirming that it is absolutely necessary to put this practice down. Last year the late Governor General issued a proclamation on the advice of his Ministers warning Indians against celebrating this festival. At these gatherings they give away their guns and all their property in a species of rivalry, and go so far as to give away their wives; in fact, as I have said, it is a great debauch. Under this Act to celebrate the Potlatch is to be guilty of a misdemeanor.

⁶⁰ From Dominion of Canada. (1884). Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada : second session. Ottawa: Roger MacLean. The following extract is from the debates of March 24, 1884.

“This is a new clause”⁶¹ (1884)

On section 3 [of Bill (no. 87) further to amend the Indian Act, 1880]⁶²,

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD: This is a new clause for the purpose of putting down the Indian festival known as the “potlatch” which is the cause of a great deal of misery and demoralization in British Columbia. The representations made to the Government on the subject, not only by the Indian agent, but by the clergy, are very strong. They say it is utterly useless, especially on Vancouver Island, where the “potlatch” principally exists, to introduce orderly habits while it is in vogue. They meet and carry on a sort of mystery; they remain for weeks, and sometimes months, as long as they can get food, and carry on all kinds of orgies. It is lamentable to read the accounts given by the clergy of British Columbia, and they urge that some legislation on the subject should take place. It was suggested by the clergy there that it would have some effect if the Governor General should issue a proclamation, warning the Indians against this unhappy custom, and though it did have some effect, it was not at all commensurate with the expectations which were founded upon it, and so it is proposed to introduce this clause. I have here a number of statements from both the Catholic and the Protestant missionaries, showing the awful effects of this custom, but I need not trouble the House by reading them.

Mr. BLAKE: I think anybody who has read descriptions of this feast will not doubt that it has a very demoralizing tendency in a great many ways. I have had accounts of men of apparently very considerable financial and commercial power among the Indians of British Columbia, some of whom I believe have accumulated considerable wealth, and it is all dissipated in the insane exuberance of generosity which seems to be encouraged by these meetings. But the custom is a very old and a very inveterate one amongst them; and without at all saying that the case is not ripe for the passage of such a clause as this, it seems to me that one should be very cautious in attempting suddenly to stop, by the harsh process of criminal law, the known customs and habits of these tribes. I would therefore strongly recommend the hon. gentlemen, with reference to the minimum punishment of two months, to alter the clause, so that for the first two years an almost nominal punishment might, if the authorities thought it expedient, be imposed in the first instance. The point to be attained is to the getting the Indians gradually to see that this practice is contrary to the law; and by the force of the trial and a very trifling punishment the first time, with a warning that would spread amongst them that a much severer punishment might be inflicted on the next occasion, would perhaps repress the practice. But the necessity of inflicting two months’ punishment might turn out to be a calamitous necessity.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD: I will accept the hon. gentleman’s suggestion and strike out the words “nor less than two,” leaving the maximum, but not the minimum.

⁶¹ From Dominion of Canada. (1884). Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada : second session. Ottawa: Roger MacLean. The following extract is from the debates of April 7, 1884.

⁶² Phrasing copied from elsewhere in the debates.

Mr. BLAKE: I have another suggestion with reference to the extreme looseness of the provision making those liable to indictment who directly or indirectly encourage an Indian to celebrate the festival, and liable to six months' imprisonment. This is certainly a very vague offence to bring a man for six months to gaol.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT: Does the hon. gentleman know whether this practice prevails universally in British Columbia?

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD: It pervades some of the tribes – I think not all; but Vancouver Island is the chief scene of these disorders. Mr. Lomas, who is a very intelligent agent on the west coast of Vancouver Island, says:

[MR. LOMAS ON THE POTLATCH]

“The two customs are intimately connected, because without a donation (potlatch) of food, a dance is never held, and these dances have been sadly on the increase during the present winter, and many young men have impoverished themselves and their families because they had not the moral courage to oppose the customs. Indeed, this want of courage or inability to withstand the sneers of the old people always forms one of the greatest drawbacks in the advancement of the native races on the coast. But in the event of any law being passed, it would be advisable to allow a fixed time for its coming into force, as potlatches are in reality a spending of a certain amount of property which has to be returned at an uncertain date with interest, or rather with an additional amount, which at some future date has to be returned either by the recipient, or if he is dead, by some of his sons. Thus, young men themselves opposed to the custom are often drawn in it, but besides the expenses of the potlatch, *i.e.*, food, firewood, and attendance on the guests, a large amount of property is always thrown away, to be scrambled for by the invited guests. Local traders derive a benefit from these gatherings, and often encourage the Indians to keep them up, forgetting that were these Indians working their lands, they would be a constant source of profit instead of being, as now, only an occasional one. A few days ago I called a meeting of all the leading men of [the] Cowichan, Chemainus, and Saanich bands, on the above subject, and the matter was well discussed, but I regret to say only a few had the courage to stand up and say they would give up both customs, and do their best to influence their relatives to do so. Since that time several others have been to request that their names may be added to this list; and as several of these have had land allotted to them, I would suggest that they be supplied with their location tickets at once.”

The clergy are exceedingly strong on this subject. Mr. Donckele, the Catholic priest at Cowichan, says:

[MR. DONCKELE ON THE POTLATCH]

“For many years I entertained the hope that these heathenish practices would have disappeared as soon as the young people adopted the habits of the whites, and applied themselves to the pursuits of various industries; but now I am sorry to state that many of the young men, who for years had improved their fertile lands, built houses and barns on them, and made for themselves and their families an almost independent life, have abandoned their farms and become again the adepts of superstition and barbarism. The evil reached its climax last winter, when some of the

most prominent dancers insulted some of their Indian Chiefs, because they insisted on their subjects assuming the habits of the whites and giving up the savage life of their ancestors. With a view to ameliorate the condition of the Indians and provide them with comfort and happiness, I respectfully request you, Sir, in the name of the civilized Indians, to beg the Indian Department to have a law to stop the disastrous practice of potlatching, and especially dancing, as it is carried on by the Indians of Vancouver Island. I am thoroughly convinced that unless stringent measures be taken, every effort will be fruitless; for parents bring up their children in such a way that it is impossible for anyone to inculcate in their minds any moral, social, or industrious knowledge. The only training parents bestow upon their children is concerning the potlatches and dances. During the whole winter, schools are deserted by all those children whose parents attend the dances. When the winter is over they have squandered all their summer earnings, and are compelled to leave their homes and roam about in their canoes in search of food, and thus neglect cultivating their lands and sending their children to school. In the summer they leave again for several months, working abroad to earn a few dollars, in order to give a dance in the winter, and spend in one winter's night the earnings of a whole winter. I have lately visited the Indians residing between Cowichan and Nanaimo, and in every tribe where dancing is kept up there was general complaint of sickness; and, alas, how could it be otherwise, when for about two months they hardly take a night's rest, and when they indulge whole days in ceaseless vociferations?"

His statements are very grievous with respect to the chief dances, and I think we must have stringent legislation to put them down.

Mr. SHAKESPEARE: Not only is it the wish of the clergy that these dances and potlatches should be done away with, but it is the desire of a large number of the Indians on Vancouver Island. Last year I presented a petition to the right. Hon. the leader of the Government from several hundred Indians on Vancouver Island, expressing the wish that the Government would take some steps to do away with these potlatches, as they were demoralizing in the extreme. [...]

Section, as amended, agreed to.

Bill, as amended, reported.

“Indian Act Amendment Bill”⁶³ (1884)

The House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole on Bill (87), “An Act further to amend the Indian Act, 1880.”

In the Committee, Hon. Sir ALEX CAMPBELL said [...] that the object of [the third] clause was to prohibit the celebration of an Indian festival known as the “potlatch” dance, which was represented as being very demoralizing in its effect on those who participated in it.

⁶³ From Dominion of Canada. (1884). *Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada, 1884: second session, fifth Parliament*. Ottawa: A.S. Woodburn. The following extract is from the session of April 15, 1884.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD explained that the word potlatch meant a gift feast. The Indians, on the invitation of a Chief, gathered together sometimes to the number of hundreds at those feasts at which he and his friends distributed gifts in the shape of provisions, blankets, furs and other commodities. Sometimes the dances were conducted in an orderly manner; at other times Indians got drunk, and most disgraceful scenes ensued. At one place, Metlakatla, the missionary, Mr. Duncan, had succeeded in abolishing the custom entirely. When he went there some twenty years ago, the Indians in celebrating the potlatch were in the habit of eating dogs and human flesh in their feasts, but Mr. Duncan had not only succeeded in inducing the Indians to abandon these horrid customs, but had abolished the trade in spirits⁶⁴ along the coast for a distance of some seven hundred miles. The Tom-an-oes dance was a half religious half Masonic ceremony, at which young men of the tribe are supposed to be initiated into the mysteries of manhood.

Hon. Sir ALEX CAMPBELL said that the evils which resulted from these potlatch dances were described in the following letters, which he would read to the Committee, and which had suggested this legislation:

BRITISH COLUMBIA, Indian Office, Victoria, Feb'y. 27th, 1884

Sir – I have the honor to enclose copies of correspondence from Indian Agent Lomas and Messrs. Doukele and Bryant, Roman Catholic and Wesleyan Missionaries, on the subject of “Potlatches” and “Tamanawas” dances.

I agree with Mr. Lomas, that some legal prohibition is necessary before these habits will cease.

If it be the intention to pass a law for the establishment of Indian councils, these bodies should have the power of stopping the evils complained of.

It is also, in my opinion, desirable that an agent should be empowered by law to prevent the practice of any barbarous customs upon reserves placed under his immediate care. Should you concur in this, I trust that something of the kind may be passed during the present session of the Federal Legislature.

I have the honor to be, sir, your very obedient servant,

J. W. POWELL,

Indian Superintendent

COWICHAN INDIAN AGENCY, Maple Bay, B.C., February 5th, 1884

Sir – After considerable experience, mature consideration, and consultations with many persons who have the welfare of the native races at heart, I have come to the conclusion that before the Indians of this coast can be permanently benefited, a law must be passed for the prevention of the foolish, wasteful, and demoralizing custom of “potlatching” and for the punishment of any Indian allowing a Tom-an-oes dance to be held in any house of which he is owner or part owner.

⁶⁴ He had gone so far as to seize vessels that were engaged in selling to the Indians, and imprisoned the captain and crew. He first succeeded in Christianizing a number of the Indians, whom he induced to leave the rest of the band and form a village for themselves at Metlakatla, which was now a thriving village with a population of one thousand souls, with comfortable houses, good streets lighted with lamps, and church and schools; but he was sorry to say that a churchman – Bishop Ridley – was now destroying all this work out of jealousy. [From the main text of the original.]

A few years ago I thought that these dances were only foolish imitations of their old savage customs, but now I am convinced they are:

- (1) The principal cause of the decrease of populaitons.
- (2) Of the destitution and misery of the aged.
- (3) Of a great deal of sickness and deaths among the children.
- (4) Of the indifference to the advantages of education.
- (5) Of the neglect of their farms, cattle and horses during the winter months.

The two customs are intimately connected, because without a donation “potlatch” of food a dance is never held – and these dances have been sadly on the increase during the present winter, and many young men have impoverished themselves, and their families, because they had not the moral courage to oppose the customs. Indeed, this want of courage, or inability to withstand the sneers of the old people, always forms one of the greatest drawbacks to the advancement of the native races of the coast.

But in the event of any law being passed, it would be advisable to allow a fixed time for its coming into force, as “potlatches” are, in reality, a lending of a certain amount of property, which has to be returned at an uncertain date, with interest, or rather with an additional amount, which at some future date has to be returned, either by the recipient, or if he be dead by some of his sons.

Thus young men, themselves opposed to the custom, are often drawn into it, but besides the expenses of the “potlatch,” *i.e.*, food, firewood, and attendance on the guests, a large amount of property is always thrown away to be scrambled for by the invited guests.

Local traders derive a benefit from these gatherings, and often encourage the Indians to keep them up, forgetting that were these Indians working their lands, they would be a constant source of profit instead of being as now, only an occasional one.

A few days ago I called a meeting of all the leading men of [the] Cowichan, Chemainus, and Saanich Bands, on the above subject, and the matter was well discussed, but I regret to say only a few had the courage to stand up and say they would give up both customs, and do their best to influence their relatives to do so. Since that time several others have been to request that their names may be added to this list, and as several of these have had land allotted to them I would suggest that they be supplied with their Location Tickets at once.

Indeed, it might have a good effect if only those Indians who give up the custom of “potlatching” receive tickets to their lands.

I have been in correspondence with both the Roman Catholic and Methodist Missionaries in my Agency. Copies of their letters I herewith enclose, that, in the event of the Government seeing fit to pass any law on this subject, the views of these persons who are deeply interested in the welfare of the Indians may be known.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. H. LOMAS,
Indian Agent. [...]

[Copy of a letter from] COWICHAN, BRITISH COLUMBIA, 2nd February, 1884
[To] W. H. LOMAS, Esquire, Indian Agent, Maple Bay:

Sir – Three years ago a petition signed by the best and most civilized Indians of Cowichan was forwarded to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs at Ottawa, praying him to abolish the heathenish practices of “potlatching” and dancing.

In that petition the Indians explained to the Superintendent how dancing was carried on, by their fellow natives, and how utterly incompatible this practice was with all progress and civilization.

The uncivilized Indians being far more numerous than the civilized prevent the latter from making any by-law to stop the evil and thus render them entirely powerless, and subject to their continual and bitter invectives.

Several of these that had signed the petition, not obtaining assistance from the proper authorities, and being daily harassed and ridiculed by their antagonists, have of late forsaken their aspirations of becoming civilized and returned to a life of vagrancy.

For many years I entertained the hope that these heathenish practices would have disappeared as soon as the young people adopted the habits of the whites, and applied themselves to the pursuits of various industries, but now I am sorry to state that many of the young men who for years had improved their fertile lands, built houses and barns on them, and made for themselves and their families an almost independent life have abandoned their farms and become again the adepts of superstition and barbarism.

The evil reached its climax last winter when some of the most prominent dancers insulted some of their Indian chiefs, because they insisted on their subjects assuming the habits of the whites and giving up the savage life of their ancestors.

With a view to ameliorate the condition of the Indians and provide them with comfort and happiness, I respectfully request you, Sir, in the name of the civilized Indians, to beg the Indian Department to have a law to stop the disastrous practice of “potlatching” and especially dancing as it is carried on by the Indians of Vancouver Island.

I am thoroughly convinced that unless stringent measures be taken, every effort will be fruitless; for parents bring up their children in such a way that it is impossible for anyone to inculcate in their minds any moral, social, or industrious knowledge. The only training parents bestow upon their children is concerning the “potlatches” and dances.

During the whole winter, schools are deserted by all those children whose parents attend the dances; when the winter is over they have squandered all their summer earnings and are compelled to leave their homes and roam about in their canoes in search of food, and thus neglect cultivating their lands and sending their children to school. In the summer they leave again for several months, working abroad to earn a few dollars in order to give a dance in the winter, and spend in one winter’s night the earnings of a whole summer.

I have lately visited the Indians residing between Cowichan and Nanaimo, and in every tribe where dancing is kept up, there was general complaint of sickness; and,

alas, how could it be otherwise, when for about two months they hardly take a night's rest, and when they indulge whole days in ceaseless vociferations?

The statistics of last year show an astonishing decrease of the population; the number of births, for instance, was about 20 less than in 1882.

Parents being unwilling to provide their offspring with moral training and education, children are naturally led to lead a licentious life, especially when parents are inflamed with a desire of prostituting their girls for the sake of money.

To remedy this evil my humble opinion is that the only means is to check the above causes obstructive of the education of the children, viz.: the "potlatches" and dances; for as long as Indians indulge in those heathenish practices it is impossible for them to remain at home; and thus during the greater part of the year there can be no school; and whereas the majority of the Indians are determined not to frame any by-law to counteract the evil, it remains with their supervisors to do so.

It has been thought that clergymen might succeed in abating the evil as they had succeeded in other places. This might have been easy, perhaps, in former times, before a host of wicked white advisors had settled amongst them, who for the sake of a scanty emolument persuaded the Indians to continue their old customs. The fact that some clergymen who for years labored strenuously to extirpate the evil were powerless to do so here, but were successful in some more Northern sphere is a sufficient proof that the blame is not to be laid to their charge.

Knowing, sir, your desire of promoting the welfare of the Indians under your care, I earnestly hope that you will lend your assistance in obtaining from the Indian Department the necessary means to destroy the evil.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your humble servant,

G. DONCKELE,

Catholic Priest.

[Copy of a letter from] NANAIMO, B.C., January 30th, 1884

Sir – In reply to your favor of the 24th inst., in which you do me the honor of asking for any suggestions I may be able to offer, respecting the custom of "potlatching" among the Indians on this coast, allow me to say that it is with pleasure that I accede to your request, inasmuch as it affords me an opportunity of conveying through an official channel to the Government the strong and decided opinion, which I hold, after a personal knowledge of twenty-six years with our Indian tribes (chiefly on the east coast, and partly on the Fraser River) of what you aptly designate as the demoralizing custom of "potlatching," which, as you say, appears to be on the increase among the Indians of this coast.

My uniform experience, but certainly my experience as a Christian missionary in this Province for the past thirteen and a half years, sustains your view that the "potlatching" customs are demoralizing without a redeeming feature.

1st. As to the individuals who, in accordance with the well-known habit of giving away absolutely all they happen to possess in many cases, thereby reducing themselves to beggary and distress, but beyond a mere impoverishment, and what is very much worse, physical misery and evils resulting from exposure to the elements in traveling to and from these "potlatches," which they do in their canoes in all kinds

of weather, and the debauchery produced by intoxication, in which they often indulge upon such occasions, leaves no doubt as to the personal demoralization which follows these native feasts. Indeed, it is well known that at such times knives and firearms are freely used in their drunken feuds, and too commonly with deadly effect. So that what is true of the individual is also true:

2nd. Of the family and the tribe. The impoverishment and dissipation already referred to have a most deplorable effect upon hapless children and aged people, who, in their dependent condition, ought to enjoy the comforts of convenient homes and wholesome food which are denied them, owing to reckless and spendthrift customs which are maintained at these "potlatches".

Improvident habits are, of course, too common among the Indians, but they are fostered sadly too much by the "potlatching" system; indeed, not only the family, but the whole tribe suffers.

For instance, how many times have I appealed in vain to those who have been hoarding up their wealth in order to give it away at the next "potlatch," to assist in some sanitary improvement such as the repair or renovation of their own dwelling-house, or the grading or laying out of some street or road, or the fencing of or supply of conveniences for their local cemetery. What is true in this respect is no less so in any attempt to elevate the natives, intellectually and rigorously, for:

3rd. The church and school cannot flourish where the "potlatching" holds sway. In this my experience accords, I doubt not, with others who have had similar facilities for observation. Thus all the objects or advantages to be secured by good government are frustrated by this very demoralizing custom; and as the wards of the Government, the native tribes should be prevented by judicious counsel and Governmental interference, that is, by some kind of paternal restraint, from indulging in their potlatching feasts. Of course, my knowledge of the Indian character suggests the danger of attempting any coercive measures. Added to this, the situation of the Government in seeking to suppress the "potlatch" is rendered the more critical by the ill advice and malignant designs of the dissipated class of whites who commonly hover around Indian camps, and from whom the natives are only too ready to take counsel. But I have discovered that the Indians have been advised to rebel against the idea of discontinuing the "potlatch" by respectable traders whose business interests have been temporarily benefited by the potlatches being held in their neighborhood.

I could hardly have thought it possible that the good intentions of the Government in seeking to suppress so pernicious a practice would have been discouraged and opposed simply for the selfish purpose of selling a few hundred dollars' worth of goods, had not the names of the white traders (one or two) been mentioned to me by the Indians themselves. It is hardly necessary to say that such an adverse opinion to prohibiting "potlatching" was quoted by my Indian informant, with approval, as sustaining his view of the unnecessary and unjust interference of the Government, as he termed it, with their long-standing customs.

In the presence, therefore, of such embarrassing difficulties, it is very perplexing indeed to say just what would be the most advisable course for the Government to pursue in trying to go down the "potlatching" system.

In view of the hostility shown to the measure by the chiefs and aged men, who are principally in favor of retaining their old customs, it might not be wise or safe to use any legislative restrictions, at last not at first, but it has occurred to me that by some judicious system of rewards to those chiefs who manage so to influence their respective tribes as to discontinue the objectionable feasts, it might be possible to carry out the worthy design of the Government in the matter, so that where coercion might fail, persuasion might succeed. Possibly such a course may have been already contemplated by the authorities, for aught I know; at any rate it is, under the circumstances, worthy of consideration.

I have the honor to be, Sir, yours very respectfully,

CORNELIUS BRYANT,

Methodist Missionary.

[BACK TO THE SENATE]

Hon. Mr. GIRARD said that there were many reforms to be made amongst the Indians, but the missionaries would do more in that way than could be done by legislation. He saw that provision was made to punish the Indians who took part in the potlatch dances, but there was no provision to punish the white men who also attended those dances and who frequently created a great deal of trouble amongst the Indians.

Hon. Sir ALEX. CAMPBELL agreed with his hon. friend from St. Boniface that it might be desirable to provide a penalty for white men who encouraged those dances or took part in them, and he would look over the clause and see if he could not amend it in that direction.

Hon. Mr. PLUMB said if these potlatch celebrations were merely for the purpose of exchanging goods, he could not see how the Indians were impoverished by them.

The Hon. Mr. MACDONALD said that the way it was done was, a chief would invite a number of his friends from another section of the country to a feast, at which he would make large gifts of provisions and blankets and other goods; the next year the other chief would invite him and his friends in return and distribute gifts to them, or some other chief would do so. If a law were enacted to suppress potlatching, and it could not be carried out, it would do a great deal of harm. Supposing at a feast of this kind a policeman appeared and undertook to break it up. He would be laughed at by the Indians, and he could do nothing against such numbers. A gunboat might be sent to enforce the law, but the result would be serious, and it might lead to the commencement of an Indian war. He considered that this reform was entirely work for the missionaries. It was a very curious thing that there was only one missionary in British Columbia who had been successful in stamping out this kind of vice.

Hon. Mr. ALMON – We should be very careful before we interfere with the religious rites or even the superstitions of the Savages. We all know very well that the mutiny in India arose from a very small thing – from the ends of the cartridges being greased. What would be the effect of a violation in this clause? We would have to put four or five hundred people in jail in a place where there are neither jails nor jailers. It seems to me that such legislation could not be carried out. Suppose a savage

were to go to England, and visit Buckingham Palace, and see a number of Highlanders dancing a sword dance in the garb of old Gaul. Would he not say that was as crazy as any potlatch he had ever seen? We can imagine him saying, “you people put down our potlatches, yet you dance in petticoats over naked swords.” I say, leave these matters to the missionary and let time work any reformation that is needed. I do not know whether we have had any petitions for the peaceable and undisturbed enjoyment of the potlatch, but perhaps they are on the way.

Hon. Mr. DICKEY – My hon. friend desires to use in this case moral suasion instead of coercion.

Hon. Mr. ALMON - Certainly.

Hon. Mr. DICKEY – I think there is a great deal of force in what he says. The Government ought to consider this question carefully before attempting such legislation. It may bring the law of the land into contempt and do more harm than good.

Hon. Mr. GIRARD – I would suggest that an addition might be made to this clause providing for the punishment of any person who incites the Indians to join these dances, or participates in them himself.

The clause was allowed to stand.

From An Act to further amend “The Indian Act, 1880”⁶⁵ (1884)

3. Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the “Potlatch” or in the Indian dance known as the “Tamanawas” is guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months in any gaol or other place of confinement; and any Indian or other person who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian or Indians to get up such a festival or dance, or to celebrate the same, or who shall assist in the celebration of the same is guilty of a like offence, and shall be liable to the same punishment.

An Indian Agent visits Lacksem, Valdez Island⁶⁶ (1884)

In November last [1884] I attended a large “potlatch” held at Lacksem, on Valdez Island. There were over two thousand Indians present, speaking several languages. Some liquor was seized, but, on the whole, the Indians at these gatherings are remarkably peaceable. A very small number of the guests were housed, most of them living in tents or mat huts, and the weather being severe, they suffered very much indeed. There was much grumbling amongst themselves about their being obliged to attend a “potlatch” at such a time of the year and where there was no protection from the wind and snow. One of the worst features of this potlatch was the number of [Métis] who were taking part in it, and these, following the example of the

⁶⁵ S.C. 1884, c. 27. (47 Vict.)

⁶⁶ From Lomas, W.H. (1885, February 28). Indian Report. *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 1. Written by William H. Lomas, Indian Agent for the Cowichan Agency (d. 1899).

Indians, gave or threw away the earnings of years. One youth alone gave away over \$400 worth of goods, being the savings of years, and to earn the praise or flattery of a few old people, who will, no doubt, be themselves entirely destitute in a few years.

The Chief, Ce-who-isiza, gave me an opportunity, on two evenings, of addressing the chiefs and headmen of the different tribes. I did my best to point out to them the folly and the injury to themselves in so many ways of these gatherings, telling them that unless they themselves took measures to stop them, the government would be compelled to do so. One chief made a long speech, saying how wrong it would be for the Government to prevent these gatherings, when relatives from a distance met each other, and the old and the destitute were feasted. Fortunately, on my way to the potlatch I had called at several villages, and was able to say that this was not the case, but the old and destitute had been, in every band, left at home to starve, having neither food nor fuel left them; and being able to give the names of the old people left in this condition, I had quite the best of the argument; and I afterwards learned that my word had done considerable good, by causing many to think of the “potlatches” in a way they had never done before; but the influence of the old men is very great, and although they cannot help seeing the rapid decrease of their tribes, they will not take the trouble, or do not wish to look for the cause. [...]

Several of the chiefs have still to hold their final “potlatch,” that the members of their band may have an opportunity of receiving and paying back blankets and other property which have formerly been lent. Some of the more enlightened of the chiefs have long agreed that these should be the last “potlatches” which they should attend, but I suppose as they are soon to be prohibited by law, nearly all the bands will be obliged to hold similar gatherings during the year.

“Still having a baneful effect”⁶⁷ (1885)

The potlatch is still having a baneful effect on the heathen tribes in some portions of the district. Now that the statute prohibits potlatching and heathen dances, it is thought the government should strictly enforce the law and thus teach the native that the dignity of the Queen’s authority shall be maintained. Official notification of the existence of this law should be given the native tribes, both in [the] interior and on the coast, if this has not already been done, then potlatching, the great barrier to civilization, will disappear.

⁶⁷ From N.W. COAST MISSIONS. (1885, May 1). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

“From the Methodist Missionary Society”⁶⁸ (1889)

STATEMENT OF REV. T. CROSBY

[In the 1880s] I went with Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Green to Judge Elliott, to lay a complaint before him of the violation of the Potlatch law, and also of the Indians making and selling whiskey on Queen Charlotte’s Island. He replied that he could do nothing under the Potlatch law, as a circular issued by Dr. Powell gave the Indians permission to return the property they had received at previous potlatches, which really meant keeping up the system of potlatches. [...]

STATEMENT OF REV. A. E. GREEN METHODIST MISSIONARY AT NAAS RIVER

Dr. Powell [had] sent me a letter to read to the Indians, to the effect that the potlatch was now unlawful. I read the letter to those Indians who were accustomed to the holding of potlatch feasts, etc., and the Indians were willing to stop if such was the law; but a short time after, a further letter was received from Dr. Powell, informing the Indians that the Government would not prevent them from returning property which they owed on account of previous potlatches. If Dr. Powell knows anything about potlatches, he must know that a potlatch means to return property already received and owing, with a large addition to it. So that the receiver is immediately indebted to the man he receives the present from. It did not require a circular to tell the Indians that the Government would not prevent them from paying their debts.

I represented this matter to Hon. Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, and received from Ottawa Dr. Powell’s reply, in which he quotes my allegations that “Judge Elliott will not take action in the matter, shielding himself with Dr. Powell’s circular.” Dr. Powell then states that the reason alleged is not a tenable one, and further says he has no hesitation in pronouncing the statement a very improbable one.

Now, I affirm that what I wrote is true. I, with Rev. T. Crosby, Rev. D. Jennings and Rev. G. F. Hopkins, called in a body on Mr. Elliott, asking him to enforce the law against potlatches, and against the making and selling of whisky to Indians. He replied he would try and stop the whisky, but could not interfere with the potlatches on account of Dr. Powell’s circular, a copy of which he read to us. I also declare the statement made by Dr. Powell to the Department that the potlatch is dying out, is not correct.

⁶⁸ From Crosby, T. (1889). *Letter from the Methodist Missionary Society to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs respecting British Columbia troubles : with affidavits, declarations, etc.* Canada: Methodist Missionary Society. Written by Thomas Crosby (1840 – 1914) and Alfred Eli Green (1851 – 1914).

“In the highest degree in favor of the law⁶⁹ (1889)

BABINE AGENCY

Hazelton B.C.
October 12th, 1889

Sir, I must apprise the Department of the results after having had a council with the Kit-au-max tribe on the evening of the 5th inst. The feeling amongst them I found to be in the highest degree in favor of the law and regulations laid down in my instructions.

They conceded to everything, even to giving up the potlatch. But the speaking of an Indian by the name of Louis, employed by Capt. Fitz-Stubbs S.M. as a constable, turned the scale in opposition to the abolishing their old custom. He spoke before me and all assembled as follows:-

“My uncle is the Head Chief of Kits-prioux, the same told me to oppose any new law that should come to this country. That they had their own laws and that they wanted no other. I know the law is against stealing, etc. I am an officer of the law, myself. We do not want anyone to come to Kits-prioux with any new laws from the Govt. How would the Government like to have their laws locked up, as they do ours?”

Then I told him, it was for those under oath to uphold the law, to help to enforce and not to obstruct it. Furthermore that his remarks were uncalled for, as I was addressing the Kit-au-max tribe and intended to visit his village in a few days or so.

Wednesday the 9th inst. I started for Kits-prioux. On arriving we were told that the Ind. Constable Louis had sent them advice, to oppose whatever I should have to say.

I assembled the tribe in council, was eagerly listened to, as the presence of my wife inspired them with confidence, despite the alarm given. They consented to send their children to school, stop eating dogs and everything else mentioned, but to give up the potlatch they could not, as they were advised by Capt. Fitzstubb's Constable that the law had no power to punish it as an offence, and that they could go on as they had been doing. This same Constable is kept on under pay, even after Capt. Fitz-Stubb's departure from here to the coast.

The Indians asked me to write to the Govt. to be allowed to retain the custom of potlatching for a year or so more, and I promised to do so. I ask for the privilege to use discretion in this matter, as to enforce the law would cause trouble and expense.

I hope the Dep't. will coincide in my views and be lenient yet for the present, as the custom has the tendency to die out in the course of 2 or 3 years. [...]

I have the honor to remain, Sir, your ob't. servant,

(Signed) R. E. Loring
Ind. Agent.

⁶⁹ From Loring, R. E. (1889, October 12). Letter to H. Moffat, Esq., Acting Supt. of Indian Affairs. Library and Archives Canada: RG10, Volume number: 3831, Microfilm reel number: C-10145, File number: 62977, Item ID 2060813. Written by Richard Ernest Loring (1849 – 1934).

[ENCLOSURE: STATEMENT OF WILLIAM HOLLAND]

William Holland says:-

I am an Indian, have been to School and can read and write English. I was present at the meeting last night; I heard Louis speak as follows:-

You are working for the Government, so am I. I will tell you what my own chiefs at Kispyox say. These words are not spoken for myself. These words were sent to me to give to you when you came. They do not want you to go up to Kispyox and open another law up there: a new law. One law came here nearly two years ago, that is all right, and they will obey that law. That law told them not to steal, not to kill, not to quarrel with anyone, and that law they will obey. Why do the Government send you up here to lock them up with a key, and keep them in prison? It is not right to lose people in prison when they have done no wrong. It is exactly the same now because you want to stop the potlatches. It is their duty to have them. They are going to have them. They do not want you to go up there and open a new law.

[ENCLOSURE: STATEMENT OF MOTHE]

Mothe says:-

I am an unconverted Indian. Last night I heard Louis say: I want to tell you what is the tune of my own Chiefs at Kispyox. All my friends know that I am working for the Government. I speak for my Chiefs, not for myself. My Chiefs told me to give you these words if you came; they do not want you to have any new law in their town. There is a law there now; it is good.

It teaches them not to steal, not to lie, not to kill, not to quarrel. That law they will obey, but they do not understand new laws. Why does the Government send you up here to lock us up? It is not fair to put anyone under lock and key, if we have broken no laws. It is with the potlatches they have done them, for years and years past. They must do them, and they are going to do them. They do not want you to go up and talk new laws.

X Mothe, his mark

October, 1889.

Witness N. Fitzstubbs.

“A great deal of discussion”⁷⁰ (1895)

Oct. 21st – In camp by the great Alberni Canal. A good blazing fire of driftwood, a log for a seat, and a knee for a table – thus we write. We left Alberni to-day, at about 2 p.m., for Ucluelet, Clayoquot and Ahousaht. A strong headwind made progress slow, and we only covered five miles before evening drew on and we decided to have supper and wait for the wind to fall.

During the meal the conversation turned upon the new law for putting a stop to the potlatches, and my Indian – Kay-hai-ce-tin, by the whites called Charley Hayricks – an intelligent fellow, told me that some of his people sarcastically proposed to stop potlatching of their own account if the white men would stop

⁷⁰ From Swartout, M. (1895). On the West Coast of Vancouver Island. *The Presbyterian Review*, 12(25), pp. 595-597. Written by Presbyterian Missionary Melvin Swartout (1851 – 1938).

drinking whiskey! He drew a comparison between the whiskey habit and the customs of giving “potlatches,” and remarked that it was the whiskey that was killing the Indian – not the potlatch. One of the Alberni chiefs, last Saturday, spoke to me in the same strain. “Don’t come to me,” he said, in a tone of withering scorn, “about whiskey. Indians don’t make whiskey; Indians make dry salmon. Burn the whiskey houses if you want us to stop drinking.”

As to the recent “Potlatch Prohibition Law,” there is a great deal of discussion among the Indians. The old men, in especial, are very bitter at the interference with their customs. They have “cast their bread upon the waters” in former days and now, in old age, look for the return from the potlatches given by younger men. One old man counted up some twenty or thirty dollars he annually received through the potlatches – and he did not suppose the great queen would *compensate* him to that extent if she prohibited the give-away feasts. Instead of being “only an Indian,” had he been a *white* liquor dealer, he might have some hope of success in protesting against the “Prohibition” – and, at least, claim compensation.

“Subversive to fruitful industry”⁷¹ (1895)

Just beyond Fort Rupert Feast House stood a rude wooden swelling, over the doorway of which was a legend painted on a piece of board by a Victoria sign artist, in these suggestive words:

“Wa-ki-tish gave away property to the amount of 2,000 blankets in 1875, and has taken the place of Fat Joe as Chief.”

A blanket is the unit of value all along the coast, and bears about the same relationship to the commerce of the mountains as the beaver skin did for many years at the more easterly posts of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Therefore, every Indian on the coast has a clear notion of the sacrifice involved in the purchase of this particular chief-ship, when he is told what this inscription sets forth.

It is not likely that Wa-ki-tish gave away more than 100 blankets, the balance of his gift consisting of rifles, fishing tackle, boots and shoes, soda biscuits, pickles, patent medicines and other store-bought luxuries, the value of which has been calculated into bed coverings.

Apart from the reward which his generosity merited, I think it was eminently proper that a man with such a distinguished Indian cognomen should supercede any chief with the plebeian name of Fat Joe.

This giving away of blankets and other articles of use and ornament is called a “potlatch,” and is at once the chief social characteristic of the coast Indians, and the curse of that country. An ambitious Indian will slave and starve himself for years, he will carry his wife and daughter into open prostitution, he will consider no hardship or deprivation too great, in order that he may accumulate enough money to give a big “potlatch”. Then he is voted a chief, a great man, and a “hyas tyee”. The most exalted

⁷¹ From AMONG COAST INDIANS. (1895, October 30). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 6.

object in life has been achieved. Henceforth, he has nothing to live for but the enjoyment of his great honors and the memory of his triumph.

The potlatch is really a remarkable custom, and all the more so when it is borne in mind that the coast Indians are exceedingly grasping and selfish. On the day fixed for the event, the would-be chief gathers all his friends about him, and, mounting a high rostrum, begins a speech. This oration has been known to last as long as five hours, but, with a lively expectation of the joyful termination, his auditors exhibit great attention and patience. They raise no objection to the sickening egotism of the speaker, who talks for the most part about his own accomplishments and the heroic deeds of his ancestors – all of which must be taken with a liberal discount for cash. They listen, with one eye on the speaker and the other on the presents.

At the end of the harangue, the blankets, shotguns, clothing and soda biscuits are scattered among the multitude. Everybody comes in for something. I know not why it is, but it is true that all modern potlatches have been marked by generous showers of soda biscuits. In the last demonstration of this kind at Alert Bay, 25 large wooden boxes of this staple were used. [...]

It is not known that any other Indians in the world have a custom like this, and it will probably soon be unknown in British Columbia; for at the last session of the Dominion Parliament a law was passed making the potlatch an illegal act, punishable by fine or imprisonment. It should be suppressed, as being subversive to fruitful industry, a course of immorality, and woeful waste of means. To pass the law, however, is very easy; but in that vast territory it cannot be carried into full effect for years to come.

“A dead letter”⁷² (1895)

Hon. Sir MACKENZIE BOWELL moved the second reading of Bill (G) “An Act further to amend the Indian Act”. He said: I have a minute of the amendments, and perhaps it would be just as well that I should give them to the House now. [...] It has been found that section 114 of the Act as it stands is insufficient to prevent the holding of Indian festivals such as the Potlatch or Tamanawas. The late Chief Justice of British Columbia expressed the opinion that it would be difficult to convict under it. It has been held that the mere designation of the festival or dance, such as the Potlatch or Tamanawas, is not sufficient for the conviction of an Indian or other person engaging or assisting in celebrating it, but that what is done thereat, which constitutes the offence, must likewise be described. As there is a similar dance to the Potlatch celebrated by the Indian bands in the Northwest Territories, known as Omas-ko-sim-moo-work or “grass dance,” commonly known as [the] “Giving away dance,” and there are, no doubt, Indian celebrations of the same character elsewhere, all of which consist of the giving away, parting with, or exchanging of large quantities of personal effects, sometimes all that the participants own, and it is considered

⁷² From Dominion of Canada. (1895). Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada, 1895 : fifth session, seventh Parliament. Ottawa: S. E. Dawson. The extract transcribed is from a debate on May 27, 1895, regarding amendments to the Indian Act.

better to prohibit all giving-away festivals, as they are conducive of extravagance, and cause much loss of time and the assemblage of large numbers of Indians, with all the usual attendant evils. [...]

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD (B.C.) – [...] With regard to the Potlatch and the Tamanawas, the government cannot possibly stop these, for this reason: that all around the coast the Indians at the villages have these dances, and the government have not police all over the country, and they will never have police at these points. The Act will be, in a great measure, a dead letter in British Columbia, where those dances are held. Even in Victoria it will be difficult to stop them, but out in the country it will be impossible to prevent them. I think the government should not pass a bill which will be a dead letter.

“A troublesome question”⁷³ (1895)

MONTHLY REPORT, SEPTEMBER 1895

[To] A. W. Vowell Esq., Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Victoria.

Sir – Suring this month I have traveled 883 miles whilst visiting the Indians of a part of this [North-West Coast Indian] Agency. [...]

On this trip I visited the Bella Coola Indian settlement and found the people well and seemingly contented. I explained to them the amendment of the Indian Act respecting the potlatch &c.

There are four bands at the south end of this Agency which cling to the practice of potlatching; these are [the] Bella Coola, Kunsquet, Tallion and [illegible]. These four bands meet at one place or another and practice the potlatch, and as they claim have a good time together during the winter months, and do no harm.

These Indians beg hard for the continued privilege of celebrating what they call the “modern potlatch,” differing from the old style potlatch in that the wild heathen dances of old time are left out of it, and only such dancing as conduces to their amusement is indulged in.

They argue that they have already given up all their ancient customs except the simple potlatch, and claim that until we can give them some other popular kind of amusement, we should not punish them for practicing the only amusement that is left to them.

They also claim that as yet the Indian has no other incentive to hard work and saving habit except the ambition to potlatch to the people, and thus gain distinction, and at the same time help the old and destitute members of those tribes with food and clothing.

There is much truth in this last claim. I have instructed them in accordance with the views expressed by your letters upon the subject of the potlatch. [...]

⁷³ From Todd, C. (1895). In GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING STEPS TO CURTAIL POTLATCH AMONG THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. RG10, Volume number: 3631, Microfilm reel number: C-10110, File number: 6244-G. Item ID number 2060800. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada. Charles Todd, Indian Agent, was dead by 1949, when his niece published an article about him in a B.C. newspaper.

MONTHLY REPORT, OCTOBER 1895

[To] A. W. Vowell Esq., Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Victoria.

Sir – On the first day of this month I started from Echo Cove by canoe up the Naas River and continued as far as any Indians reside, about fifty miles. [...] Upon visiting Kitlach-damax, the furthest up and largest settlement, I called together the Indians at the house of Chief Scolam and explained to them the meaning of the law respecting the potlatch. The chief and all the people expressed disappointment at my words and at the law, having, they stated, been informed by Government officers at Victoria very recently that the law was good and the Indians may continue the potlatch. The same statement was made to me at Kitwint-shelth meetings at Kitangalaa meeting and at Kilax meeting.

Certain Indians, late delegates to Victoria who attended each of these meetings, called by me, certified to the correctness of this statement.

The chiefs and people told me that they desired friendliness and lawfulness and the protection of Government, but that the law against their potlatch was wrong and would not be obeyed by them, that they had all prepared themselves as usual for giving potlatches this next winter, and would do so even with a certainty of imprisonment for it.

They argued as others elsewhere have that the custom is good for the Indian and their only amusement, that it is the only old custom practiced by them now and will do no harm to anyone if they are let alone. At each village the speakers asked me to kindly send their words to the Government and then, they thought, all would be well, that if the Missionaries and Christian Indians would let them alone, there would be no trouble. They also assured me that the chiefs would see to it that no trouble arose at any of their potlatch festivals, which would not take place until the month of February.

These Naas River heathens claim for the potlatch all the virtues that the Tallion nation claims for it, but they are much more defiant and determined in their own ways than the Tallion people.

This is the most difficult part of the district in which to carry out the law against the potlatch, by reason of its inaccessibility at the time this law will be set at defiance. These Indians know the difficulties of enforcing law amongst them during the winter months, and would be sure to resist law officers going in there at that time of the year, or lese refuse and neglect to obey a summons to attend a court elsewhere until the winter is over.

This is a troublesome question on the upper Naas River, and [it] will be difficult to handle unless the provincial authorities sanction an attempt to enforce this law.

It would be folly for the Justices of the Peace at the river to try to enforce the law against the potlatch during the winter months, further than to receive information against breaches of the law.

“An irresponsible party”⁷⁴ (1895)

COWICHAN AGENCY, INDIAN OFFICE

Quamichan, B.C., October 21, 1895

Sir, I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th inst. enclosing a copy of a letter from the Reverend C. M. Tate to several clauses in which I take exception, as they are palpable misstatements of facts.

In clause 1 the rev. gentleman states that “before these social gatherings come to an end there is quarreling ... or whiskey is introduced and there is fighting”. I have seen more of these gatherings than Mr. Tate has ever done, and I never saw or heard of this quarreling; indeed it is constantly remarked by parties visiting a potlatch that no other people could meet in such numbers as these Indians do with less friction occurring, and whiskey is scarcely ever introduced; occasionally some young Indian may get liquor outside from a white man, but the public feeling of the whole gathering is against him, and he is invariably given up to the authorities.

The aged and infirm are not always left out, as articles are often lent to them when they cannot attend, and anything owing to a deceased person is given to his or [her] nearest relatives.

With regard to the “destruction of property,” Mr. Tate is quite aware, if he knows anything of a potlatch, that the “shreds of blankets” of which he speaks are all used by the women, being woven by them with the hair of the mountain goat into the large and heavy rugs or quilts so much [valued] by Indians.

With regard to “All manner of evil perpetrated under cover of the potlatch, especially immorality of the worst kind,” I would suggest that the reverend gentleman ought at least to define what some of these evils and immorality are, as he seems to be so well posted on this subject, of which others know little or nothing.

I would also remind you that wherever the missionaries have been most successful in their self-denying efforts, it has not been by appealing to the arm of the law to “stamp out” the old Indian customs, giving them nothing in return. It would appear from Mr. Tate’s letter that his mission labors will prove of no avail unless assisted by the law to stamp out an “abomination” which in other missions has been successfully done away with by the teaching of the missionaries before there was any law on the subject.

Mr. Tate, being an irresponsible party, advises putting the law in force “firmly & kindly” with the further advice to the Indians to go and pay their debts, as he calls them, like white men. He knows perfectly well that Indians do this for anything purchased, but that these debts (if so called) were contracted in public, and according to all Indian customs they must be paid in public, or not at all.

After this advice the reverend gentleman goes on to make a statement which is utterly false. He states that I told the Indians to go on with their potlatch “and no

⁷⁴ From Lomas, W. H. (1895). In GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING STEPS TO CURTAIL POTLATCH AMONG THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. RG10, Volume number: 3631, Microfilm reel number: C-10110, File number: 6244-G. Item ID number 2060800. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada. William Henry Lomas died in 1899.

one would interfere with them,” and that “before going to Lomas the same Indians went to Mr. Bate, J.P. Nanaimo”. I beg to state that the Indians who went to Mr. Bate were not the same who came to me, also that I yesterday showed the copy of Mr. Tate’s letter to Mr. Bate, and that Mr. Bate assures me that he never advised the Indians to put their blankets &c., into a canoe and deliver them to the parties to whom they belonged, knowing that according to all Indian custom they had to be returned in public, but that he did advise Chief Jim to go to Victoria and see you, asking that the Nanaimo Band might be allowed to have one last potlatch to wind up their affairs. On Mr. Bates’ advice I showed the letter to Chief Constable Stewart, who has had over thirty years’ experience with Indians, that I might have his opinion on what I consider Mr. Tate’s hasty and thoughtless memento, as to quarreling, drinking, immorality &c. at potlatches.

Mr. Stewart states that the letter is full of misstatements – “That there is no quarreling at potlatches as stated,” “That there is less immorality at them than might occur in any village where there was no potlatch,” “That there is less drinking at a potlatch than at other times,” “That in his opinion the Tamanawas gatherings where wounding of living, and mutilation of dead bodies takes place ought to be at once stopped, but that to suddenly interfere with the simple dances and potlatches of this Agency was very unwise,” particularly as they are now dying out.

With regard to Mr. Tate’s formal and personal charge against myself, I would state that some days before his letter was written I assured him that I had not told the Nanaimo Indians to “go on with their potlatch and no one would interfere with them”. I must therefore decline to have, in future, any communication with the reverend gentleman unless it is in writing.

I beg also to state that years before Mr. Tate did anything for Indians, I had in public and private advised the young men to avoid getting entangled in the meshes of the potlatch, which I believed then, as I do now, does not tend to their advancement, and I claim to have done my utmost to elevate the people under my care, possibly not in the manner which Mr. Tate would wish, since I am proud to see that my efforts have not been entirely unsuccessful; I do not claim credit myself, for I have always been strongly supported by my white neighbors and by the Roman Catholic Missionaries of the Agency, and today the majority of them will compare favorably with those of any other [Agency].

I would strongly endorse your circular letter of the 4th ult. [...] as I consider that great care should be taken in enforcing the provisions of the Act, and I quite agree with the remarks of Chief Constable Stewart when he says it would be unwise to strictly enforce the law preventing these gatherings until something has been devised to take their place, as actions of this kind must result in bringing about a bad feeling against the authorities, particularly as the potlatch is dying out, and there are only one or two to take place, and the custom will be over.

I think I need not assure you that I did not make the statement which Mr. Tate put in my mouth when the Indians were at my office. I again explained the law to them, and explained to them that even if I did not prosecute, the Provincial Police

might do so, and that should I hear of any serious sickness, or epidemic of any kind, I should take steps at once to stop or break up the gathering.

I yesterday saw Chief Jim Sit-Kah-met, and he assured me that when his friends had arrived the whole gathering would be over in four days, and that his young men would assist the authorities in preventing the introduction of intoxicants, or anything likely to cause trouble.

With regard to these gatherings in general, any person acquainted with the Indians would assure you that Mr. Tate's remarks are, to say the least, untrue. The chief fear I always have is not the drinking, fighting, or immorality, but that when a large number stop for a length of time in one village, some epidemic might break out and be spread over the whole Agency..

I ought also to state that the Nanaimo Indians assured me that this was the last gathering of the kind they wished to hold, that the old man "Jim" had been accumulating blankets for years, which according to customs of the natives have to be returned in public, that the young men have no idea of continuing the custom.

I propose to be in Nanaimo and neighborhood while the meeting is going on, and will report further on the subject.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. H. Lomas, Indian Agent.

[To] A. W. Vowell, Esquire, Indian Supt., Victoria.

The arrest of Bill Uslick⁷⁵ (1896)

INDIAN OFFICE, NEW WESTMINSTER, B.C., 24 JANUARY 1896

[To] A. W. Vowell Esq., Indian Superintendent, Victoria

Sir, I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letter, [...] [and] also [your] telegram, re[garding the] potlatch. I intend going to Chilliwack on Tuesday next, and will make inquiry into Potlatch given by Bill Uslick. Should I find the circumstances warrant, I will take the necessary steps to have him presented.

Referring to [your] telegram, when in Vancouver yesterday, Andrew, a False Creek Indian, told me they were making arrangements to have a potlatch and dance at False Creek. I told Andrew that Potlatching and dancing was contrary to law, and that if they held it that I would punish them. I presume it was after this conversation that the Chief wired to you.

About a week ago the Chief at Capilano informed me that one of his Indians was getting ready to hold a potlatch in February, and requested me to assist him to prevent it. I sent the Chief a letter the following day explaining the law on

⁷⁵ Devlin, F.. and Reed, H. (1896). In GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING STEPS TO CURTAIL POTLATCH AMONG THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. RG10, Volume number: 3631, Microfilm reel number: C-10110, File number: 6244-G. Item ID number 2060800. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada. Written by Hayter Reed (1849 – 1936) and Frank Devlin, who died in May, 1903.

potlatching, and requested him to have it explained to all his people, and to inform them that if any of them disobeyed the law they would be punished. The False Creek Indians were also informed of the contents of this letter.

It is not my intention to deal too strict[ly] with these Indians under this head, but I feel no opportunity should be missed to discourage and prevent the holding of potlatches, and if one or two of the ringleaders who persist in still celebrating the potlatch are punished, I feel certain that the practice will be stopped.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

Frank Devlin, Indian Agent.

[RESPONSE FROM HAYTER REED]

Ottawa, 31st January 1896

Sir, with reference to the letter addressed you by Mr. Agent Devlin on the 22nd instant, and to that part of his letter of the 18th ultimo, forwarded by you to the Department on the 22nd ultimo, in regard to the holding of potlatches, &c., I have to inform you that the Department agrees with Mr. Devlin's opinion that the conviction and punishment of Bill Uslick would have a good effect and deter others from following his example; and if therefore Mr. Devlin is tolerably certain of securing a conviction it would, I think, be well to take proceedings against Uslick, unless he promises to obey the law in the future.

Your obedient servant,

Hayter Reed

Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.

[UPDATE BY FRANK DEVLIN]

INDIAN OFFICE, NEW WESTMINSTER, B.C., 3 FEBRUARY 1896

[To] A. W. Vowell Esq., Indian Superintendent, Victoria

Sir, I have the honor to report for your information that I returned from Chilliwack yesterday. I made inquiry into the reported celebration of potlatch and dance given by Bill Uslick, an Indian residing on Teachtew [?] Reserve. The festival lasted three days, [the] 11th, 12th and 13th of Jan., and was participated in by a large number of Indians, a large quantity of blankets, provisions, and in a few cases money having been given by Uslick to the Indians assembled, leaving himself and his wife positively destitute.

I issued a warrant for Uslick's arrest, and tried him on Saturday 1st inst., and sentenced him to two months imprisonment in the Provincial Jail. All the Indians in the District were at the Court, and with a very few exceptions feel that Uslick should not be interfered with for giving a potlatch. I explained to them that every Indian who went to the potlatch was liable to the same punishment as Uslick but as he was the principal offender, I would only punish him this time, but should a repetition occur, I would punish every Indian who was guilty. I feel certain the steps taken will have the effect of stopping the potlatch in Chilliwack. Bill Uslick is a bad Indian. It is he whom [illegible] Breed arrested, at the time Collinson was shot.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

Frank Devlin,

Indian Agent.

“The Indians would not stop it”⁷⁶ (1896)

New Westminster, B.C., 3 March 1896

MONTHLY REPORT OF FRANK DEVLIN, AGENT

For month ending 28th February 1896

[To] A. W. Vowell, Esq., Indian Superintendent, Victoria.

Sir, I have the honor to report for your information that during the past month I have been engaged in the usual routine work connected with this Agency. The potlatch question has been very much discussed by the Indians of this District during the past two months. The great majority of Indians of this Agency are opposed to potlatching, and I feel certain that if they are dealt with firmly, potlatching will soon be a thing of the past.

When inquiring into the potlatch given by Bill Uslick at Chilliwack recently, an Indian named Commodore [?], of Kultus Lake, and who is one of the most intelligent Indians on that Reserve, told me I could not stop potlatching, that the Indians would not stop it. I gave him, and all the other Indians present, to understand that they would have to stop it; otherwise that they would be punished severely.

After Bill Uslick was tried and sentenced to two months' imprisonment, Commodore came to me and said he did not believe before it was against the law to give a potlatch, that he only thought it was the priests who were trying to put it down, but now that he knew it was against the law, that potlatching would cease.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

Frank Devlin,

Indian Agent.

“A plea for potlatches”⁷⁷ (1896)

Amos Gosnell, William Jeffrey and Billy Williams, three intelligent and representative chiefs of the Naas River Indians, reached Victoria yesterday by the arrival of the Boscowitz on business fraught with peculiar importance to not only their important tribe, but to all the native races of British Columbia. Their mission is to place before the public the Indians' side of the story so far as potlatches in particular are concerned, and – such action being necessary – to test in the highest courts of the land the constitutionality of that portion of the Dominion statute relating to Indian affairs wherein the holding of “potlatches” or “gift feasts” is declared illegal and prohibited under heavy penalties. It is the intention of the delegation, who come as the accredited representatives of 153 chiefs of the northern

⁷⁶ From Devlin, F.. (1896). In GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING STEPS TO CURTAIL POTLATCH AMONG THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. RG10, Volume number: 3631, Microfilm reel number: C-10110, File number: 6244-G. Item ID number 2060800. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada. Frank Devlin died in May, 1903.

⁷⁷ From A PLEA FOR POTLATCHES. (1896, February 20). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

river nations, to retain legal advice this morning and forthwith wait upon Mr. A. W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia, with the object of presenting the following petition:

“We your humble petitioners, being a deputation from our people living on the Naas River, beg that you will take such steps as will prevent clergymen and missionaries from interfering with our people in the holding of potlatches, as Rev. J. A. McCullough, of Naas River, has, we believe, unduly interfered with us in our holding or giving of potlatches. The holding of potlatches has been a custom prevalent among our people for many generations, and a method we have of showing our good will toward one another, and we believe that it is our just right just as much as it is the right of our white brethren to make presents to each other.

“We assure you that our potlatches are conducted in the most orderly manner, and we expect to keep and to observe the laws of our great and good mother, Queen Victoria, whom we all love. We not only feel very keenly this interference, but we know that it is the opinion of many intelligent and good white men that the clergymen’s meddling in our affairs is very often uncalled for, and creates a feeling against them among us which prevents the accomplishment of any amount of good that might be realized to our advantage. By answering our supplications we, as in duty bound, will ever pray.”

This statement of the case was drafted as long ago as the 30th of last August, when the Northern tribes were notified of the changes in the Indian Act prohibiting the potlatch. Since then, however, the authorities of the North have been energetic in the enforcement of the new law, hence the presence of Amos Jeffrey and his two companions in Victoria. Matters were brought to an issue so far as the Naas men are concerned, a little more than a month ago, when a potlatch was held about one mile above Rev. Mr. McCullough’s place. The clergyman, who is also a justice of the peace, promptly summoned six of the tribe including Scotteen, the head chief. The latter with Stephen Light, Stephen Gransey and Nis-kit-iskh, was according to the story of Amos and the two Williams, held prisoner in a dark cabin for four days prior to any court being held, and each of the Indians summoned was then fined \$70 and costs. The reverend magistrate, as they understood him, gave the option to the prisoners of paying these fines or going to jail at Nanaimo for one year, the tribe at the same time to pay \$1,000 for each man. It is a result of the apprehension, trial and sentence referred to, that the lead men of the northern tribes gathered in council and decided to send their representatives to Victoria to invoke the aid of the law. The tribes interested have plenty of money at [their] command, and their delegates have authority to spend liberally in order to accomplish the object of their mission.

It was in the spring of last year that the Dominion government decided that the potlatch must follow its contemporaneous festival, “the tamanawas,” into the list of aboriginal celebrations proscribed by Canadian law, and the agents of the Indian department lost no time in notifying their wards in British Columbia accordingly. From the first it has been questioned whether the prohibition would be or could be enforced, for the potlatch has ever been the joy and delight of the Western Indian’s soul, and the prospect that he would relinquish its pleasures without a struggle were

not of the brightest hue. The “tamanawas” is still practiced far up North, at the heads of the rivers, in the interior mountains – anywhere remote from civilization and beyond the reach of the officers of the law. And so doubtless it will be with the potlatch – less barbarous by far.

“In reply to the plausible article”⁷⁸ (1896)

In reply to the plausible article in yesterday’s *Colonist* on the above named subject [of potlatches], I beg leave to state that the potlatch is by far the most degrading heathen rite known to the Indians of the Pacific coast. I make the above assertion after having lived over a quarter of a century almost exclusively among the Indians, and covering a territory from Alaska to and within the bounds of Washington State.

In the first place I can say, without fear of contradiction, that the Indians will never become trustworthy citizens, so long as they are allied to the potlatch.

In the second place, the nice plots of land which they hold as reserves throughout the country will remain dormant so long as the potlatch exists. Ask the agents who are the most civilized, and who are the best people in every sense of the word, and they will not point out the men who clamor for the continuance of the potlatch.

As far as the white men are concerned who are friendly to the potlatch, they are either ignorant of the evils connected with it, or are receiving a revenue from it through sales of goods to the Indians.

PIONEER.

“A letter on the other side of the question”⁷⁹ (1896)

Victoria, B.C., Feb. 25th, 1896.

[To] *G. E. Corbould, Esq., M.P. Ottawa:*

Dear Sir – Noticing in the *Colonist* that a petition by three Naas River Indians, and headed “A Plea for Potlatches,” had been forwarded to you, I beg leave to call your attention to a letter on the other side of the question, which also appeared in the above-named paper on the 21st inst., not, however, before the editor had taken the liberty of cutting out the most important clause. Now, it is a well-known fact that the potlatch has an inherent principle which is antagonistic to civilization, and under its cover deeds of darkness and shame are perpetrated which would be an astonishment to the civilized world were they brought to light.

Let me give you a few pointers:

⁷⁸ From PIONEER. (1896, February 21). INDIAN POTLATCHES. *Daily Colonist*, p. 4. Missionary C. M. Tate (1852 – 1933) appears to have outed himself as the author of this letter in a letter published in *The Province* on Feb. 29, 1896.

⁷⁹ From Tate, C. M. (1896, February 29). At the request. *The Province*, p. 4. Written by C. M. Tate (1852 – 1933).

There are in and about our cities, mining camps, sawmills, logging camps, and other places, a number of Indian women who are either voluntarily playing the harlot, or worse still, who have been coerced into that horrible position by their own fathers and husbands. The object has been the accumulation of money for the perpetuation of the "potlatch".

Many times we have seen those people returning to their villages with bales of blankets, tons of flour and biscuit and sugar. But they carried something else back with the, besides these thousands of dollars' worth of goods; and that which has done more than all other forces combined, to devastate the Indian villages of this land, viz. – disease.

We do not wonder at the traders taking the part of the Indians in their "plea for the potlatch," because there is money in it. Neither do we wonder at the missionaries seeking for its abolition, for it is they, who have to nurse these masses of corruption, and wash their purifying sores, in order to alleviate their awful sufferings.

Nor is it confined to the women; for, having played the harlot among the whites, they continue their profligacy among their own people, and God only knows where the matter will end.

What has become of the thousands of stalwart Hydahs, who once populated the Queen Charlotte Islands? Where are the large tribes of Bella Coolas, the Kimsquits and Tallioms, whose villages nestled amid the mountains on the Bentinck Arms?

In taking the census of the Government a few years ago, we found very few children indeed, and many of them were full of scrofulous disease. The very men who are sending this petition know that in one of the tribes on the Naas, a few years ago, there was not a single woman left. The Fort Ruperts and Laquiltos are going the same road.

Even now they are but a fraction of what they used to be. Then look at the Bella Bellas, the Tsimsheans and the Kits-a-maats, who long ago gave up the potlatch. They have built up well-ordered villages and are making comfortable homes for themselves and their families, and are becoming an educated, law-abiding, self-supporting people. There are missionaries at villages where the potlatch is still kept up, and what is the record? All kinds of barbarous practices, drunkenness and immorality, no desire to improve their homes or cultivate their lands, schools closed on account of the non-attendance of the children, general disorganization of mission work, and a spirit of enmity to the missionary who, after all, is their best friend. Besides all this we know of cases where they have squandered their all at a potlatch and are now being supported by the Government, whereas [previously] they had sufficient to keep them in independent comfort. The law is all right; the only fault we have to find is with its non-enforcement.

We would very much like to know the reason why it has not been enforced. There have been potlatches in all the coast agencies since the law was enacted, but all the agents – except Mr. F. Devlin of the Fraser Agency – have shown the utmost indifference. In fact, reports from the mission field assure us that the Indians have gone to greater extremes than ever since the potlatch law was passed, as though they

would defy the Government. In fact, some of them have said that the Government cannot stop them.

Trusting that the Department will issue definite instructions for the vigorous enforcement of the law, and the suppression of this monster evil, I am, dear Sir,

Yours in behalf of civilization for the Indians,

C. M. TATE. *Methodist Missionary.*

“Utter folly”⁸⁰ (1896)

To the Editor – In your issue of the 29th ult., an open letter appears from, and at the request of, the Rev. C. M. Tate to Mr. G. E. Corbould, M.P., on the subject of Indian potlatches. On reading the letter an outsider might think that it would have been better had it been a private communication, but as the reverend gentleman wishes to be before the public, I suppose his letter is open to criticism.

The reverend gentleman wishes to make Mr. Corbould and the public believe that he is well-acquainted with the worst features of Indian life and of the “deeds of darkness and shame perpetrated under cover of an Indian potlatch;” that the potlatch is alone answerable for the decrease of the Indian population.

Anyone acquainted with the history of the aborigines of any country will see the utter folly of a statement of this kind. Will Mr. Tate, for the benefit of the public, answer any of the following questions?

1. What was the origin of the potlatch? Did it not originate after the Hudson’s Bay Co. came to the coast, and was it not suggested by them to take the place of a worse evil?

2. Will the reverend gentleman give the public some idea what he would propose to offer the Indians in exchange for the pleasure they all experience at these gatherings?

3. Can he conscientiously say that the state of things of which he speaks forms any feature of the potlatch of to-day?

4. Will he contradict the police when they say that there is seldom a case of drunkenness at a potlatch?

5. Can he claim that we have any just right to prevent Indians meeting together, even if it does interfere with “mission work”?

6. Will he state that the givers of the last two potlatches in this neighborhood (viz. on Songhees and Nanaimo) impoverished themselves or are left dependent on the Government for support?

7. Do not white people give weddings and Christmas presents often to an extent that they can ill-afford?

Now, Mr. Editor, I am not writing this in favor of the potlatch, for I believe Indians could put their time to better use, and in these large gatherings there is always a fear of contagious disease being spread, but I am opposed to statements

⁸⁰ From Dwyer, W. (1896, March 21). THE INDIAN POTLATCH. *The Province*, p. 14. Written by William Dwyer (1870 – 1948).

which are not true and to humbug generally, especially when written over the name of a missionary.

I have seen a few potlatches, and I must say that I have come to the conclusion that the same number of white people could not live together for a week or two and settle up their affairs in a more peaceable and orderly manner than the Indians of this coast do. The potlatches of the present day seem to take more the part of a country fair. Friends and relatives living far apart meet together – debts are paid and presents made, besides which boats, canoes, [and] cattle are bought and sold, and store debts of deceased relatives are often provided for.

Visitors constantly remark about the orderly manner in which these gatherings are conducted, but of course they are not like Mr. Tate behind the scenes, and do not see the “barbarous practices, drunkenness and immorality” which he does.

In conclusion, I would say that I believe the majority of the people of this province are opposed to any forcible interference with the harmless customs of the natives, knowing as we all do that these customs are rapidly dying out.

Cowichan, B.C.

WILLIAM DWYER.

“Scandalous and untruthful”⁸¹ (1896)

To the Editor – In your issue of February 28th, you publish a letter from Rev. C. M. Tate, who signs himself Methodist Missionary, and as from the position that gentleman holds, what he says may have weight with those who are ignorant of the nature of “potlatches,” I trust that you will, in the interests of liberty and truth, give me space to criticize his statements.

I have probably as much experience as Mr. Tate in Indian life, and I have seen many “potlatches,” but when he states “the potlatch has an inherent principle which is antagonistic to civilization, and under its cover deeds of darkness and shame are perpetrated which would be an astonishment to the civilized world were they brought to light,” he gives utterance to a scandalous and untruthful libel.

He states that around our mining camps, etc., there are Indian women prostituting themselves for the accumulation of money for the perpetuation of the “potlatch”. I am living where a few years ago there was little else in the shape of humanity than Indians, and where now there are many mining camps, and I say that there is no truth in this statement. By what method of reasoning Mr. Tate comes to the conclusion that diseases are the result of the “potlatch,” I know not. I know that they exist, but always attributed them to the immorality of the whites.

Mr. Tate enquires what has become of the Hydahs, the Bella Coolas, etc. This would take too much space to answer, but just to show how uopinions differ, I heard Chief Tonasket, of the Colvilles, at a potlatch held at the foot of Osoyoos Lake about eleven years ago attribute the decay of the Okanagans to the fact that Chief

⁸¹ From Sidley, R. G. (1896, March 21). THE INDIAN POTLATCH. *The Province*, p. 14. Written by Richard Graves Sidley (1855 – 1924), a rancher perhaps best known today for naming Anarchist Mountain.

Scoolatkin had adopted Methodism. It is, however, a demonstrable fact that the decay of the tribes mentioned is not due to the “potlatch”.

When Mr. Tate closed his letter hoping the Government will use force to suppress the potlatch (an Indian meeting harmless in practice and Christian in principle), he evidently forgot two things. One was, that it is not so very long ago that Methodists and other nonconformists were forcibly prevented from gathering together. The other is that the whole spirit of Christianity as taught by its founder is opposed to compulsion.

Now, Mr. Editor, as I am aware that the only mead given to those who take the part of the ignorant and oppressed is unmitigated abuse, I will conclude with expressing the wish that those who think with Mr. Tate will act like St. Paul, who at one time was very bitter against the truth.

Osoyoos, B.C.

R. G. SIDLEY.

“Misleading, mischievous and dangerous”⁸² (1896)

Victoria, B.C., Monday, March 2, 1896.

Mr. Helmcken – Last Saturday, we, your clients, discovered that Mr. Tate, Methodist minister, had written something about the potlatch in *The Province*. From what we understand of it, Mr. Tate’s words are based on assumptions. Assumptions are the weapons of busybodies, and may be misleading, mischievous and dangerous. Mr. Tate assumes that the property taken by Indian women from the cities to their home are the proceeds of immorality, whereas they are mainly the earnings of these women at canneries, for sewing, and gained at trading. He also assumes that all this property thus acquired is wasted in potlatching, whereas most of it is used by the families of the women who earned it, and only what can well be spared is given away to be returned hereafter with usury. The potlatch is in no way responsible for immorality.

Mr. Tate asks where certain stalwart Haidas are. We answer, they are dead. They died of small-pox and measles. They did not die of potlatch⁸³. The other Indians mentioned by Mr. Tate went the same way. We might readily assume, from the opposition which some missionaries make to the potlatch, and the eagerness with which they collect money from us when opportunity occurs, that the main object of all missionaries is to acquire control of our property and to apply it to suit their own views; but our experience with other missionaries who are obviously sincere in the doctrines which they teach, lead us to conclude such an assumption would be mischievous.

A minister in our country, who is also a Justice of the Peace, punished with imprisonment and penance some Indians who had been at a potlatch. We are told here that he had assumed jurisdiction which did not belong to his office. His action

⁸² From Gosnell, A. (1896, March 14). We give the same prominence. *The Province*, p. 3. I’ve been unable to find a date of death for Amos Gosnell, or mentions of him past 1915.

⁸³ As seen in another report in this collection, at least one of the episodes of smallpox is thought to have been contracted at a government “potlatch”.

might have caused disturbance, hurt, and even death to the Indians concerned. His was a dangerous assumption. We like people who are sure of their words before they speak, and who are sure of their powers before they act.

We have to leave by the steamer *Danube* to-day, with great disappointment and heavy hearts, as there may be trouble ahead of us.

We want you to put our words in the same paper which published Mr. Tate's letter, and let the white people know our minds.

(Signed) AMOS GOSNELL, for himself and associates.

“An undue infringement by the State”⁸⁴ (1896)

To the Editor – Through your instrumentality, many abuses, many grievances of the weak, much oppression and many infringements of individual rights have been exposed, public sympathy enlisted, and at least to that degree the burdens lightened. This may have cost you some “thirty” subscribers, but what is that in comparison to having earned public esteem and confidence, and the yet greater reward, the satisfaction of having done your duty?

I desire to draw attention to what I believe [is] an undue infringement by the State of the rights of the individual. We have, I believe, a law prohibiting “potlatch,” and the first conviction under the Act has been recorded from the Fraser River country. Now, the word “potlatch” simply means “to give,” to “grant”; and it has been a custom, and in the opinion of nearly all who have seen and witnessed this practice, a most beautiful custom, handed down from immemorial times, among the aboriginals of this country. Why was this right of giving, what rightfully belonged to them, taken from them?

Is there any power on earth that can interfere in such a question? Yet we have legal cobblers in our midst who seem not to have shrunk from such a task. We sound our praise to the “Giver of all good things,” we have even got so far as to have this thanksgiving made on a national holiday, but woe betide the Indian, who in a practical way gives thanks “to the giver of all good things,” by helping his less fortunate brother. It would, indeed, be interesting, Mr. Editor, to learn at whose instigation, by what pressure this legislation was enacted; perhaps correspondence between the Department, Indian Agents and missionaries and any others who might have been busying themselves on behalf of the Indians could be laid before the House. Or perhaps the aboriginal himself has petitioned that a fatherly guard be placed on his charitable propensities.

The last potlatch of this district took place sometime in the beginning of November last. The chiefs from the southern part of Vancouver Island were here with many of their followers, and by the way, a fine-looking lot of men they were, stout, well-clad, and with a very comfortable-looking appearance; most liberal in their gifts to the poorer Indians of Nanaimo; food, clothing, blankets and money were freely given and most graciously received. One poor Nanaimo Indian, who has a very

⁸⁴ From POTLATCH. (1896, February 22). A LAW PROHIBITING “POTLATCH”. *The Province*, p. 16.

consumptive appearance and a large family to support, received quite a large roll of notes; it must have been considerably over one hundred dollars. What harm, what criminality can there be in thus cultivating the best element in their nature?

It seems to me as if here was an undue interference with the right of the individual which some of our law makers may, with advantage to themselves, credit to the community at large and profit as well as happiness to the Indian population, well have amended or expunged.

Nanaimo, B.C.

POTLATCH.

“To obtain our natural rights”⁸⁵ (1896)

Having interviewed the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Mr. A. W. Vowell, and also consulted with a city lawyer in regard to their complaint, the delegates of the Naas River Indians – Amos Gosnell, William Jeffrey and “Billy” Williams – have forwarded to Mr. G. E. Corbould, M.P., at Ottawa, the following petition:

“The undersigned, a delegation of Indian chiefs, in view of the hereditary right of our ancestry, would respectfully represent: That we were at the Indian Department in the city of Victoria this day at 11 o’clock. In an interview with Mr. Vowell, Indian Commissioner, we were informed by an explanation of how that any person giving a potlatch would be imprisoned for six months. It is the desire of the Indian department to civilize us, which meets with our approbation; but we were born Indians, educated according to the laws of our ancestry, and, as nature dictates to us, we enjoy their vested rights as an inheritance. We came to Victoria to obtain our natural rights.

“We see in this a contradictory state of affairs adorning your civilization. Churches are numerous; theatres are located in the various sections of the town; and saloons multiply in numbers; all of which are in conformity with your laws, consequently we wish to know whether the ministers of the gospel have annihilated the rights of white men in these pleasures leading to heaven and hell exactly in different directions. They have kindly forced us out, as we are ‘not in it’.

“In the difference of your wisdom, have we committed any offence against the Almighty God or civilized humanity by bestowing on our poor Indian brethren the pleasure of our hearts by donation of charity in token of friendship? If it is a sin against nature, or a damage to government, society or otherwise, we will yield with the kindest feeling to your imperial mandate.

“You have your Christmases, Fourths of July and 24th’s of May, all of which you celebrate without interference – *sine qua non*. Money is spent in squandrous profusion with no benefit to the poor of your race.

“We go to the entertainments of your theaters, and you charge us money for the privilege. We give our dances at which our guests are welcomed by the testimonial of donations, according to our custom – the inheritance of our fathers.

“If we wish to perform an act moral in its nature, with no injury or damage, and pay for it, no law in equity can divest us of such right.

⁸⁵ From A PLEA FOR THE POTLATCH. (1896, February 23). *Daily Colonist*, p. 7.

“We see the Salvation Army parade the streets of your city with music and drum; enchanting the down, leading wanderers, and helping the poor – by making him pay for all he gets.

“We are puzzled to know whether in the estimation of civilization we are human or fish on the tributaries of the Naas River, that the felicities of our ancestors should be denied us.

“Our lands and our fishing grounds are converted to other hands; licenses are imposed for fishing the waters of the White Crest Mountains, which we pay with pleasure, for such is your law, and we only ask in connection that our potlatches may meet with your approbation.

“We see in your graveyards the white marble and granite monuments which cost you money in testimony of your grief for the dead. When our people die we erect a large pole, call our people together, distribute our personal property with them in payment for their sympathy and condolence; comfort to us in the sad hours of our affliction. This is what is called a potlatch – the privilege denied us.

“It is a chimera that under the British flag slavery does not exist.

(Signed) WISE-AS-YOU.
SIMH-SAM.
NAAS-QUAH-SO.

Delegation of Naas River tribes who claim for the injunction on three towns \$15,000 yearly; a *pro rata* of \$5,000 to each town, payable every twelve months.

“From the inside”⁸⁶ (1896)

As an Indian who loves fair play and justice, I feel it my duty to place before the public, through the columns of your widely circulated newspaper, a few words on the question of the potlatch; and who is as capable of judging the custom or thoroughly understanding its features, good and bad, as [an] Indian who looks at it from the inside?

In the first place, writers argue that the government has no right to interfere with the ancestral rights of the Indian. That may be true so far as those rights and habits are innocent and harmless, but farther than that it is not true.

These writers do not know that the principle of the potlatch is unjust to many of our own race, and, at that, the very portion which is trying to adopt the customs of the white man, and respect our Queen and Government.

What would these men think of a custom that deprived city aldermen of their seal of office, power and influence because they would not profess themselves of a certain sect, or a custom that would unseat and forever bar out an influential member of government because he does not believe a certain creed? And yet this outrage we, who try to benefit by the civilization of the white man, are forced to bear as long as the potlatch exists. I might be the highest and most respected chief of this river, or

⁸⁶ From Derrick, T. (1896, May 29). THE POTLACH. *Daily Colonist*, p. 7. Written by Timothy Derrick, chief of Gitlaxt'aamiks. I find no mention of Chief Derrick after 1931 and believe him to have died prior to 1970.

this coast, and yet all my influence and honor, as dear to me as the birthright of any nobleman, [may] be snatched from me by the bribes of a potlatch, or series of potlatches. In the same way might go the hereditary title to my hunting and fishing grounds and my name, of which I am justly and pardonably proud, simply because I wish to live in civilization and law-abiding citizenship. Why, I ask, in the name of justice and British fair-play, should such a practice be tolerated, not to say defended, and how long shall we suffer this injustice?

The writers who have defended the potlatch will see that we complain not of what *seems* to them as an act of charity, but of the motive of this act. I say seems, for it is charitable only in appearance; in reality, it is a bribe. The Indian is paid so many blankets or guns simply to shut his mouth against the wrongs to be perpetrated by the usurper, and not by any means as an act of charity. We have no word for charity or benevolence in our language; these ideas come from the whites. If the thousands of dollars were really given away to needy Indians, with the idea only of helping them, who would not applaud it? But who dare applaud bribery?

Then, too, many think the potlatcher is a rich man, and by his gifts keeps the poor from starving. Thus it has been represented by deputations from our river, but such representations are utterly false, as are also the suppositions. The potlatcher is not necessarily a rich man; true, he sometimes accumulates hundreds of dollars' worth of goods, but at the same time he runs into debt to his friends, to the neighboring stores, and that for years, but why not, when he can capture a prize so much esteemed? The Indian would stake life itself on this attempt, and all sense of morality too often vanishes before it. He does not give goods to the poor unless first their fees have been paid, and in event of failure to do this they are simply dropped, and, if a chief, subjected to public ridicule, to avoid which the old chief would sacrifice even the purity of his daughters. If unable to raise the money, it only remains for a younger, thriftless, and often meaner man, by bribery to take his place.

In the excitement of the potlatch season, the poor and indigent are often left behind, in the dead of winter, to look after fuel and fire as best they can, or to become objects of charity for the nearest civilized village. On the contrary, I challenge anyone to produce an instance of this negligence among Christianized Indians. Potlatchers are not wealthy philanthropists or public benefactors by any means. I have often seen them come into the store after the potlatch is over to beg food for their suffering families. They had hundreds a few days before, now all are gone, but what of it, if now they are but accounted great? No wonder, then, that we who have relatives in such bondage are more than anxious to see them liberated by the enforcement of the present law.

Our personal safety is also bound up in this question. The readers of your paper know that at different times gunboats and forces have been called at the government's expense to suppress the riots of the potlatch. The danger is not over until the evil is prohibited. The merest oversight on the part of the potlatcher when giving property according to the grade of chieftainship is almost sure to cause a tribal feud.

One of your writers asks, "who instituted the petition against the potlatch?" If he will write me I can give and will give the particulars. Suffice it to say, it originated

among the Indians on this river, and two of the deputation now so active in waiting upon the government officials to remove the present legislation, were then active in suppressing the potlatch.

In conclusion I beg to ask – How in the name of common sense are we to save our race as long as the potlatch exists? Only in civilized villages where we imitate the habits of the white man are there any signs of permanency. Only about the modern homes where matrimony and motherhood are respected do we see happy, healthy children sporting in the streets – the hope and joy of the Indian. In the interests of five hundred Christianized Indians, sixty per cent., at least, of the population on this river; in the name of justice to those of us who try to advance; in the name of fair play to those of us who are robbed of their birthright, lands and hunting grounds, and in the name of mercy and hope for a race still striving for existence, I ask that every lover of humanity not only leave the law as it is, but use all their power and influence to enforce it.

TIMOTHY DERRICK.

Naas River, B.C.

“The greatest hindrance to his work”⁸⁷ (1896)

This custom [of the potlatch] peculiarly belongs to the native tribes of the North Pacific Coast. Viewed outwardly it has the appearance of a harmless mode of entertainment, but only those who are acquainted with its inward features can tell how predominant is the evil. As a relic of heathenism it holds a determined front against all civilizing and Christianizing influences. Before the coming of the white man to these Western shores, it existed with the many other savage practices, itself being the medium for the operation of the various crafts upon the superstitious minds of the people, and at the present time the missionary meets in it the greatest hindrance to his work of evangelizing.

To enlist the sympathy of public opinion, the Indian of to-day clothes it with a sort of civilized garb by introducing games and amusements indulged in by our own race, and in this way endeavors to point out to us his claim to like privileges with ourselves. Then again, the usage is accepted in the simple definition of the term, which means “to give,” and that it is nothing more than the expression of generosity on the part of the giver to his tribe; but were the public more acquainted with what lies back of this giving, and understood the motive of the potlatcher and the end in view, the right kind of sympathy would be shown by putting down the evil.

It might be well to say here that potlatching is a violation of our Canadian law, and in some instances the offence has been followed up and the offender punished. In one case the Indian rebelled, and his so-called grievance was taken up by a few pretending to guard the rights and liberties of the red man. Denunciation followed, and our missionaries have been subjected to unwise and undue criticism. Reference is made particularly to Rev. J. B. McCulloch, a devoted worker of the Church

⁸⁷ From Stone, W. J. (1896, August 22). HOME MISSION WORK. *Daily Colonist*, p. 8. Written by William J. Stone (c. 1863 - 1937), Methodist missionary.

missionary society among the Naas River Indians, and to Rev. C. M. Tate, the Methodist missionary to the East Coast tribes of Vancouver Island. Further, it has been charged to missionaries in general that they have been seeking the filthy lucre. It is almost needless to add that these apparently interested ones in the freedom for the potlatches belong to a class themselves who derive no small gain thereby, and it is to be expected these followers of Demetrius will use every effort to declaim this Diana among the Indians.

As missionaries we have treated with silence the several newspaper articles on this supposed grievance, relying upon the sound judgment of better-disposed minds, to whom we appeal for confidence in our endeavors to instruct in the Truth. We also look to such for assistance in breaking down this greatest barrier to knowledge and advancement for the Indians of British Columbia.

We will now take up the question itself and will try to show:

First – its effect among the Indians, socially, morally, and intellectually. First, we have the social aspect. It is the potlatch which maintains the present social condition of the Indian as it was in the past. Each tribe has its hereditary chief, but there are numerous sub-chiefs who hold their positions or rank by the number of potlatches they give. Were it not for the feeling of pride that it fosters, it would not be long before this custom would cease to exist. But the spirit of rivalry encouraged, by which one vies with the other to gain the highest point of favor in the estimation of the tribe, makes up in interest for any material loss to the potlatcher, even though he be beggared and also compelled to borrow money from his friends who will have to wait his leisure or his pleasure, as the case may be, in refunding the loan.

It is held that no better means can be employed by the natives to maintain peace and friendship among the several tribes and families, but this is an open question, for we have noticed that although there is a general mingling of minds and sympathies, yet no sooner is the event over than the old animosities invariably return.

There is another way we might view this social side of the question. It encourages indolence. It has been observed that only the thrifty, industrious Indian will give a potlatch. By using every economy he gathers in \$200, \$300, \$400 and even \$500, which he, no doubt freely on his part, presents to his, or it may be some other tribe that he has called. Then gather in this indolent class who live upon his bounty for a week or more and in the end have divided among them the hard earnings of the poor native. We know of one Indian in our own experience who has given away over \$2,000 in this manner.

Then the plea comes to us that the Indian money is round, but it is also noted that this circle of exchange contracts with every series of potlatches. Of the \$1,600 or \$1,800 potlatched by one of the tribes on the West Coast last winter there is nothing to show. The money was squandered, and provisions and property destroyed, not mentioning many other excesses indulged in. The tribe is suffering from these effects already, and if continued there will be no further means and the Indian will turn to the government for support. We can readily see what an abuse this practice has been on the social life of the Indian.

But there is yet another way by which its effects are shown. I refer to its influence in deterring the well-disposed native from adopting civilized modes of living. The Indian who refuses to potlatch is ostracized. Every missionary knows somewhat of the persecution, not only contempt, to be borne by the Christian natives for their refusal to engage with the tribe in its heathen festivals. And these have come to us during the year asking why the law did not protect them under the existing conditions of the case at present.

We now take a view of the moral side of this question. Potlatching incites to bribery; in fact, it is a form of bribery itself. The main object in giving a feast of this kind is to curry favor with the tribe, and who gives the most wins the greatest respect. We can cite instances where hereditary chiefs have had their power usurped by rivals who outdid them in potlatching. Then it is the Indians of the higher class who receive the highest amounts, while the poor, old and forsaken receive the passing four-bits. The writer offered to join in with the tribe to which he ministers if they would adopt the policy of giving for charitable purposes, but they could not see the point. In the exact sense of the term, only from a worldly point of view, it was the expression of honor to whom honor is due.

Again, the tendency to being dishonest is encouraged. As was stated before, large sums of money are borrowed by many with no intention of paying back. Only let the end in view be achieved, and any means is considered proper. This also explains the worst and most dangerous feature, which is the disposition tending to immorality. Not only at their feasts is licentiousness given full sway, but in order to secure money for the potlatch nothing is too impure. Men will sell their wives and daughters, and women sell themselves, body and soul, in the most nefarious traffic, that this desire to emulation may be satisfied. Look to the noblest nation of Indians on the coast, the Haidas. Not twenty-five years ago there were thousands, where now there are but hundreds. These have gone down to darkness and everlasting death, having met their untimely end through the sore disease of sin and immorality, and all because of the demands of the potlatch. And the other tribes are not behind in the same sinful practice.

We now turn to the event itself. It is on this occasion the baser appetites are freely indulged. Their ideas of virtue are confined in general, but here no line of purity is drawn. And it goes to show that these and various other defilements would not have such full scope, were the potlatch system prohibited.

The representative of the press who lately attended one of these potlatches and who certified to the innocent amusement afforded by them, must have attended only the one. But could he witness them in their true light, he would not so freely express himself, and act justly to the public mind.

And now we inquire how the mind of the Indian is affected by these heathen feasts. In a word, they debase him. He may be raised to an assumption of false pride, but more surely does it degrade his nature and condition and render the mind less susceptible to the influence of light and truth. And because of its own influence it enslaves the mind, exacting homage from even those who are looked upon as civilized. This was particularly emphasized to the mind of the writer only last winter. Young

men who are respected by those of Victoria who know them, and who conduct themselves with due propriety in this town on their visits to it, were compelled to honor one of the potlaches by feasting on a dog which had just been killed in a most cruel manner. At another time a cat was dispensed with in the same way. To think that this occurred in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-six, and within seventy miles from civilized Victoria, should convince us of the deep barbarism the potlatch exercises on the mind of the Indian.

There is a wolf dance, held chiefly to terrorize the minds of the women and children, and which is generally carried on successfully. Again, in many instances [Indians] are subjected to torture, such as cutting with knives and biting, the biter giving a handsome sum for a piece of human flesh.

Superstition holds its sway through the influence of the potlatch, the Indian doctor celebrating a feast of this kind on his initiation to the secrets of the medicine art, and with which he is again honored on the completion of his course.

Summing up all the evidence before us, we find the potlatch is the great stronghold of heathenism. Destroy it and all other forms will fall with it; encourage it and the way of missionary enterprise is barred to a great extent.

And now, in conclusion, we will endeavor briefly to state our relation with the Indians to this and other evils prevalent among them. As a people we owe to them protection and support in the right. Look at it as we will, we must acknowledge we have taken their land from them, and this intrusion has greatly straitened their means of subsistence. We can now best reward them by using every effort to induce them to adopt our mode of living.

But the potlatch sternly opposes this, therefore in the interest of the Indian the potlatch must go, that they may be free to be educated, to rightfully use their gains and earnings in dealing with us.

Not only this, but our government is pledged to protect the interests of the Indian, and as his guardian instruct him. The wisdom of this legislature is shown by enacting a law condemning the potlatch in all its forms, and we are assured by the Indian department that the act will remain despite the efforts of some to repeal it. We look for a speedy enforcement of the same, believing it to be for the best good for the Indian.

And as members of the Body, the Church, of which Christ is the Head, we view this question with no other feeling than that of true sympathy and interest in our Indian brother's welfare. And our Lord, who has sent us forth to preach the gospel to every creature, has also enjoined us to teach them to observe all things commanded by him. With this command, which is also a prerogative of the Christian teacher, we appeal to a Christian nation for help to carry out God's purpose of salvation for the heathen tribes of British Columbia by stamping out such evil customs from their midst. And of the church we ask her prayers that God's spirit may convince the Indian of the wrong and lead him to understand that in our opposing the evil we are simply seeking not only his temporal good, but the welfare of his soul. The church has many trophies of divine grace in the persons and lives of many from the Indian tribe – men and women – who are enjoying blessed experiences in the Christian life. It is not

strange to relate that these all know of and shun the contaminating influence of the potlatch. May she in defending and encouraging these brethren show to them her earnestness in endeavoring to make this evil a thing of the past.

“Slurs and slander”⁸⁸ (1896)

To the Editor – In your semi-weekly edition of August 24 you publish a paper read at the Union Missionary Conference by Rev. Mr. Stone of Comox, in which he states:

“Young men who are respected by those of Victoria who know them, and who conduct themselves with due propriety in this town, on their visits to it were compelled to honor one of the potlatches by feasting on a dog which had just been killed in a most cruel manner.”

When Mr. Stone says “young men,” does he mean white men? [I wish to know,] as I have been asked by several people who the parties are. If so, will he be man enough to give names? I can account for all the young white men within twenty miles, at the time of the occurrence. One – my son – was in Victoria. Another, my assistant, was not far away from his station. Another, one of the government linemen, can answer for himself – I don’t know where he was, but I hardly think he [ate] dog – if present. The fourth person was present on his own business – he will answer for himself.

Mr. Stone leaves it to be inferred that they were young white men; at least everyone who has spoken to me on the subject thinks so. Mr. Stone may possibly mean young Indians who are respected, etc., etc.; but in part of his speech he says of the potlatch, “it enslaves the mind, exacting homage from even those who are looked upon as civilized.”

Mr. Stone does not say how the dog was killed. The live dog was torn to pieces by the Indians with their teeth, a thing which had not happened in the Nitinat tribe for 17 years previously, and was done on this occasion principally to show their dislike and contempt for Mr. Stone and his ways.

I shall be glad if you will insert this, that people may know there are no young white men eating dog down here. Anyone who will cast slurs and slander [at] young white men (always behind their backs), and then eat his own words and send others to deny his words and actions, is, in my opinion, more likely to eat dog or worse than anyone in this part of the country.

I am, respectfully,

[W.] PHILIP DAYKIN⁸⁹, Keeper Carmanah Light Station

⁸⁸ From Daykin, W. P. (1869, September 19). THE POTLATCH QUESTION. *Daily Colonist*, p. 6. Written by William Phillip Daykin (c. 1843 – 1916).

⁸⁹ “William Philip Daykin, one of the pioneer marine men of the North Pacific Coast, and one well and favorably, passed away last evening [November 20, 1916], following an attack of pneumonia. He was 73 years of age and a native of Doncaster, Yorkshire, England, and had been in British Columbia for the last thirty years, during most of which period he was employed as keeper of the lighthouse in Carmanah, west coast of Vancouver Island. Retiring from the position some years ago, he had latterly

Rev. Stone's rebuttal⁹⁰ (1896)

To the Editor – In the issue of your daily for the 19th inst. is a request from Mr. Daykin, of Carmanah lighthouse, for explanation of a certain passage taken from the paper on the potlatch which was read by me at the Union Missionary Conference. On first reading it I decided to let the article pass for what it was worth; but in deference to his wish I make this statement, although such contumely as he endeavors to heap upon missionary work deserves no return but its treatment with silence.

In the first place Mr. Daykin is asked to replace the extracted quotation in its former position in the paragraph from which it was taken, and, reading the paragraph throughout, he will find no reference to any but Indians. Or, may I ask you, Mr. Editor, to have the whole paragraph inserted here? It reads as follows:

“And now we inquire how the mind of the Indian is affected by these heathen feasts. In a word, they debase him. He may be raised to an assumption of false pride, but more surely does it degrade his nature and condition and render the mind less susceptible to the influence of light and truth. And because of its own influence it enslaves the mind, exacting homage from even those who are looked upon as civilized. This was particularly emphasized to the mind of the writer only last winter. Young men who are respected by those of Victoria who know them, and who conduct themselves with due propriety in this town on their visits to it, were compelled to honor one of the potlaches by feasting on a dog which had just been killed in a most cruel manner. At another time a cat was dispensed with in the same way. To think that this occurred in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-six, and within seventy miles from civilized Victoria, should convince us of the deep barbarism the potlatch exercises on the mind of the Indian.”

Nothing more need be said, as the above explains itself.

Further – Mr. Daykin's statement referring to the young white men is sufficient inference itself as to their probable connection with the several potlatches held here. Such reference was indeed remote from my mind. Section 114 of the Indian Act as now enacted prohibits white men from having anything whatever to do with the potlatch. It is to be presumed the law-abiding citizens within twenty miles of Carmanah will observe this and act accordingly.

With reference to the other intimations of the letter published, as they are given to show a particular antipathy, we had better, Mr. Editor, let them run their course. Thanking you for the space afforded for this, and desiring no further correspondence on my part,

WM. STONE.

Methodist Missionary, Nitinat, West Coast
Kla-oos Mission, Sept. 26, 1896.

been keeper of the foghorn at McLaughlin Point. Mr. Daykin is survived by his widow and two sons.” WILLIAM P. DAYKIN DEAD. (1916, November 21). *The Province*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ From Stone, W. J. (1896, August 22). THE POTLACH. *Daily Colonist*, p. 8. Written by William J. Stone (c. 1863 - 1937), Methodist missionary.

“It takes very little to fan those feelings”⁹¹ (1896)

COWICHAN AGENCY, INDIAN OFFICE, QUAMICHAN, B.C., MARCH 18, 1896

Sir, I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th inst. with enclosures related to potlatches, and in reply beg to say that the subject of potlatches in this Agency was treated in my letter of Oct. 21st [...]. With regard to the one held in Nanaimo in October last, I would state that it was given by an old chief named Jim Sil-kah-met, assisted in the work of entertaining the visitors by others of the Nanaimo Band.

Before the potlatch took place, the Indians came to me and promised that this should be the last one in their village, and that they would do their utmost to prevent the introduction of liquor.

Owing to a delay in the arrival of the Musqueam Band, the gathering was not over for about 12 days, but the whole affair passed off without any friction. There was no drunkenness, quarreling, or fighting, and being held close to the city of Nanaimo, the Indians were visited every day by hundreds of white people, both ladies and gentlemen, and even little children, which would not have been the case had there been drunkenness and [the] barbarous practices we hear so much about taking place.

I was present on several occasions and can bear testimony to the orderly manner in which the whole potlatch was conducted.

I can also say that the popular feeling in this part of the province is that we have no moral right to interfere with these harmless Indian customs; of course in this I speak of my Agency, and although I know there is a waste of time, and a fear of spreading contagious diseases attending any potlatch unless well watched, which I am sure by the present Act I have sufficient power, and influence amongst the Indians to enforce if necessary, I am at the same time sure that by doing so I should at once weaken the influence of the missionaries on the bulk of the natives, and at the same time add to the steadily increasing strain which is now being felt against both the Dominion and Provincial Governments caused by “Fishery Regulations,” “Game Acts,” and the general hard times which are at present really oppressing the Indians.

The newspaper telegram enclosed alludes, I presume, to a proposed potlatch to be held at the Penelakut Village (about 20 miles from Nanaimo) sometime next month. I heard of this, and on the 20th of February last sent my constable with notices explaining the provisions of the present Act, that none might plead ignorance.

In two days, every male member of the Penelakut Band came to my office and explained that old Pierre (Hul-kah-lats-tun) was the only one calling the potlatch, although others who owed articles were joining him to invite their creditors to be paid off at the same time.

⁹¹ From Lomas, W. H. (1896). In GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING STEPS TO CURTAIL POTLATCH AMONG THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. RG10, Volume number: 3631, Microfilm reel number: C-10110, File number: 6244-G. Item ID number 2060800. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada. William Henry Lomas died in 1899.

They one and all pledged themselves that this should be the last gathering of the kind that should be held in their village, stating that Victoria (Songhees) and Nanaimo had made the same pledges which all understood and intended to keep.

Pierre Hul-kah-lats-tun is an old man, the only son of a chief who entertained the first Roman Catholic missionary who came to the coast. He has had gifts of blankets & other property, many of the donors (or rather lenders) of which are now dead, but according to the Indian custom he should pay these debts in public, i.e. at a gathering such as a potlatch is, to the heirs or relatives of the donors who are his visitors for the occasion, and whom he and his friends have to feed while in their village. In the providing food he is assisted by his friends and relatives from far or near who bring, or send, food of all kinds, in the same way that the old man has done when any of them gave a potlatch.

In this Agency the giver of a potlatch does not impoverish himself – his farm-stock, boats or canoes are not thrown away, merely what he owes, and some few dollars' worth of goods or cash to promote excitement or to encourage sports among the younger members present – whose only interest in a potlatch is in the meeting of friends seldom seen, and in the sports which may occur.

When in my office the words of the old man Pierre were really pathetic. He stated that to numerous people he owed blankets and other property, but that if I would assure him the feelings of Her Majesty the Queen would be hurt by his having a potlatch, he would give it up, although he had been waiting to do so the best years of his life, but that he would be more ashamed of not paying what he owed to the living and the dead, than he would be of dying in jail, as he was told he was liable to.

On this he produced from many coverings an engraving of Her Majesty, taken, I would say, thirty years ago, and a Union Jack of about the same age. I answered the old man that the action of the Government was not to oppress them, but to endeavor to keep the young men free from the ties of the potlatch, that they might make their farms and fishing profitable to their children. I also pointed out to the younger men that they would be in a better position to meet the hard times if they had milk, and garden produce for their families, as they had before they began to go to hop-fields and canneries for the high wages paid there for a few weeks' work.

I would respectfully state to the Department that the action I have taken in not interfering with a Band holding a potlatch when they pledge themselves that it should be their last, is not hasty, but has had long consideration, and that I am sure it is in the interests both of the public and the Indians.

I would also state that although there is not likely to be any Indian rising as we see in the United States, still when a general feeling of dissatisfaction against the law occurs amongst an ignorant population, it takes very little to fan those feelings into a determination to screen the breakers of the law, whether for murder or minor offences.

Submitting this views on the potlatch subject, I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. H. Lomas,
Indian Agent.

The arrest of Johnny Moon⁹² (1897)

The Indians in the vicinity of Cape Mudge are in a state of great excitement just now over the arrest on Tuesday last of Johnny Moon and his father, the chief of the Cape Mudge tribe. In consequence, Mr. Edward Wilson, storekeeper and hotel proprietor, came to the city yesterday in post haste, in quest of Mr. A. W. Vowell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He says the Indians are making no threats nor resorting to violence, but they are in the sulks and are so thoroughly aroused that, unless diplomacy is displayed in dealing with them, trouble may be looked for.

But this is not the dangerous aspect of affairs that confronts Mr. Wilson. He knows that most of the Indians possess some kind of a fire arm, and that their number is daily being increased through the arrival from all parts of the coast of cousins, brothers and visitors to participate in the festivities of a long-heralded potlatch. Once maddened by whisky the festive company might make things very interesting for the civilized community.

What happened to bring about the present agitated feelings of the natives does not seem altogether clear. The Johnny Moon arrested had issued numerous invitations for a potlatch, to come off about this time or a little later, and had, either in this or some other way, aroused suspicion, of which Constable Manson, Cortez Island, sought corroboration of. Whereupon the officer visited Cape Mudge last Tuesday and placed under arrest the father and son, Mr. Wilson says, giving no explanation for his action. The old man resisted arrest and so attracted a crowd of blanketed and husky natives to the beach, where just prior to the steamer's departure with the two prisoners, a contest took place, resulting in the hoary-headed chief being taken from the authorities, and the latter being hurriedly driven away, the young prisoner going with little objection.

This story Mr. Wilson reluctantly related as he was, he said, desirous of seeing the authorities before having the news published.

"A trifle too hasty"⁹³ (1897)

Johnnie Moon, the Cape Mudge Indian who was brought down from Comox [to Nanaimo] last week for trial on a charge of taking part in an Indian feast at which gifts were bestowed, came up for hearing before Judge Harrison this evening. C. H. Barker appeared for the crown and stated that he was instructed on behalf of the Attorney-General to enter a nolie prosequi, as the depositions contained no proof of the potlatch having taken place. The prisoner was accordingly discharged. It appears that the complainant, Rev. J. Walker, has been too hasty in laying the information, the arrest having been made before any illegal ceremony had taken place.

The prosecution of Johnnie Moon and his associates possesses peculiar interest as being the first case of the kind under the new Dominion statute of two years ago, by which it was decreed that the potlatch, or "gift-feast," must follow its

⁹² From ANGRY ABORIGINES. (1897, January 10). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

⁹³ From A TRIFLE TOO HASTY. (1897, January 20). *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

contemporaneous festival, the “tamanawas,” into the list of aboriginal celebrations proscribed by Canadian law. Whether the prohibition would be or could be enforced, has from the first, been a matter of very considerable doubt among those who best know the native character, for the potlatch is the joy and delight of the native Indian’s soul, and it was not to be expected that he would relinquish its pleasures without a struggle. The tamanawas is still practiced far up North, at the head of the rivers, in the interior mountains – anywhere remote from civilization and beyond the reach of the officers of the law and the missionary. And so doubtless it will be with the potlatch, less barbarous by far.

For the benefit of the unenlightened ones, it may be explained that a potlatch is just what the word means in Chinook jargon – a gift feast – and there is little if anything wrong in the potlatch itself. It is in the attendant ceremonies that the mischief lies – whiskey drinking, quarreling and fighting, reviving the old and barbarous rites of savage days, and too often setting every principle of law and order at defiance. The potlatch, too, frequently bankrupts the giver of it, and those who profit by his generosity in turn rob themselves of the savings of years in order to repay the compliment and themselves enjoy the distinction of bidding the tribes from far and near to their potlatch.

This potlatch, gift-feast, or blanket feast, is a social event more than anything else. Some chief or prominent tribesman decides that the time has come for him to “potlatch” his friends, and after months and sometimes years of preparation, he sends his invitations to all the tribes that can be reached by mail or messenger, bidding them to attend the celebration as his guests. These invitations are always accepted, and by canoes and boats, and wagons or afoot, the guests arrive, generally several days before the festivities are scheduled to commence – a motley and picturesque assemblage, uniform only in the common insignia of dirt. Dancing, feasting and story telling are the side features of the carnival – the main attraction is the distribution of presents by the host of the occasion, who is supposed to “potlatch” to his friends the proceeds of his total possessions.

Franz Boas on the potlatch ban⁹⁴ (1897)

NEW YORK AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

February 11th, 1897

Dear Sir – With much regret I have seen in recent newspapers that the enforcement of the provincial law forbidding potlatches has led to serious disturbances among certain Indian tribes.

It might have been expected that the attempt to enforce such a law among tribes who still adhere to the old custom would lead to disaffection and discontent. Unfortunately, the meaning of the potlatch has been much misunderstood by the whites; else, I believe, the attempt would not have been made to abolish it by law

⁹⁴ From Boas, F. (1897, March 6). THE INDIAN POTLATCH. *The Province* (Commercial Supplement), p. xi. Written by Franz Boas (1858 – 1942).

without making provision for the gradual transition of the old system to a new one. Let me explain briefly what the potlatch is.

The economic system of the Indians of British Columbia is largely based on credit, just as much as that of civilized communities. In all his undertakings the Indian relies on the help of his friends. He promises to pay them for this help at a later date. If the help furnished consisted in valuables – which are measured by the Indians by blankets, as we measure them by money – he promises to repay the amount so loaned, with interest. The Indian has no system of writing, and, therefore, in order to give security to the transaction, it is performed publicly. The contracting of debts on the one hand, and the paying of debts on the other, is the potlatch. This economic system has developed to such an extent that the capital possessed by all the individuals of the tribe combined exceeds many times the actual amount of cash that exists. That is to say, the conditions are quite analogous to those prevailing in our community: if we want to call in all our outstanding debts, it is found that there is not by any means money enough in existence to pay them, and the result of an attempt of all the creditors to call in their loans results in disastrous panic from which it takes the community a long time to recover.

It must be clearly understood that an Indian who invites all his friends and neighbors to a great potlatch, and apparently squanders all the accumulated results of long years of labor, has two things in his mind which we cannot but acknowledge as wise and worthy of praise. His first object is to pay his debts. This is done publicly and with much ceremony, as a matter of record. His second object is to invest the fruits of his labor so that the greatest benefit will accrue from them for his own benefit, as well as for his children. The recipients of gifts at this festival receive these as loans, which they utilize in their present undertakings. But after the lapse of several years, they must repay them with interest to the giver or to his heir. Thus the potlatch comes to be considered by the Indians as a means of insuring the well-being of their children if they would be left orphans while still young; it is, we might say, his life insurance.

The sudden abolition of this system, which in all its intricacies is very difficult to understand, but the main points of which were set forth in the preceding remarks, destroys, therefore, all the accumulated capital of the Indians. It undoes the carefully planned life work of the present generations, exposes them to need in their old age, and leaves the orphans unprovided. What wonder, when it is resisted with vigor by the best class of Indians, and when only the lazy ones support it because it relieves them of the duty to pay their debts?

But it will be said, that the cruel ceremonies connected with some of the festivals make their discontinuance necessary. From an intimate knowledge of the Indian character and of these very ceremonials I consider any interference with them unadvisable. They are so intimately connected with all that is sacred to the Indian that their forced discontinuation will tend to destroy what moral steadiness is left to him. It was during these ceremonies that I heard the old men of the tribe exhort the young to mend their ways, that they held up to shame the young women who had gone to Victoria to lead a life of shame, and that they earnestly discussed the question

of requesting the Indian Agents to help them in their endeavor to bring the young back to the good, moral life of old.

And the cruelty of the ceremonial exists alone in the fancy of those who know of it only by the exaggerated descriptions of travelers. In olden times it was a war ceremony, and captives were killed and even devoured. But with the encroachment of civilization, the horrors of the old ceremonies have died out. I heard an old chief addressing his people thus: "How lovely is our time. No longer is there the strife of battle; we only try to outdo each other in the potlatch," meaning that each tries to invest his property in the most profitable manner, and particularly that they vie with each other in honorably repaying their debts.

The ceremony of the present day is no more and no less than a time of general amusement which is expected with much pleasure by young and old. But enough of its old sacredness remains to give the Indian during the time of the celebration an aspect of dignity which he lacks at other times. The lingering survivals of the old ceremonies will die out quickly, and the remainder is a harmless amusement that we should be slow to take away from the native who is struggling against the over-powerful influence of civilization.

Yours very truly,
FRANZ BOAS.

"As will result in the immediate repeal"⁹⁵ (1897)

Monday, April 12, 1897.

The speaker took the chair at 2 o'clock.

Prayers were read by the Rev. J. F. Betts. [...]

Mr. Helmcken moved and Mr. Braden seconded the following resolution:

"Whereas by virtue of 58 and 59 Vict., ch. 35, s. 6, the Indian custom known as the potlatch was prohibited; and whereas the Indians have thereby become greatly disaffected, and the enforcement of such law is likely to cause serious trouble; be it therefore resolved, that an humble address be presented to his honor the Lieutenant-Governor, requesting him to make such representation to the government of the Dominion of Canada as will result in the immediate repeal of so much of the said section of the said statute as prohibits the said custom and will allow the Indians to enjoy such custom unmolested."

Mr. Helmcken in moving the resolution said he felt that each member took peculiar interest in the welfare of the Indians. The question was one that needed to be seriously, and he thought favorably, considered by every hon. member. The law as it originally stood in 1886 said that any Indian or person who participated in the celebration of the potlatch was a misdemeanant and could be imprisoned. One Indian who was arrested on this charge was freed, a magistrate declaring that no offence was committed. The Dominion government therefore made the law stronger in 1895.

⁹⁵ From PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE. (1897, April 15). *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 3.

Last year he had deputations from chiefs on the matter, who were much dissatisfied and disheartened over the matter. He could only advise them to keep with the Dominion government on the subject. He had again had visits this year from chiefs, and they pointed out that unless they were allowed to enjoy themselves, there might be trouble.

The policy of the government had always been to treat the Indians as rational beings, and we ought to give them proper consideration. No one would attempt to interfere with our enjoyment of Christmas, or the 24th May or 1st July, and the Indians should be allowed to enjoy themselves in their own way. He claimed that a certain reverend gentleman, who had got Indians heavily fined for celebrating a potlatch, had a little more zeal than discretion.

Hon. Mr. Turner said that the matter had a great deal of consideration, but it was quite a Dominion matter. The federal authorities had the regulation of the Indians, and it had been thought wise, on the advice of missionaries, to check the potlatch. He personally knew that potlatches on the Northern rivers had been prejudicial to the community. The trouble had arisen from the indiscriminate supply of liquor. If liquor was kept away, the potlatch would be no trouble at all.

Hon. Col. Baker said the Indians were entirely under the Dominion government. If this resolution passed and the law altered, the Dominion government might turn round later, should any irregularities occur, and throw the onus upon the province.

Mr. Booth was heartily in accord with the spirit of the resolution. He could not sympathize at all with the action of the missionaries in getting the potlatch stopped.

Dr. Walkem did not think the potlatches were stopped because of excesses, but because of the action of those who were Christianizing the Indians, who claimed that the celebrations were not compatible with the creeds they were trying to inculcate. Potlatches had been handed down among the Indians from generation to generation, and the practice was just as natural to them as migration was to the swallow. It was with the object of putting a stop to potlatches as associated with heathenism that the missionaries moved in the subject. His feeling was that these potlatches were not good, but Justices of the Peace should not have so much power in punishment entrusted to them.

Hon. Mr. Eberts had made many inquiries as to whether potlatches were a menace to the peace. He referred to the last trouble at Salmon River, and he felt that there was a good deal in the claim of the hon. member for South Nanaimo (Dr. Walkem) that these potlatches were very demoralizing. The matter was a difficult one to make laws on, but he had no doubt that the Dominion government had not dealt with the matter in the way they did until they had taken a very careful opinion from the Indian agents. He saw no reason why the Dominion government should not amend the law so that the actual potlatch could be carried on, but the law should, however, step in and prevent anything demoralizing. The missionaries among the Indians were a band of men who had done a great good, and we could point with pride to a large number of men who were giving their time and undergoing privation to alleviate the condition of the Indians.

Mr. Sword felt that there was much in what was urged by the Provincial Secretary. He also felt that there was much in the resolution and that careful inquiry should be made into this matter. He therefore moved an amendment, seconded by Mr. Kidd, to the effect that an inquiry should first be held into the meaning of the custom.

Major Mutter objected to the amendment, as he thought it might cause delay. He believed the Indians had great cause for delay. The missionaries had done a great deal of good, but they had done much harm in interfering with native customs.

Mr. Helmcken, in closing the debate, gave the hon. member credit for moving what he considered was for the good of all concerned. He did not, however, think there was anything in the Provincial Secretary's objections, as he believed the provincial government had just as much a matter of duty in looking after the Indians as the Dominion government. The Federal parliament was now in session, and he asked that the resolution might be passed intact, so that it might at once come before them at Ottawa.

Hon. Mr. Martin remarked that in his district, before the white men came in the Indians never did any harm. The Indian had the right to have a jolly good time, just as much as the white men, and he would heartily support the motion of the member for Victoria.

The amendment was carried by 14 votes to 13, and the resolution as amended was then carried.

“Give them a potlatch of amity”⁹⁶ (1897)

To the Editor – Indians have said that a potlatch means that a chief, in order to keep up his dignity and return hospitality, heaps up riches for this occasion. He invites, on a day fixed, neighboring friendly tribes, generally allies, in order to keep alliances or make additional ones, for defense or offence, or amity, and for this purpose gives a feast and makes presents, in fact so numerous that he himself becomes beggared. Other chiefs have done the same to him and his tribe, so it is merely an exchange of courtesy and property.

The guests usually arrive a day or two earlier – they, in their canoes, advance in proper order and array, singing some tune in time of the paddles. The spokesman of the chief on land welcomes them with an oration, and then provides them with a place to encamp. All are treated in the same manner on arriving. Swan's down, the sign of peace, is distributed. On the days of the potlatch, there is plenty of the best and most dainty provender – music, dancing, and other amusement. The people are most polite and friendly together, and care is taken that order be kept. Spiritous liquors are not on the card. Speaking generally, the visitors go peaceably away – alliances have been renewed, and friendship sworn to.

⁹⁶ From WHAT PEOPLE SAY. (1897, April 20). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

In all these things there is much that resembles the customs of civilized countries – the meeting of monarchs – the presents – the grand displays attendant thereon – the pomps and vanities of this wicked world and the glorification of the chiefs. The intention, no doubt, in some instances of potlatches has fallen from its original signification, owing to the Indian having become debased through contact with civilized!!! men [who] introduced their vices, but for all this, it will be well in the interests of peace for the government to deal gently with the Indians, and rather give them a potlatch of amity than by forcibly suppressing what to the Indians is the test of friendship, convert it into animosity against their trustees.

“Discretion should be allowed”⁹⁷ (1898)

A very interesting return has been presented to the Legislature with regard to the enforcement of the clauses of the Indian Act which prohibit the holding of the Indian festival known as the potlatch. The return consists of an extract from a report of the Committee of the Canadian Privy Council, approved by His Excellency, on February 22nd, 1898.

In that report, the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, referring to the Order-in-Council of May 21st, 1897, respecting the representations made by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, through the Executive Council of that Province, that the Indians have become greatly dissatisfied through the enforcement of the clauses of the Indian Act prohibiting the holding of the Indian festival known as the potlatch, states that he has caused inquiry to be made into the origin, nature and meaning of the said festival, with a view to the repeal of the clauses referred to, in the event of its being ascertained that the prohibition of the potlatch is a well-founded grievance; and he finds that the festival has a most demoralizing effect upon the Indians who participate in it; that, through the efforts of the missionaries and Indian agents, it has, in the Williams Lake agency entirely, and in the Fraser River agency almost entirely, disappeared; that in the Babine and West Coast agencies it still exists, but without the degrading features of mutilation and dog-eating, and not to the same extent, in any way, as formerly; that in other agencies it can also be suppressed without much opposition from the Indians, if the law is administered with prudence and good judgment.

The Minister further states that the general consensus of opinion held by the Indian agents, missionaries and others interested in the welfare of the Indians, is that the law should not be repealed, but that discretion should be allowed, and great care exercised by the Indian agents in its enforcement. In this way it is believed that, as the young and progressive Indians, who are, for the most part, opposed to the potlatch, obtain greater influence in their tribes, and take the places of the chiefs and older Indians who favor its continuance, the custom will gradually die out.

⁹⁷ From THE INDIAN POTLATCH. (1898, March 27). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 5.

The Minister believes that the repeal of the law would be viewed by the Indians as an evidence on the part of the Government to weakness and vacillation, and would produce disrespect and want of confidence in the source from which it emanates.

The Minister, therefore, recommends that the law not be repealed, but that Indian agents be instructed to continue their efforts for the suppression of the custom, with great care and moderation, and that the Provincial Government be requested to instruct its magistrates to use their very best discretion in dealing with any cases of infraction of the law which may come before them.

“Oppose the potlatch”⁹⁸ (1899)

To potlatch or not to potlatch is a question which is agitating the minds of the Indians of Naas River district, and it is a question which appears to involve the great principle of right and wrong, and upon which depends very much more of importance to the natives than is generally believed. It will be remembered by readers of the Times that in recent years there have been several deputations to Victoria from northern tribes asking that the customs of the Indians be not interfered with in this regard, and that the old established custom of potlatching be allowed to continue; and there has grown up a feeling that the opposition to the custom exists only among the white people. This impression will probably be removed when the utterances of a deputation of prominent natives from the Naas, which arrived here on Saturday for the purpose of interviewing the Attorney-General, are read. These chiefs constitute the first deputation of natives appointed for the purpose of protesting against the continuance of the custom, and they certainly made out a very strong case against it.

The members of the deputation were Luke Nelson, of Kinkolith, chief of the government-appointed council in that settlement; Andrew Mercer, of Aiyansh, a member of the council; and David McKay, of Lake Kalzap, also a member of the council there. They are highly intelligent and educated Indians, who have imbibed the teachings of civilization and awakened to the harm which is resulting, and will continue to result, from the perpetuation in their midst of the heathen customs of the aborigines.

Rev. S. S. Osterhout, being in the city, kindly undertook to introduce the deputation to the Attorney-General, but the natives are anxious for it to be understood that their mission was undertaken solely at the instigation of the people whom they represent. Mr. Osterhout’s services in connection therewith being limited to the interpretation of their speeches, which was necessary owing to their not conversing very readily in the English tongue, although they read it and understand it when spoken to them.

The deputation represents a very large number of natives, and their visit to the capital was caused by the expectation of a general rising among the Nishgas, whom they represent, in regard to the non-enforcement of the law prohibiting potlatching passed by the Dominion government some years ago. That law was

⁹⁸ From Oppose the Potlatch. (1899, May 2). *Victoria Times*, p. 3.

passed, and during the occupancy of the chief justiceship by the late Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, a potlatcher was brought down to Victoria for trial, being dismissed, as the chief justice considered the law as it stood did not sufficiently define the crime it was intended to prohibit. Subsequently the government did define the crime in the most praiseworthy fashion, but since then no prosecutions have been undertaken, and the law has practically been disregarded.

The members of the deputation made out a very strong case in addressing the Attorney-General, and their statements will give a better idea of the position of affairs of which they complain than something else could possibly do. The chief spokesman was Luke Nelson, who is a son of the head chief of the Naas River tribes. His father, Skaden, has only this winter forsaken the heathen and taken up his residence with his son.

The following is the substance⁹⁹ of the arguments addressed to the Attorney-General at the conference on Saturday afternoon.

Speaking on behalf of the natives by whom they were sent to press upon the authorities the necessity of enforcing the law as it stands, the deputation said that in the interests of civilization and for the welfare of the Indians, both socially and physically, to say nothing from the moral standpoint, potlatching should be discontinued. Great wrong has been done them, they say, by the mis-representation of what potlatching is, by those who are unacquainted with its workings. Speaking on behalf of six hundred civilized natives who have long since forsaken the thralldom of heathenism with its potlatching and belief in the "evil eye," the members of the deputation said potlatching is not potlatching in the sense that people in this locality think of it. Here the custom may be very amusing and very innocent, but there, in the northern districts, it is very serious and very discouraging to those who are anxious to promote the welfare of the Indians. Here it is a potlatch – a gift; there it is a system of bribery. Here it is done for the amusement of the onlooker and the benefit of the people; there it is generally for self-aggrandizement, to advance personal interests, and in many cases to rob and to wrong the innocent.

About 1868 Governor Seymour visited the Naas River and proclaimed that there should be no more intoxicants used among the natives of that region. The immediate cause of his visit was a tribal feud between the Nishgas and the Tsimsheans, arising from the too free use of liquor, in which conflict many lives were lost. For many years the law of Governor Seymour was respected, and the consumption, manufacture and sale of liquor was suppressed. Later, some years ago, the then Premier of the Dominion, Sir MacKenzie Bowell, visited the Naas and proclaimed that the potlatch should cease. Immediately afterwards, several of the Indians visited Victoria as a deputation, to complain of the suppression of the potlatch, saying how innocent the custom was among the natives, and that it was only their system of helping the poor and those unable to work. The white men upon whom they waited apparently believed them, and as a result they were encouraged to continue the custom. The Indians, seeing they were thus enabled to set aside the

⁹⁹ Since I cannot always tell where paraphrase ends and direct quotation begins, I have followed the original in not using quotation marks below.

law regarding the potlatch, and not being able to discern between one law and another, considered that they might ignore all other laws, and the whisky law particularly. Consequently, for the last few years whisky has been flowing as freely as water, fights have occurred, and deaths have resulted.

“It is very painful to us,” continued the delegation, to see the young men who have forsaken heathenism and the customs of their forefathers and adopted the beliefs and manners of white men, deprived of their natural birthright, their chieftainships, their rights, by those who by a system of potlatching, persuade their fellows to bestow upon the usurper the standing and authority among the tribes which ought to belong to the civilized. No wonder that many a promising young man who has lived with us and promised well for success, has cast aside the blessings of civilization and gone back to heathenism, sacrificed his home, his fishing grounds, his all, seeing someone [who] has no right nor title to them securing positions by the use of this system of bribery. This is the system we ask the government to obliterate, not by passing a law, but [by] enforcing a law already passed and well-defined.

It may be that some of our white brothers look upon potlatching as they look upon legitimate businesses, store-keeping, hotel-keeping and the like, but there is a great difference. The legitimate business affords benefit and the means of sustenance, but the custom of which we complain robs the Indian of his physical strength; sacrifices scores of lives annually, as the natives are compelled to travel from village to village in winter, subject to the cold and wet, and it consumes, instead of supplying the necessaries of life. All the money that is earned in the canning industry, by hunting, by fishing and the other various occupations of the Indian, is consumed by this great giant, the potlatch, whose mouth is forever open and whose appetite is never satisfied, all prompted by the selfishness and the ambition of a few chiefs. Many of the white men on the coast defend this evil custom from selfish motives. They know that so soon as our people are free of their barbarous customs, they will not then be able to infringe upon the rights of the natives and to trifle with their social relations. We know of many instances of poor women in our settlements who have been led astray by this class of white men, who would not have been sacrificed thus if there were no potlatching, which still keeps the people in their benighted condition. We are in a position to judge of the evil tendencies of the potlatch; the white man is not. The white man sees it from the outside; we see it from within. He sees some of the results; we see the causes, and so we have been sent, this, the first time anyone has been sent on behalf of civilization, law and order, and justice and mercy, to represent this abominable system as it is. We were born in it, reared in it, and only of recent years have we been free from its influence, and so we speak from personal knowledge and not from hearsay, and we are prepared to substantiate every statement we make.

Our white brethren, whom we believe are interested in the welfare of the Indian, have been deceived long enough. Deputations have come here almost annually from those who are interested in the potlatch system, mis-representing the system as we have stated. They say potlatches help the poor, the indigent and the infirm. We are prepared to refute this statement and say that never have the poor, the indigent or the infirm been assisted in this way. As soon as an Indian, although

a chief, becomes infirm and is unable to reciprocate with his potlatch, in turn, he is cast aside, a poor subject of neglect, and must seek help from those more kindly disposed than the potlatchers. They even ridicule the man who is too poor or too old to give a potlatch in his turn, and sing songs proclaiming his poverty, much to his shame. So it is very evident there is no mercy in the potlatch.

Luke Nelson added a personal statement regarding the young men of his own village who have been called away by this authority of the potlatch, and in obeying it have contracted colds and disease, which have resulted in death. No less than four cases could be mentioned of this kind, and this winter when a chief of the village, George Kinsadak, died, the heathens came and imposed their obnoxious custom upon the people of the village, by potlatching in their midst. As a representative of law and order Nelson did his best to interfere, but was powerless. This makes it evident that in the potlatch, so called, there is concentrated considerable authority, and it's denominated a "heathen government". We wish further to say, added Nelson, it is a government in opposition to all that would tend to the furtherance of our best interests.

We spoke of whisky just now. It came to us also in the case just referred to, and that is one reason which prompted me to come with my friends McKay and Mercer and give the government the rights of this matter. We wish the white men to remove this great cloud and give us freedom. This is not a trifling matter to us. It will require firm and decisive action. This authority of the potlatch has even arrested magistrates proceeding quietly down the river and has imprisoned them. It has withstood provincial constables, and local constables do not presume to interfere.

The members of the deputation said they did not wish the government to think that as the old chiefs died off this custom would cease. Young chiefs are being reared in the custom, and it becomes necessary that the law shall be enforced if the natives are to be freed of the evil consequences.

They referred very clearly and convincingly to the evils that result from the system, the loss of life and the misery entailed, concluding with an earnest appeal that the Attorney-General would help them to rid themselves of the curse.

Hon. Mr. Martin promised that he would write the Dominion government immediately and use his influence to have the law enforced. He assured them of his sympathy in the state of affairs of which they complained, and expressed the hope that the Dominion government would be able to carry out their wishes.

The chiefs were highly pleased with their reception and will leave for home tonight, strong in the hope that much good will result from their visit to the capital.

“It is the duty of the Indian Department”¹⁰⁰ (1899)

Chief McKay, of the Naas Indians, has to-day received the following letter: [...]
Victoria, B.C., May 1, 1899.

Chief David McKay, Lak Kalzap, Naas:

Sir – I listened to-day with great interest to what you had to say with regard to measures being taken to stop the potlatch on the Naas River. As I explained to you, this matter is dealt with by section 114 of the Indian Act, and it seems to me that it is the duty of the Indian Department at Ottawa to enforce the law. I have written to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs at Ottawa, informing him that you have presented this matter to me, and urging upon him the desirability of instructing the Indian agent at Metlakatla, Mr. Todd, to take proceedings against those Indians who have violated the said law. I have every sympathy with you in your wish to have these evil practices put an end to, and will be glad to assist you in any way in my power. I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) JOSEPH MARTIN, Attorney-General.

Chief McKay expressed himself to a Times reporter as highly delighted with the assurance given him by Mr. Martin, and said that his fellow chiefs, Nelson and Mercer, who left for home last night, will convey the glad news to their people with considerable satisfaction. In addition to the facts [...] contained in the statement of the deputation to the Attorney-General, McKay says that the very men who have been in the habit of coming to the Capital almost annually, to explain the innocence of the “potlatch” as it is practiced among the tribes of the north, have now given very decisive evidence of the error of their previous representations and attitude, and have abandoned the evils of the “potlatch” and adopted the customs of the white man.

“This speaks volumes for our cause,” said McKay, “especially when it is remembered that one of the most influential members of these deputations, Moses Oxidan, has sent by me a personal letter to the Attorney-General, stating the fact above referred to, and asking that the law be vigorously enforced. Amos Gosnell, [who] also has been in the city many times in this connection, has been convicted for selling liquor during the winter, but has now forsaken the heathen custom. I also bring letters from William Hymas, Nathaniel Lal Robinson and Peter Kis-a-yu Calder, all of whom have abandoned their belief in the heathen custom.”

McKay was particularly anxious to impress upon the reporter that the enforcement of the law will not entail any great expenditure upon the government. There is a general expectation among the Indians that the law will be made operative, and it requires only a stern notification to that effect for it to be observed.

It would seem from the assurances given the Indian by the Attorney-General that the matter will now be brought to the attention of the proper authorities and the custom be prohibited, and this assurance is a source of great satisfaction to McKay and his colleagues.

¹⁰⁰ From THE POTLATCH QUESTION. (1899, May 5). *Victoria Times*, p. 8.

A letter from Clifford Sifton¹⁰¹ (1899)

It will be remembered that a delegation of natives waited upon the government a few weeks ago asking that the law prohibiting potlatching be enforced. Attorney-General Martin communicated with the Dominion authorities, and Senator Templeman laid the facts before the ministers. The following letter addressed to Senator Templeman from Hon. Clifford Sifton will be of interest:

Ottawa, 19th May, 1899

In reply to your letter, enclosing a clipping from the Times regarding the desire of the Naas Indians that the law be enforced to suppress the donation feast known as the "potlatch". I beg to say that representations in this matter were recently made by the Attorney-General for the province, and he requested that proceedings be taken under the provisions of the Indian Act against the Indians who have engaged in this festival: but before authorizing proceedings in the direction indicated, it was considered necessary to obtain a report from Indian Superintendent Vowell as to the advisability of such being done.

I may say with regard to this and other festivals practiced by the Indians, that the department has felt it to be peculiarly incumbent upon it to proceed with the utmost caution, because the religious belief of the Indians and their economic system are more or less involved. Moreover, strong sympathy has been expressed with those who desire to continue to celebrate these festivals – and, to go no further for an example, I may refer to the resolution of the Legislative Assembly of the province of British Columbia communicated to His Excellency the Governor-General by the Lieutenant-Governor on the 28th of April, 1897, stating that the Indians had become greatly disaffected in consequence of the prohibition of the potlatch, and that the enforcement of the above law was likely to cause serious trouble, and asking that the Dominion government make a full enquiry, with a view, in the event of the grievance complained of proving well-founded, to the immediate repeal of so much of the legislation referred to as prohibited the custom. An enquiry was accordingly made, but it was found inadvisable to make any changes.

I may add that reports from our agents go to show that the policy of patience in the education of the Indian has been successful, and the festivals, when held, are gradually assuming a character of harmless social gatherings from which the most objectionable features have disappeared, and the giving away of articles has been, in the main, confined to the relief of the aged and destitute.

There may, of course, have been something so objectionable at the potlatches referred to by the petitioners as to call for interference, or the time may have arrived in their district when public opinion would justify the strict enforcement of the law.

As soon, however, as Mr. Vowell's report has been received, I shall be in a position to determine as to the action which should be taken.

Yours faithfully,

CLIFFORD SIFTON.

¹⁰¹ From THE POTLATCH. (1899, June 2). *Victoria Times*, p. 6.

“Indians state their case”¹⁰² (1899)

Two dusky tribesmen of the Naas River Nation – the nation against which Rev. Mr. Osterhout not so many months ago pressed charges of cruelty in tribal practices, before then Attorney-General Martin – have reached Victoria to present their reply to the statements of the missionary and the Christianized Indians with whom he was associated in the filing of his complaint.

Nes-les-yan and Ste-yah-wn are the unpronounceable names proudly borne by these late-arrived champions of aboriginal customs, although for purposes of convenience, white residents of the North prefer to know them as Tom and Samuel.

Although they have been characterized by the Christianized natives of the Naas as “ignorant and utterly depraved savages,” there are certain elements of the case that show the description to be not altogether fitting. In the first place, they show considerable diplomacy in declining to consider in the matter of their rights and regulations any intermediary department – going with their defense direct to the Indian Department.

“Why should we lay our grievances before the law man of the colony?” said Ste-yah-wn, in discussing their mission. “Only a childish one would do that. He has not our care in his hands. We are wards of the Dominion of Canada, and all that concerns us is the business of the Indian Department. The law man of the province could only tell what he has been told, to the Dominion people. Mr. Osterhout and these Christianized Indians knew this. They only wanted to make notoriety for themselves. These Indians are not the only ones who are fit to live, simply because they are learning to imitate the white men, and laugh at the religion and the customs of their forefathers. If white men do the same things, what would the white men think of them?”

The special business of the two delegates in behalf of less interference with the Indian at home, is to interview Superintendent Vowell, replying to the complaint forwarded to Ottawa through the late Attorney-General. Mr. Vowell not being at home just now, they will await his return, while at the same time they have presented to the department the following unique letter, as embodying what they wish to say – in their own language. It is interesting as the production of “totally ignorant and utterly depraved savages”:

[A UNIQUE LETTER]

Victoria, B.C., Sept. 13, 1890.

To Mr. A. W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in British Columbia.

Esteemed Sir – We have been delegated by the chiefs and head men of the tribes Ki-ha-ten, Kit-la-tomic and Kit-Win-Chilco, residents of Naas River and its tributaries, to express to you our heartfelt thanks for your condoling kindness in thus far protecting us from the threatening attitude of tribes amalgamated with Christianity.

¹⁰² From *Indians State Their Case*. (1899, September 15). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

In the treaty on the concession of our lands, all our former rights in the usages and customs of the tribes are to be respected. Notwithstanding these are vested rights, which according to the great law-writers cannot be divested even by parliamentary enactment. A delegation of our Christian cousins in the month of April last made application to you to have this treaty stipulation abrogated, on the grounds that the potlatch and other customs were consummated with drunkenness, prostitution and murder. Now, if this is the case, it is in violation of the statute laws of British Columbia, and there is a strong force of Indian provincial police. Yet but few arrests have been made, and we regret to say that they were all Christians. The last one was fined \$6 and allowed to escape. You kindly ignored their application, and your fostering protection has secured us a few months' peace.

On leaving the river a few days since we were again confronted by a more serious aspect of hostile demonstration. The Bishop and Mr. Todd, forming a Christian alliance (of course with no selfish ends in view) are to jump the jurisprudence of British Columbia and bring the powers of Ottawa on the defenseless and friendless in condoling kindness, because they cannot convince us that for thousands of years our people all went to hell and still abide in that uncomfortable atmosphere, and we contribute nothing to support the dynasty.

The Christian Indians are in the conglomerate army arrayed against us, and the sympathy of "peace and love" of former missionaries are to be the victims of a general slaughter.

In consideration of "peace and love," we have relinquished the Medicine Tomanawas doctrine, the Black Tomanawas, the sacred dances, potlatches, our former mode of intercourse and peace-making with other tribes.

The only rites which we still celebrate are the invitations to our funerals of friends as mourners, which we donate to in behalf of the deceased, erecting a monument over the graves of relatives, and gifts are bestowed. We still have dances for amusement, with no potlatch.

In our feeble effort to show the wrongs imposed on us for want of representation in a joint council, we would respectfully ask, as a matter of equity, that you appoint a provincial force of police from the tribes which we have the honor to represent, equal to the Christian police force, that the many drinks in the dark may be brought to light and recorded in the dockets of your criminal courts.

In conclusion we would say a word of consolation to our persecutors: Turn not the course of the mighty river's pure waters from the mountain's white-capped creation, kissed by the Great Monarch of all living things in his noon-day's love and affection to the little fish that play on its pebbly bottom and smile the welcome advent of the morning Aurora; the parent of their heritage; the divinity of their affections, for he is the noble functionary in evidence of the Great Spirit; our Almighty Providence; an Immaculate and Affectionate God. Darken not the horizon with mysterious delusions of nimbus clouds in the vanity of ostensible civilization, for on the placid bosom of the waters were the happy days of our ancestors spent.

We have the honor to be Her Majesty's most humble subjects, and for the kind regard you have for our welfare we tender in behalf of our people their love and gratitude.

Very respectfully,

(Signed) NES-LES-YAN.
STE-YAH-WN.

“Indians debarred holding potlatches”¹⁰³ (1913)

If the policy of the Department of Indian Affairs, as disclosed in instructions received from Ottawa by the superintendent of Indian Agencies in British Columbia, is successfully enforced, the “potlatch,” which is the most treasured of the natives' traditional feasts, will be a thing of the past before long. Orders have been issued that these gatherings, that is, the functions the principal feature of which is the giving and receiving of presents, must be discontinued forthwith. Already the first step in this direction has been taken and the matter, it is expected, will be ventilated in the courts of Vancouver at an early date.

Having been notified of the department's wishes, Indian Agent Halliday, of Alert Bay, in whose district are the Kaawkewith Indians, took the necessary steps to apprise his wards of the situation. They were told, it is authoritatively reported, that the “potlatch” must be abandoned. However, the season for such affairs was at hand, and the Indians could not resist the temptation. The usual arrangements were made, and soon the tribe was engaged in one of the long-drawn-out celebrations, at which the presentation of gifts by one or more of their number was an outstanding feature. As a result, Indian Agent Halliday swore out information under section 149 of the Indian Act, which specifically makes participation in such an event an indictable offence, and two of the leaders were placed under arrest. Their prosecution is to take place in Vancouver, to which city they have been removed. It is understood that several of their tribesmen have followed and that their purpose is to engage counsel to fight the charge. Probably the ground taken will be based on the plea that what is being done is an unwarranted interference with the rights of the subject.

IN INDIANS' INTERESTS

Mr. W. E. Ditchburn, Inspector of Indian Agencies, explains that the department's policy with respect to the time-honored potlatch is in the best interests of the Indians of British Columbia for a number of important reasons. In the first place, he declares, the form the celebration takes, namely, the giving away of goods and chattels, inspiring in one man a feverish desire to outdo the other in generosity, results in impoverishing many. Men who have been working all Summer and saving the money return in the Winter and, instead of spending their earnings to good purpose in obtaining necessaries and comforts for their families, squander everything at a potlatch. He mentions also the time lost. Some of the festivals last months, and throughout them there is little, if any, work done. Besides, it tends to bring in large

¹⁰³ From INDIANS DEBARRED HOLDING POTLATCHES. (1913, November 28). *Daily Colonist*, p. 3.

numbers together in windowless houses, where they remain for days, which is unsanitary, as well as harmful in other respects.

But Mr. Ditchburn lays special emphasis on the barbaric aspect of the historic Indian celebration. He points out that through the potlatch the Indian practically buys the young klotchman who has agreed to become his bride. It is the custom of his people, and he is forced to do so. In recent years, Mr. Ditchburn explains, the special schools for Indians, which have been established at all centers and are being largely attended by the younger generations, have turned out young men and women of a different turn of mind from their parents – men and women whose minds have been cultured and who would prefer to cast behind them the objectionable elements of the festivals that have become a part of the life of their progenitors. But when they leave school they go back to their homes and immediately are swept off their feet by the traditional customs that have grown out of years. The result is that a great part of the effect of the work of the institutions referred to is lost.

For these reasons, and especially for the latter, Mr. Ditchburn is convinced that, hard as it may be considered by the Indians at the outset, it is for their ultimate welfare that it now is proposed to enforce the particular section of the Indian Act in question.

AN INDICTABLE OFFENCE

The section of this law under which it is the intention to take action, follows:

Section 149 – Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort, forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same, or who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term now exceeding six months and not less than two months; provided, that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition or the giving of prizes for exhibits thereat.

“Indians protest at Department’s action”¹⁰⁴ (1914)

A protest signed by the chiefs of the various tribes of Indians which recently held a potlatch at Duncan, against the action of the Dominion Indian Department in enforcing legislation prohibiting the holding of these Indian celebrations, will be forwarded to Ottawa. On the last day of the potlatch, Indian Agent W. R. Robertson announced to the assembled chiefs and Indians that hereafter no further celebrations of the kind would be permitted. Mr. Robertson quoted from the regulations to show that the holding of potlatches was now illegal, and he warned the Indians that the one just completed would be the last.

¹⁰⁴ From INDIANS PROTEST AT DEPARTMENT’S ACTION. (1914, June 17). *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

Following the completion of the celebration, the chiefs gathered, and after a lengthy discussion, determined to protest to Ottawa. They claimed that there was nothing in the nature of the potlatch, as held, to warrant prohibitory action on the part of the Government. There was no unseemly behavior by the Indians, the occasion was properly celebrated, and they profess to see no reason why the Indians must be compelled to dispense with their annual celebration any more than the whites must give up their Christmas, New Year or other festivity. The protest points out that the Indians who participated in the potlatch at Duncan were well off and equipped with lands and houses as well as stock and other property. The Government, they say, has put a stop to their catching fish or hunting game on their lands, and they desire to know what will be the next step to be taken by the Government to limit their liberties.

MANY CHIEFS SIGN

The protest was signed by the following chiefs: Chiefs Seaholton and Big Bill, of the Quamichan tribe; Chiefs George Thin, Louis Underwood and Peter Joe, of the Thinalitch tribe; Chiefs Tom Seymuir and Jimmy Quayabuck, of Chemainus Bay; Chiefs Charley Joe and Norris Taligh, of Valdez Island; Chief Charley, of Koksilah; Chief Charley Tulpemult, of Kenapson; Chief Charley, of Someons; Chiefs Billy Yakthum and Elie Teanholt, of Nanaimo; Chiefs Edward and Charley Sekulotut, of Kuper Island; Chief David, of Saanich, and Chief Copper and William Roberts, of the Songhees, Esquimalt.

Last year the Indian Department took steps to bring into effect the regulation prohibiting the holding of potlatches. Two Indians of the Kwakewith Agency were prosecuted for participating in a potlatch held at that point. They were convicted, but allowed to go under suspended sentence, as the department did not then wish to go further, and thought that the conviction would serve as notice to the rest of the tribes that the old practice must cease.

The provision of the Act under which the agents throughout the Province have been instructed to act is as follows:

“Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly, another to celebrate any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift or article takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same, or who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offence, and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months. Provided, that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition, or the giving of prizes for exhibits thereat.”

INFLUENCE OF POTLATCHES

Mr. W. E. Ditchburn, inspector of the Department of Indian Affairs, stated yesterday that the regulation prohibiting potlatches had been in force for a number of years. The Department had been endeavoring to end the custom by moral suasion, in the hope that the Indians would gradually be weaned from the practice as they

became more civilized. No attempt had been made to force the Indians into a compliance with the regulations if persuasion would answer the purpose, but the fact was that of late years the practice had been increasing among some tribes.

There had been a tremendous waste of money, which the Indians should have saved and used in developing their holdings. The physical and moral effect of such celebrations had been shown beyond a doubt to be pernicious. The practice had had a degrading influence, which, among some tribes, had proved a serious matter. Statistics showed that, in the past twenty years, among those tribes in which the practice of holding potlatches had been most prevalent, the Indian population had seriously declined. While this might not be wholly due to the practice, it was certain that it was, to a great extent, the outcome of the custom.

Mr. Ditchburn stated he had not yet seen the protest signed by the Indian chiefs, though he understood that such a complaint had been prepared and would be forwarded to the Department.

“The passing of the potlatch”¹⁰⁵ (1915)

This historic annual event among the British Columbia Indians has now lost its popularity amongst a number of the sages of the tribes and particularly on the North Shore, where Chief Jimmy Harry of Seymour, No. 2, is instituting a campaign against the ancient custom.

THE AWAKING

Chief Jimmy Harry, backed up by Chief George of No. 3 and Chiefs Harry, Tom, Charley Joseph and Edward of the No. 1 reserve, and all members of the big Squamish family, in an interview with the North Shore Press yesterday, said it was time the Indians were doing away with this wasteful indulgence and paying more attention to improving themselves in learning and modern methods and in the saving of their money. This almost barbarious [sic.] custom, which takes the form of revelry and dancing, had been responsible for much squandering of good hard cash, bodily injury and a general degradation which does not make for the uplifting of the race. Chief Jimmy Harry has always held this view, and when he became the head and adviser of the Seymour reserve he ventured to air this view and send his cry broadcast for a discontinuance of the old, out-of-date potlatch and dance, and the revival of a spirit of thrift and industry which should be the object of the Indians today.

HELD SAME VIEW

When Governor-General Earl Grey visited Vancouver during the lifetime of the late Chief Joe, Chief Jimmy was standing no less than three feet from him, when he advised Joe to encourage his people to save their money, to be industrious and to put aside old customs of waste and perfunctoriness.

¹⁰⁵ From THE PASSING OF THE POTLATCH. (1915, January 19). *North Shore Press* (North Vancouver), p. 2.

WASTEFUL PRACTICE

The potlatch which was observed on Vancouver Island this month, served as an example of the harm resulting from this obsolete joy-maker. A certain Indian who had a big bank account distributed a lot of money amongst the Indians, and afterward scattered silver coins to the four winds for the Indians to grovel and fight over. In more ancient times, and possibly at the present in the more uncivilized districts, the custom is to exchange blankets and every manner of possessions, and the honor goes to him who can give the most away and comes out the poorest.

Chief Jimmy Harry firmly denounces this and wants the Indians to awake to their opportunities and to the betterment of the rising generations, to provide themselves with better comforts and their children with education, so that they may take their places in the world with their white brothers.

No advancement or development towards this new era can be made if this annual carousal of dancing and debauchery is allowed to take place and poison the minds of its participants, said the chief.

THE RESULTING HARM

Modern potlatches consist of dancing in particular, and this phase of the celebration is carried to the farthest limitations. "Tickling," said Chief Jimmy Harry, is a popular form, and [harmful] when carried too far beyond human endurance. The potlatch is now illegal, declared the Chief, and can only be carried on without the knowledge of the Indian Agent.

The Indians are fooled in this. They believe in the stories told them, that the potlatch is permitted, and in his statement to the press, the Chief wished this fact strongly emphasized.

A POTLATCH ADVOCATE

Continuing his talk, Chief Jimmy Harry told the newspaper representative that Chief Matthias, of Capilano, was a great dancer. He was the chief advocate amongst the provincial tribes, excepting No. 1, 2, 3 on the North Shore, for the cherishing and continuance of this big annual celebration.

His father, Chief Joe, was the one who was advised by Earl Grey, yet, in spite of this he is tending backward instead of forward.

"Indians arrested on potlatch charge"¹⁰⁶ (1915)

Two Indians were brought down on yesterday's steamer from the North, charged with having held potlatches, "contrary to the statutes made and provided." Both men are chiefs in their respective districts. One of them, Klaka Agila, comes from Fort Rupert and was taken over to Victoria for trial, and the other was Seesakolis, and comes from Kincum. The men are within the jurisdiction of the Indian Agency at Alert Bay.

Seesakolis' case was speedily disposed of in Vancouver.

¹⁰⁶ From INDIANS ARRESTED ON POTLATCH CHARGE. (1915, February 10). *Daily News-Advertiser* (Vancouver), p. 7.

Mr. Frank Lyon was secured to act for him, and on an appearance with His Honor Judge McInnis, pleaded guilty to the charge, stating that it was not desired to put the Crown to the expense of bringing witnesses all the way down from the north country to give evidence. In consideration of this the court remanded the chief until called on for sentence, and he will be able to get back to his tribe by the next steamer. The court, however, warned the accused that the potlatching must not be repeated.

Seesakolis is not able to speak much English, but through an interpreter said that he had not been really “potlatching” at all. It was a mere feast, he said, in which he had fed the hungry and had made a few presents to needy people. There had been no fights, no drinking and no stealing, nor had it been accompanied by any religious or other rites.

TO ALLEVIATE DISTRESS

With the fur market idle and many of the other sources of income from logging camps and other industries gone, owing largely to the war, he explained that there was much distress among the Indians, and the affair which had led to his arrest was merely for the purpose of alleviating in a small way some of this suffering. From what he had heard he believed that many white men in Vancouver could be arrested for doing what he had done if there was the same law for the white man as there was for the Indian. He also expressed, as his opinion, that if the Indian agent busied himself a little more in other things than those which led to trouble for the Indians, it would be of much benefit to the tribesmen.

This is the second time that Indians have been brought to Vancouver for trial for holding potlatches, which are prohibited under the Indian Act. The cases brought before the Assize Court last year were three in number, all being from Alert Bay, in each case the men being allowed to go on a suspended sentence. In the evidence at that trial it was brought out that when the Duke of Connaught and his party were at Alert Bay, the Indians were permitted to make “potlatch,” that is, make presents, to the Royal Party, but that when they themselves “potlatched” they were arrested.

“Quaee Indians appear in court”¹⁰⁷ (1921)

Five Indian chiefs of the Kingcome Inlet tribe have been sentenced to two months each as the result of a meeting held sometime in October last, at the Indian village of Qua-ee, at the mouth of Kingcome River. The trial took place before William Halliday, the Indian Agent at Alert Bay. Heretofore all prosecutions under the so-called potlatch law have been in connection with functions at which there has been singing of Indian songs, native dances in native costume, formal speeches and the making of gifts (the term “potlatch” meaning “a gift”).

MATTER OF CONTRACT

The transaction which resulted in the conviction of these chiefs had no singing, dancing, native costume, formal speeches, feasting or gifts; it consisted of the payment of some \$1,500 as the first payment on account of the purchase of an Indian

¹⁰⁷ From QUAAEE INDIANS APPEAR IN COURT. (1921, December 25). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 3.

copper, valued at approximately \$10,000. The transaction was purely a matter of contract, but it was carried out according to the Indian custom and consequently was held by Mr. Halliday to be a ceremony within the law, which makes it an offence for any person to take part in any Indian dance, festival or other ceremony, at which the giving away, paying or giving back of money, goods or articles, forms a part, or is a feature.

“Found guilty of participating in a potlatch”¹⁰⁸ (1922)

Five Indians of the Kwawkewith Agency, found guilty of participating in a potlatch, this morning appealed to Chief Justice Hunter, but the conviction and sentence of two months’ imprisonment imposed by Mr. W. M. Halliday, Justice of the Peace, Alert Bay, were confirmed.

The information had been proffered by Sergeant Donald Angermann of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police against Johnny Scow, George Scow, Lagia, Chief Dick and Kasu. On October 15 last the five accused took part in a ceremony at Kingcombe Inlet when a copper shield was purchased by Kasu for his son-in-law, George Scow, the price being \$10,000 and the first payment amounting to \$1,400.

Mr. E. K. DeBeck contended a potlatch, according to the Indian Act, required a feasting, dancing and singing, which had not occurred on this occasion. In addition, although Lagis called the Indians together, none were dressed in the native costume and none wore masks or headdresses. The speaker did not use his wand of office, no gifts were distributed, and no order of proceedings was observed among the Indians participating.

SCOW “COPPERED”

The ceremony, as stated by Mr. Halliday, consisted in the assembling of the Indians and the offering of the copper for sale. Chief Dick made the first payment of \$1,400, partly cash and mostly blankets, used among the Indians as currency. Kasu’s wife added \$100 to this amount. The funds went to Lagis, and the copper to the Scows, who rejoiced considerably in consequence of this emblem of honor coming to the family.

Counsel for the convicted Indians argued the affair was a business transaction, while Mr. F. R. Anderson, for the prosecution, maintained the act had been infringed.

“Kasu, being the wealthy man of the tribe, was coppered in this way,” remarked the Chief Justice.

“Exactly,” agreed Mr. Anderson, “he was coppered and next year somebody else would be; just like a game of tag.”

Counsel argued the intention of the Legislature was to protect the Indians against improvident dealings.

¹⁰⁸ From WEALTHY RED MAN COPPERED. (1922, January 20). *The Province*, p. 20.

NOT WORTH MUCH

Mr. DeBeck stated the copper was worth \$10,000, and had the same power and effect among the Indians as a bank note of high denomination. He admitted there was possibly less than a dollar's worth in the shield.

Potlatches were not harmful, he contended, a view supported by a report of the Anthropological Society. He said he had every reason to believe the act would be amended in this respect.

The potlatch was the keynote of Indian social organization. In the present case there was no ceremony and the meeting was for the purpose of properly witnessing a business transaction, and so obviate the necessity of recording the dealings in writing. The carnival spirit and excitement which were the outstanding features of a potlatch were absent in the present case.

"There evidently was quite a pow-wow among the sages of the tribe, and some kind of ceremony," said the Chief Justice. "The intention of the act is to prevent the tribe wishing off a copper on some member of the tribe and so relieving him of his money. The value of the copper depends upon the amount of property owned by the man on whom the copper is to be wished. Evidently the whole thing is a scheme to relieve this man of a large sum of money under the guise of a potlatch," he said in conclusion. "The conviction must be affirmed."

"Twenty-three Indians brought to prison"¹⁰⁹ (1922)

Twenty-three Indians – five of them women and two of them grandmothers – trooped up from the dock Tuesday on their way to Okalla prison, in charge of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They were convicted at Alert Bay by Mr. W. M. Halliday, the Indian agent, on charges of taking part in "potlatches". Twenty-two of them are to serve two months in prison, and one of them six months. Twenty-five others who were convicted have been allowed to go free on suspended sentence, on promising to give up the ancient tribal custom. The sentences were imposed on Saturday night last.

WANT INQUIRY

Mr. R. W. Ellis, who with Messrs. J. A. Findlay and W. Murray appeared to defend the Indians at their trials, says that the Indians are petitioning Ottawa to appoint a commission to investigate the "potlatch" and declare which are the innocent portions of the festival which the tribesmen may be allowed to perpetuate. At present even the most innocent form of potlatching is prohibited. One of the prisoners had merely called 25 of his friends together and distributed fifty-cent pieces and made a speech in order to give his newest baby a name, it is said, but he fell under the general law.

Objection to the potlatch, it is said, formerly arose owing to the "wild devil" dance which the seventh degree Indians used to dance in memory of their old cannibal days. Spectators used to take the chance of getting a bite from the frenzied dancers.

¹⁰⁹ From TWENTY-THREE INDIANS BROUGHT TO PRISON TO SERVE TERMS. (1922, April 12). *Vancouver Daily World*, p. 11.

The missionaries used also to object to the custom of holding marriages at potlatches where the bridegroom would pay over a sum of money to the father of the bride, a system which allowed the wife, if she did not like her husband after a fair trial, to save up an equal sum of money and purchase her release from the marriage.

MARK OF ESTEEM

At one of the recent potlatches, it is said, one happy wife handed over to her husband the sum with which he had purchased her some years before, but would not take her release. This was regarded as a mark of the highest wifely esteem.

Lavish giving of presents is a feature of the potlatches. The dances are grotesque, but are said not to be immoral, as they are all done in costumes of ermine skins decorated with bells and the sacred bark of the cedar trees, and the masks representing various animals.

Sergt. Ankerman of the Mounted Police acted as prosecutor in the 58 cases at Alert Bay.

“To be released”¹¹⁰ (1922)

The potlatch, a famous Indian institution, has been the subject of a special inquiry by the Dominion government. The inquiry was made by the anthropological division of the department of mines, but it does not make any recommendations regarding the potlatch or regarding an amendment to the Indian Act to permit the Indians to carry on the practice.

This information was given in the House of Commons this afternoon by Hon. Charles Stewart, Minister of Indian Affairs, in reply to a question by L. J. Ladner, Conservative, Vancouver South.

Mr. Stewart stated further that there had been 50 indictments of Indians during the last six months in British Columbia for taking part in potlatches. All have been released except four, and the parole of three of these is now under consideration by the Department of Justice. The department now has before it a petition, presented by certain British Columbia Indians, asking for a commission to investigate the potlatch.

“Indians persistent in breaking potlatch law”¹¹¹ (1922)

From time to time there is a notice in the press that a certain Indian or Indians have been convicted of having taken part in a potlatch and sent to jail for a term of months. Within the past six months there have been more than 50 Indians convicted at Alert Bay alone of this offence. At least 23 of these are now at Oakalla serving no less than two months each. Four of these are women, one being a grandmother. At the time of writing, Friday, May 5, not one of these 23 has been released.

¹¹⁰ From B. C. Indians, Sent to Prison for Potlatch, Are to Be Released. (1922, May 4). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 1.

¹¹¹ From CHIEFTAIN. (1922, May 7). Indians Persistent in Breaking Potlatch Law. *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 31.

What is a potlatch?

Why is it criminal?

Why should men and women be sent to prison for taking part?

Why should the taxpayers pay the expenses?

And why are the Indians so persistent in breaking the law?

This article is an answer to these questions.

First of all, go back and examine the social fabric and organization of the Indians prior to the advent of the "whites". It is stated by anthropologists[that] the Indians of British Columbia had achieved a state of civilization extremely high for a primitive people. They had a code of laws so wide in scope that it could only be mastered after years of experience and study, and by a direct contact with the operation of the law. It was a complete code, both civil and criminal, covering all the requirements of their community.

Some of their laws appear strange, for instance, the law that in most cases the nephew took priority over the son in matters of inheritance; or the law that the right to sing a certain song or dance a certain dance, was the property of one man or family; or the law that when a girl married, a settlement of money or goods must be made by her family, to be returned at a later date with interest, and until this settlement was returned, she was not in the eyes of the law deemed a member of her father's family.

The organization of their social system was "patriarchal," i.e., the family was the unit and the heads of the family united to form the state. Each head of a family, or patriarch, had complete jurisdiction over his own family, but was answerable to the tribe, and in tribal matters he represented the family. The people were in three classes: First, the hereditary aristocracy, whose rights, privileges, [and] precedences were most jealously guarded; second, the common people who had many rights similar to those of the upper class, although of less degree; third, the slaves, who were slaves over which the owner had power of life and death.

The last vestige of slavery disappeared many years ago, and with the depletion in the numbers of the Indians, most of them now belong to the upper class. Thus the families united to form the tribe, and the tribes united to form the nation. On the coast there were from six to twelve nations. This is a brief summary of the organization which was, and is, highly prized by the Indians; so highly, in fact, that banishment was the heaviest penalty that could be inflicted, short of death. There were, in addition to this political organization, certain secret societies, or orders, or phratries, some seven in all.

EACH HAD RANK

These phratries, with slight modifications, appear in all the nations. Each had its rank, the highest being the "Hamatsa," best known on account of the "Tsaika" dance, a dance that may only be danced by a Hamatsa man, and the most highly-esteemed dance of all Indian dances. Each of these phratries had a membership in almost every tribe, had totemic crests belonging to itself, and had rights and powers directly bearing on the administration of organized society.

Now, how could such an organization be administered by a people who did not know the act of writing? How could property be transmitted, and the title to property

made safe? How could hereditary titles, crests, sons, dances, etc. be ensured to the proper owner and his rights safeguarded? How could all events which should be matters of record be recorded?

The answer is the answer found by all peoples developing beyond the state of savagery, yet before the advent of writing, viz., the attaching to the event a certain amount of publicity and a certain formality or ceremony to impress it on the people before whom it is proclaimed. Relics of such customs have survived amongst all civilized peoples.

FOUND IN POTLATCH

In the case of the Indians, this is found in the potlatch. The potlatch is the logical result of the evolution of a people without the art of writing, developing to a higher state of civilization.

The potlatch is the formal gathering of those directly or indirectly concerned, either for the formal publication of some event whereby the status of an individual or group of individuals, or to the tribe, or to the nation, was altered or fixed.

Amongst many others, the following events necessitated a potlatch in order to give the proper legal effect: The recording of a birth, giving of a name or title, the attainment of the age of marriage, marriage itself, divorce, death, expulsion or banishment from a tribe, the making of a chief, the admission or initiation into one of the various phratries, agreements between tribes, making of treaties, [and] declaration of war, each with its attendant adjustments of property and rights.

The potlatch must not be confused with certain other functions at which the now-defunct "Medicine Man" was wont to officiate, consisting of the doctoring by incantations, charms and dancing and the laying on or removal of spells; nor must it be confused with certain ceremonious feasts, or functions, pertaining to the seasons, such as were considered necessary to ensure a good salmon or oolichan run, or a good season for hunting, or good weather for fishing.

These were not part of the working out of the social organization, but were matters of superstition and more of a semi-religious or mystic nature.

NOT OF RELIGION

There was nothing of religion in the potlatch, nor was it in any way a heathenish ceremony, as was once believed. Apart from the fact that there was a mythical or mystic origin to all families and all phratries which was always symbolized at all ceremonies, there was nothing mystic about the potlatch. It was merely the machinery by which the Indians carried on organized society.

Of course, the Indians now have no desire that their potlatch system should in any way conflict with, or be antagonistic to our system; they do not presume to operate in the judicial capacity of courts in any matters in which our courts have jurisdiction, but they do ask that where our courts will not act, that their potlatch may do so. For instance, it is deemed a matter of importance to the Indians that each should have the status to which he is entitled, that he should have the use of certain family names, or titles, [and] that he should have his hereditary right to admission into certain societies or phratries. Our courts or systems of record offer no relief or means of administering such matters.

The great importance of matters of this kind is well illustrated by the statement of an Indian recently sentenced to a term for potlatching, when he said, "My grandson had to be given the hereditary name to which he was entitled, and it was so important to me that he should be named, that I was willing to serve six months in jail to ensure his being named."

VIEWPOINT IS DIFFICULT

It is somewhat difficult for us to get their viewpoint, or to understand why these matters are deemed of such importance. Nevertheless, the fact remains that paramount importance is attached to such matters by the Indians. The nature of the potlatch varies with the occasion of event being celebrated, but certain elements are always present.

Those concerned must be summoned to attend; all who come are arranged or seated in a proper procedure; the speaker (either a professional orator or herald, or a member of the family of the host) arises grasping the orator's staff – a staff of 5 or 6 feet in length, carved in totemic designs – and in the name of the host invites all present to bear witness to what is to follow; he announces the names and standing of the host and defines clearly the event, or transaction, to be effected, or recorded.

If there is a consideration to pass, the consideration is enumerated. If there is any song, dance, mask, copper or other insignia concerned in the transaction, the song is sung, the dance danced, the mask paraded, or the copper or other insignia, exhibited. If there is money to pass, it is counted out; if chattels pass, they are produced, the underlying idea seeming to be that the actual transaction must be seen by and impressed on those who are to witness it.

Quite naturally it follows that the greater the host can make the entertainment, the more conspicuous and important would the ceremony appear to be, and the higher the standing of the host. From this has arisen the custom of making very substantial gifts to all present.

The giving is present at all potlatches; hence the name "potlatch," which in Chinook means "a giving," or "gift". Here again one must note a peculiar feature of all potlatches: No gift is ever made at a potlatch without the implied obligation of a return in kind, with interest; it wasn't really a gift at all, but a loan or investment, and it worked out exactly in that way.

NONE IMPOVERISHED

When the system was in operation without the interference of the Indian department, the security of such an investment was a perfectly good one. No one was impoverished by the system of giving! In fact, the opposite was the case; saving and investing were encouraged.

There was no legislation amongst the Indians – the laws were as they found them immutable, but through the potlatch the law was administered, and the affairs of the state regulated, and in addition to this the potlatch constituted the sole diversion and amusement of the Indians, apparat from their daily avocations. So completely did the potlatch enter into the lives of the Indians, that it is not surprising that they cling [to it] with considerable pertinacity as the sole expression of any of any or all of their native customs.

The law against the potlatch has never been rigidly enforced until comparatively recently. The scope of the law is extremely sweeping, and according to its strict interpretation it is a great hardship.

It provides that any person who aids, encourages or assists in the celebration of any Indian dance, festival, or other ceremony at which the giving away, paying, or giving back of any moneys, goods, or chattels, forms a part of is a feature, is liable to a term in jail of not less than two months, or not more than six months.

BAN TO CUSTOM

Apart from the sweeping nature of the law, it seems anomalous that the legislation is not against the dance or the ceremony, for any Indian dance or ceremony is apparently all right, unless there is something given away. When one couples this with the fact that an Indian ceremony, at which there is nothing given away by way of refreshment or otherwise, is inconceivable to the Indians, the direct conclusion is that the law, as it stands, is a complete ban to any and all Indian customs or ceremonies.

Be it also remembered that in order to constitute an offence it is not necessary that there be a dance or festival. This was made manifest in the recent case against Johnny Scow and four others, who each spent two months at Oakalla for having consummated a business deal, respecting an Indian copper, according to the usual custom and without dancing, [without] feasting, without the wearing of any costume of the parading of any masks, and without any gifts being made other than the payment over of the consideration for the copper.

“Increase the sentence”¹¹² (1922)

“Many Indians are overgrown children, and the law is framed to protect them against themselves, as well as to prevent others preying upon them,” said Judge Grant on Friday afternoon, when dismissing the appeals of nine Alert Bay Indians, convicted recently of potlatch offences. Sentences of two months’ imprisonment imposed by Magistrate William Halliday were affirmed.

Only one appeal was heard, that of Billy Moon and Mrs. Ya Kuglas, and when Judge Grant upheld the magistrate in this case, defense counsel, Mr. J. A. Findlay, abandoned appeals on behalf of eight other Indians. The appeal of the tenth Indian, Charlie Hunt, who had been sentenced by Magistrate Halliday to six months’ imprisonment, was adjourned to May 26.

In February a dance took place in Billy Moon’s house at New Vancouver, Harbledown Island, about ten miles from Alert Bay. Billy delivered a speech of welcome to the guests, comprising the population of the village. A member of the tribe, Mrs. Dick Mountain, executed a dance, wearing a wooden mask on her head. Billy and Mrs. Ya Douglas distributed apples and twenty-five and fifty-cent pieces to the guests. When the supply of coins ran short, the equivalent in blankets was given.

¹¹² From INDIANS MUST STAY IN SKOOKUM HOUSE. (1922, May 13). *The Province*, p. 26.

The Indians contended that the ceremony was not a potlatch. It was an “eskala,” or “little giving,” they said.

Mr. Halliday, who is magistrate and Indian Agent for the Alert Bay district, attempted to persuade the Indians to sign agreements by which they would promise never again to participate in potlatches. Many Indians signed the agreement and surrendered their potlatch paraphernalia. These, when prosecuted, were released on suspended sentence or recommended for parole, while others, who refused to sign, after conviction were given the minimum sentence of two months in Oakalla jail.

Mr. Halliday asked Judge Grant to increase the sentence so that the Indians should be liberated in time to participate in the salmon fishing, which commenced June 18. His honor affirmed the convictions.

Although the Indians appealed their convictions, thirteen on the other hand, did not, and are at present serving the balance of two months’ sentences in Oakalla jail. Most of the Indians were found guilty in connection with a much larger potlatch when Indians from Cape Mudge to Cape Caution, to the number of several hundred, took part, and presents to the value of \$10,000, including gas boats and pool tables, were given away.

“Indian chief appeals against potlatch ban”¹¹³ (1924)

An eloquent appeal against the ban which the Government has imposed on the holding of potlatches was made by Captain Jack, one of the Indian chiefs who took part in the entertainment of the party which visited Friendly Cove on August 13 to witness the unveiling of the memorial cairn commemorating the landing of Captains Cook and Vancouver and the taking over of the area for the British. The West Coast native, who had already eagerly attested his loyalty to the King, found in the big audience which assembled in his tribal council hall to watch the dances and other diversions, arranged for the occasion, an opportunity which should not be missed to make his plea for the withdrawal of the regulation which has ruled the abolition of the old tribal custom. The potlatch is to the Indian his “gift-making” time, and Captain Jack tried to make it definitely understood that the alleged disorderliness which the authorities had complained [of] had no historical or traditional connection with the observance whatsoever.

Chief Napoleon Maquinna (Mowachat), head of the Nootkas, and Captain Jack, his friendly rival, were at the beach to welcome His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor and others of the party who came ashore after the ceremony of the unveiling.

¹¹³ From Indian Chief Appeals Against Potlatch Ban. (1924, August 24). *Daily Colonist*, p. 30.

“Go, and potlatch no more”¹¹⁴ (1927)

Several thousand dollars in money, blankets, furniture and a piano, and prized Indian “coppers” were given away at a potlatch by the Kingcombe tribe on Kingcombe Inlet recently. Investigation by provincial police showed that the free distribution of wealth followed payment of a large sum by a tribesman for the marriage of a young Indian girl.

Chief Dick Weber and six other members of the Kingcombe band were arrested by Constable W. H. Hadley and taken before Magistrate W. M. Halliday, Alert Bay. The accused pleaded guilty to potlatching and were allowed to go on suspended sentence on promises that they would never potlatch again.

The Kingcombe tribe was the only band of Indians who refused to enter into an agreement several years ago with the government for the abolition of the old custom. The authorities are considerably elated over the promise and think that potlatching among the Coast tribes is a thing of the past.

“Should the potlatch go?”¹¹⁵ (1936)

The reason Indians give potlatches, convivial ceremonies in which they donate their belongings to friends, is to attain social prestige, according to A. W. Neill, Independent member for Comox-Alberni, who yesterday defended in the Commons the red man’s right to indulge his fancy for acting as Santa Claus, and later told of personal experiences in an interview.

He was for years [an] Indian Agent on the West Coast.

“It is the man, not the [woman], who has the social aspirations, otherwise the idea is much the same as when Mrs. Smith invites her friends to an elaborate dinner party to impress them and Mrs. Jones sends out extravagant cards and presents at Christmas time,” Mr. Neill explained.

“Muckamuck (food) potlatches given now, are really large dinner parties with gifts of food that are eaten on the premises. In the old days Indians would give away their beds and stoves and even mortgage their futures, but such extremes are dying out.”

METHOD IN MADNESS

Mr. Neill said that often there was method in the madness of a man who gave such a feast.

“An Indian was once pointed out to me as a potlatch expert,” he said. “He had bought a dozen boxes of biscuits and held a potlatch, then every man who had been a guest became in turn a host for the donor of the first party, and he acquired an amazing quantity of paraphernalia.

“The custom occasionally has the good point of becoming an old age pension for men who were generous in their youth.”

¹¹⁴ From ‘GO, AND POTLATCH NO MORE,’ SAYS COURT. (1927, March 28). *The Province*, p. 10.

¹¹⁵ From Should The Potlatch Go? (1936, March 21). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 1.

Originally, he said, potlatches were orgies of initiation for the younger men of the tribe. Now they are more or less a community affair, sometimes given by one tribe to another and held in huge houses accommodating more than 200 people.

Indian giving still holds many of its old traditions, according to Mr. Neill, and potlatch customs appear on other occasions.

“My sister-in-law was given a carved wooden sea otter with cod liver oil bottle stoppers for eyes, by one of the tribes,” he said. “It was too large to carry away, so I put it outside my door.

“In a short while it cost me money. Indians would arrive to trade, remark that their cousin John or cousin’s cousin John or Cousin Peter had worked on the carving, then take it for granted when they spoke about a bag of sugar, biscuits or jam that they would receive it for nothing.”

Mr. Neill agrees with the law that the potlatch of the old variety should be taboo, but believes that if an old man wants to save superfluous belongings and give a giveaway party that will not injure himself, he should be allowed to do so.

“Prosecution may follow potlatch”¹¹⁶ (December, 1939)

Provincial Police heads, the Indian Department, and possibly the Attorney General’s Department, will decide what is to be done as an aftermath of a big potlatch at the Indian village of Kitseguelka, a few miles west of Hazelton, on November 8th and 9th [1938]. The scale reached in that potlatch caused police to take action in the matter. While potlatches are illegal, small gatherings for gift-making have been more or less tolerated for some time.

At an investigation at Hazelton one Indian witness stated that the Act in this respect was fifty years too old. He outlined the custom in regard to the election of a new chief and intimated that there was no more harm in Indians passing out gifts on such occasions than there was in white making gifts during the Christmas season.

It is stated that the potlatch was put on by Hazelton and Kitseguelka chiefs following the burial of Chief Dan Cookson on November 7. The presents covered a wide variety, but the leaders were an expensive radio and a sum of \$500 in cash. Chiefs and their relatives were the great beneficiaries.

Provincial Police have seized the radio and reported to headquarters. It is believed the prosecutions will be started in the near future.

W. W. Anderson conducted the enquiry held at Hazelton.

The end of the potlatch ban (1951)

Indian Act S.C. 1951, c. 29, section 123.1.(2): “Sections two to one hundred and eighty-six of the said Act are repealed.” This includes the section banning the potlatch.

¹¹⁶ From Prosecution May Follow Potlatch. (1939, December 6). *Interior News* (Smithers, B.C.), p. 1.

ALERT BAY



Alert Bay located on a map of British Columbia from 1888.¹¹⁷

“A vigorous kick against the potlatch law”¹¹⁸ (1895)

Kia-ku-glass, chief of all the Nimkish and the most conspicuous figures in the Indian ranks about Alert Bay, is making a vigorous kick against the “potlatch law,” which the Government are about to put in force. The Chief thinks it hard lines to have to give up the potlatch and public feasts which his ancestors have been accustomed to enjoy since time immemorial, and which he and his tillicums wish to perpetuate.

‘Evils’ of the Potlatch¹¹⁹ (1896)

The following letter, written by a missionary, summarizes religious and government reasoning behind the potlatch ban. It took time away from wage work and the ‘civilizing’ influence of residential schools, and it was a gateway to ‘retrogression’ to traditional Indigenous cultural practices.

I desire to place before your readers a few facts with regard too the potlatch. I emphasize the word *facts*, and wish it to be understood that I am only referring to what I have observed on the north end of the Island, where I have lived seventeen years.

On one occasion a woman returned from Victoria with seven bales of blankets. They were placed in a pile and she sat on this throne while men sang (if not her

¹¹⁷ Engraved by George F. Cram (d. 1928) in Chicago, Illinois. Collection of C. Willmore.

¹¹⁸ From CITY AND PROVINCE. (1895, September 16). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 3.

¹¹⁹ From Rev. Alfred J. Hall. (1896, March 15). EVILS OF THE POTLACH. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 7. Reverend Alfred James Hall (1853 – 1918) published a grammar of the Kwakiutl language in 1889.

praises) applauding her action. These blankets were then distributed. I once counted thirty-two women in one month who embarked by the steamers to bring back the coveted blankets. In my time about fifty women under 25 years of age have died, all of whom have been sacrificed to maintain the potlatch. Girls that I have taught in school have returned only to be nursed and die. Whenever a tribe ceased to potlatch, the life of shame, which some of these women lead, practically ceased.

I have often seen tribes leave their villages and remain at the potlatch in another village three and five months. The aged and infirm are left behind, and once in a deserted village I found an old woman frozen to death and as hard as a stone. I have been applied to for poison to put such out of the way, because their friends (?) wished to follow those who had gone off to the potlatch. There can be no real progress in any direction while this system flourishes, and so long as it lasts the natives acquire but cannot accumulate. An Indian trader is unknown in a potlatching village; they abound when this system is given up.

The efforts of the Indian department to educate the Indians are beyond all praise. It is school versus potlatch; both cannot flourish. Our hope is that the school will undermine its opponent and that it will topple over. In this district there are two schools and the Indians from these two villages have been absent to-day ten weeks potlatching in two other villages. There are no signs of their speedy return and the deserted schools for a while, at least, are second best. So much for morals under the potlatch. Now, how does this system affect the industry of the province in general and the merchants of Victoria in particular.

There are, as I have stated, assembled to-day in two villages, 800 Indians potlatching. There they have been nearly three months and may remain five. This is the season to procure furs and oil. Have they (Say 200 able men among them) earned or produced \$2 per day, i.e. 1 cent per man during this stay? I believe not. Now there are many tribes on the coast who have given up the potlatch, and from them I will mention three totaling also about 800 – the Bella Bellas¹²⁰, the Kitkalas¹²¹ and the Kinoliths. Will anyone dare to say these non-potlatchers will not produce this season ten times the value of furs produced by the 800 now potlatching? Probably fifty times more would be nearer the truth.

By all means give the Indian his liberty. But there is little fear under a government which treats its aborigines better than any are treated in the world, that they will ever lose that. The essence of the potlatch consists in this, that a few in every village terrorize over the many, and thus the law which forbids the potlatch is not against liberty, but license. It is in the interests of this province that we keep our Indians alive; they are worth preserving. What they generally produce is in addition to what our settlers produce. They occupy land the white man does not require. They love the white man, and their ultimate future must be absorption and assimilation to the whites.

¹²⁰ The Heiltsuk people of Bella Bella Island.

¹²¹ The Gitxaala band of the Tsimshian First Nation of British Columbia. Their traditional territory is Dolphin island.

Those who live in towns do not see the best of our Indians. There are nobler men among them than many are aware of. I have many kind and good friends among them, and I am not ashamed to say I love the Indians. Whiskey is supposed to kill the Indian, but for one destroyed by whiskey, the potlatch has destroyed ten. No one who really knows what the potlatch is, and what it tends to, can wish to uphold it, and at the same time love the Indians. Selfishness may and does uphold it, but love, never.

ALFRED J. HALL.

Alert Bay, March 11, 1896.

A letter from Alert Bay¹²² (1898)

The Indians at Alert Bay recently held a meeting to discuss the proposed reinstatement of the potlatch as a lawful proceeding, and the talk resulted in a composition which one of them wrote out for publication in the *Colonist*. It has been transmitted at their request by Mr. Alfred J. Hall, of Alert Bay, who vouches for its authenticity as a purely Indian composition. The letter, addressed to the Editor of the *Colonist*, proceeds as follows:

[LETTER FROM ALERT BAY, VIA ALFRED J. HALL]

Having heard that in the last session of the provincial parliament a resolution was passed asking [the] Dominion government to reconsider the potlatch question with a view to repealing section 114, and that there is to be an inquiry as to the evils of the potlatch, so we should like to tell the public what the potlatch is.

Really and truly it is destruction to life and property, as we shall show. The first is that the women go from home to other places for immoral purposes, to get money or blankets to give away, or potlatch, as people call it. The second is that they sell their daughters to other men as soon as possible – sometimes 12 or 13 years old – marriage they call it; the people do not care so long as they get blankets to potlatch with. And the third is that they hate each other so much because of their trying to get one above the other in rank, as it is according to how many times they potlatch that they get the rank, and to keep it too; if they could, they would even poison one another. Even now they think they kill one another with witchcraft with intent to kill, and they believe that they do kill. A man does not care for any relatives when the potlatch is in question. The potlatch is their god; they will sacrifice everything to it; life, property, relatives, children or anything must go for him to be a tye in the potlatch.

A man after giving a potlatch will sit down, his children too, without knowing where he is going to get his food and clothes, as he has given away everything, and he has borrowed half of it, which he has to pay back double. And another thing is when they are mad with one another, they will break canoes or tear blankets or break a valuable copper, to shame their opponent. The potlatch is one fight, and quarreling and hating one, another.

¹²² From INDIANS. (1898, January 3). THE POTLATCH. *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 4.

“Deforming the character of the potlatch”¹²³ (1898)

The following self-explanatory letter has been received by the Colonist, and like the communication with which it deals, is printed for what it purports to be – an Indian composition on a matter of absorbing interest to the natives of the coast:

BIG POTLATCH AT FORT RUPERT, B. C.
(Special to the Colonist.)

Henry J. Buler ungrounded Mr. Alfred J. Hall’s perfidious narrative deforming the character of the potlatch which appeared on the 3rd day of January, 1898. The composition [was] sent to the editor of the Colonist from Alert Bay. Mr. Alfred J. Hall of that place states that the Indians at Alert Bay held a meeting to discuss the potlatch and requested him to send their composition to the editor for publication, and he vouches for its authenticity as a purely Indian composition, and as soon as it reached here an investigation was made to see whether it was truly composed by the Indians or not.

The investigators assembled the Indians at Alert Bay, which were about four hundred. Mr. Alfred J. Hall was at the assembling. The investigator asked the audience if they did meet to discuss the potlatch, but they all ignored Mr. Alfred J. Hall’s imaginary statement, and he did not mention who are the Indians [who] requested him to send the supposed Indian composition to the Colonist. He said the newspaper man put his name in it, and the assemblage came to [a] conclusion with the putting up of many hands in token of favoritism of the potlatch. Mr. Alfred J. Hall likewise put up his hand; whether it was for favor or otherwise, no one knows.

The public must understand that the composition in which the writer of this article relating [to the potlatch] is supposed to be composed by the Indians, [was] proven to be utterly groundless, and the public must also know that this Mr. Alfred J. Hall is the same Reverend Alfred J. Hall who was sent out here to teach the Indians that “A lying [set of] lips are [an] abomination to the Lord.”

The writer found out the individuals who met to discuss the potlatch were the handful of [Métis] [who] called themselves [the] “Church Army”. The writer is going to answer every subject they mention in their deformation of the potlatch.

Their first subject is, [that because of the potlatch,] the women go from home to make money in immorality.

Answer – [I] wonder if Mr. Hall ever told them of the famous Whitechapel in London, where the potlatch is never dreamt of.

Their second subject is that they sell their daughters in the age of 12.

Answer – The writer never saw one yet marry at [less than] the age of 14.

[Their] third subject is that they hate each other; they think they kill one another by witchcraft, [and] a man does not care for any relatives.

Answer – [I] wonder if they read about [the time] Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him, although he never tried to get above his brother in potlatch

¹²³ From Buler, H. J. (1898, March 24). ABOUT THE POTLATCH. Semi-Weekly Colonist, p. 2. Written by Henry J. Buler. I’ve been unable to find Buler’s date of death, or a mention of him after 1898.

ranks. Children never ran away from parents, the Indians love each other, [and] they feed strangers without charges.

[Their] 4th subject is, [that] a man after giving a potlatch sits down his children without food and clothes, as he has given away everything, and he borrowed half of it, and another thing is [that] when they are mad with one another they will break canoes, etc., [and] the potlatch is one fight and [a time of] quarreling.

Answer – The writer gave three potlatches last year and is about to give one in a few days. He paid 450 blankets for his wife, and [they] have plenty to eat, and clothes. The Church Army once were in the potlatch, and did borrow blankets, etc., from the Indians, which they decline to pay back. They fulfilled the word of God unto Moses, when leaving Egypt: “speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor jewels of silver and jewels of gold.” They will also break things when they get mad. [...]

Let the public read this article carefully, and let them see if there is any difference between the Church Army and the “potlatch army”. They [have] done those things which they ought not [to have] done, as they are God’s chosen people, to be a light unto us poor gentiles. The Alert Bay Indians [are] talking about moving over to the Nimpkish River to get rid of the church people, as they are [a] nuisance in the vicinity.

The writer has been requested by the chiefs of the many Fort Rupert speaking Indians to send their application to the government through the Colonist, read as follows:

“We, the Indians of the Fort Rupert speaking language, do earnestly entreat of our government not to take away from us our only means of living. What would our fatherless children and our old people do for living? Such men as Seaweed, the head man of the Fort Rupert, he is stone blind [and] firmly supported by the potlatch. If it were really destruction to our lives, we would [have] given it up long ago; of course we must die like other beings. Yes, we give away our own things, [but we] never stole anything from our Christian friend to give a potlatch. We respect the law, and everything in our Indian country is in your hands (government), and let us have this only one thing – our joyous potlatch.”

The writer is a successor to his chief grandfather and uncle, and he knows all the details of the Indian customs, and [has] been also a student in the Alert Bay mission and knows all about it, and is the son of the late A. Buler¹²⁴, one of the pioneers of Victoria. Every words of my statement are of reality.

HENRY J. BULER.

¹²⁴ Probably Asbury Buler (1825 – 1881), who ran a second-hand store on Government Street as early as 1862.

“They fired the cannon”¹²⁵ (September, 1899)

The steamer Barbara Boscowitz, just down from northern British Columbia ports, brings news of a big klootchman’s potlatch at Alert Bay a week ago, in which [they] were permitted to participate. Chinaware only was given away.

“An old-time potlatch”¹²⁶ (March, 1900)

From Alert Bay comes news of cannibalism among the Indians of the rancheria adjoining that little northern settlement. Three of the Indians of that place are now on trial at Vancouver, whither they were taken by Provincial Constable Woolacott, charged with having committed the heinous offence of cannibalism at a potlatch recently held at the Indian village at Alert Bay. The accused are Ahkow and Igluk, Indians, and Hunt, a [Métis]. All are well-known settlers along the Coast.

It seems that about three weeks ago a potlatch was held at Alert Bay in return, as it were, for the entertainment given to the Alert Bay Indians last summer by the chief at Fort Rupert. [...] The potlatch was a very swell affair from the Indian point of view. All the Indians of the vicinity were invited, and gathered in the totem square in the center of the Indian rancherie, and the festivities of the first few days delighted the siwash heart. Then affairs began to drag, and some of the siwashes managed to get a little firewater, which they generously shared with the klootchmen.

It was the firewater that gave birth to the whole trouble. To the liquor-fired siwash mind, the potlatch was altogether too slow, and the klootchmen did not hesitate to make their mind clear to those present on the point. They chanted the forgotten glories of the tribe, and recalled the old ways before the tribe became white-washed Indians. They sung of the days of savagery, and shouted for the “tamanamass” and other weird, prohibited dances of old.

Fired by the words of the klootchmen, a number of young men sprang into the center of the grouped Indians, and then ensued a scene such as has not been witnessed in connection with the Indian potlatches for some time. Ten young [Indians] were running among the crowd, biting all they could catch. This, too, was very tame, though, with what was to follow, according to the story told by an Indian deputy, who makes serious charges against the Indians. He charges the three Indians who have been brought down by Provincial Constable Woolacott with devouring the flesh of some corpses which had been secured and half-roasted on the fire around which the potlatchers were grouped.

This is the ghastly story which comes to this city in letters from Alert Bay, a settlement on Cormorant Island, off the eastern coast of this Island. Alert Bay is a very picturesque settlement, from its limits at the little Indian graveyard with its totem monuments, to the Industrial school, which marks the outer limit of the village. The principal buildings are the cannery of A. S. Spencer and the general store on the wharf, which is the landing place of the northern steamers. To the left of the cannery,

¹²⁵ From THEY FIRED THE CANNON. (1899, September 5). *Semi-Weekly World* (Vancouver), p. 2.

¹²⁶ From An Old-Time Potlatch. (1900, March 13). *Victoria Times*, p. 7.

which marks the center of the village, is a terrace of cabins, where live the employees of the cannery, and further along are the dwellings of the provincial police officer and others, which reach for perhaps a hundred yards down to the Indian burying place.

To the right of the cannery is the Indian rancherie, with its cluster of huts, many of which have immense totems in front of them. One of the totems, that in front of the first hut, fronting on the beach past the cannery buildings, has a very lofty and unique totem [sic.], which has been photographed again and again by those going up and down the coast. The lower portion represents the head of a large bird, and the bill is hung on hinges, opening and shutting by the pulling of strings. The Indian village is quite picturesque. There are a large number of siwashes there, and they can be seen squatting around the pebbly beach, many of them in the primitive blanket. At the end of the rancherie is a sawmill and store, run by the Church of England missionary, Rev. J. Hall, who, it will be remembered, was one of the foremost in the effort to have the potlatch forbidden by law. His residence, a two story frame building, adjoins the little church, which is perhaps the best architectural work to be seen in the settlement. It is indeed a fine building in comparison, and [especially] when it is considered that the whole village consists of but a single line of buildings about two thousand yards long. Nearby is another church building, which is used by the mission people on week-days, the more pretentious building being used for the Sunday services. The Industrial school at the left limit of the village is also a large building in comparison with the size of the settlement; here a large number of the Indian children make furniture, etc., and are [taught] other useful branches of industry. The whole village fronts on the beach, and on a rising hill behind there is a dense background of Douglas firs. It is indeed a picturesque place.

That the Indians of the rancherie, although the majority of them are as enlightened as any on the coast, have not all adopted the customs of civilization, is shown by the fact that some of them retain the old custom of marriage by purchase. It is not long since one of the young [Indians] in the Indian village gave the father of one of the young [women] sixty blankets he had saved for his daughter.

The trial of the men against whom the grave charge is pending at Vancouver will no doubt be watched with interest.

“No eating of flesh”¹²⁷ (March, 1900)

The [Métis] boy Hunt, who, with the Indian, Ingluk, who is to be tried at the assizes on the 17th of next month for offences against the laws of Canada in taking part in a potlatch in the far north, above Alert Bay, is the son of a former Hudson’s Bay [Company] factor and has several sisters well-married in the province. He is fairly well fixed financially and will put up a vigorous defence, having already retained W. J. Bowser¹²⁸ to act for him. The story, as told by Hunt, is as follows:

“It was decided to hold a potlatch, and the chief offered a 30-foot canoe to the member of the tribe who would show the most fortitude when the hamatzas danced.

¹²⁷ From NO EATING OF FLESH. (1900, March 13). *The Province*, p. 2.

¹²⁸ A future Premier of British Columbia.

The hamatzas (the make-believe cannibals) were out in the woods howling, as they always do; they had had nothing to eat for three days then; and I prepared for the trial. I pulled the skin up under my elbow and held it in a vice until the blood was all out, then I drove two small holes clean through the skin and kept two skewers through the holes and hid away until the hamatzas rushed into the potlatch house dressed in nothing but boughs of trees and painted all over. They rushed around among the young [Indians], biting at them but not biting them. When they made a dart at me I slipped out the skewers and held my arm to one of them. He pretended to bite it, and then I ran to the chief with my arm bleeding and two holes in it. Well, I got the canoe, that's all. Ingluk is arrested for allowing the potlatch; there was no eating of human flesh at all."

"A common thing"¹²⁹ (1900)

Mr. Green, B.C. Indian interpreter, says that he does not believe that the courts will consider the offence of which the two Indians from Alert Bay are accused, namely unlawful practices at a potlatch, as an extremely serious affair.

"I remember potlatches," said Mr. Green, "30 years ago up the coast when the Indians would tear the dead bodies of their ancestors from the tree-tops and devour pieces of them. These practices were kept up every year at the big annual potlatches of the tribes where I was stationed, and until recently the Indians were not interfered with. The practice, of course, must be stopped, but the fact that these things have been done by British Columbia Indians without let or hindrance for several hundred years perhaps is an extenuating circumstance, certainly as far as the punishment for the offence is concerned."

Regina vs. Hunt¹³⁰ (1900)

In the case of Regina vs. Hunt, Chief Justice McColl and Judge Bole were on the bench to-day. The following jury was chosen and sworn: George Fletcher (foreman), John K. Cowan, James Macklin, Wm. H. Allen, Chas. M. Tanner, Robt. Crackenthorpe, Jas. H. Redmond, John Crowe, John A. Percival, Jos. Kenny, Thos. Cootes, John A. Forsythe.

Upon application of Mr. Bowser, witnesses were excluded.

Mr. Cane, in opening, said that the charge laid was that the prisoner had taken part in an Indian celebration or potlatch, and had there mutilated and eaten parts of a dead body. These celebrations are contrary to section 114 of the criminal code.

William Brotchie was sworn as interpreter.

To-Cop, an Indian sworn as witness, comes from [the] To-Nak-lak tribe, [and] was at the village at Alert Bay on 17th February as a spectator at the Hamatas dance. A Hamata is one who dances and eats a dead human body. The dance was held at Coloqua's, an Indian of the same tribe. [The] witness saw [the] prisoner there. A

¹²⁹ From A COMMON THING. (1900, March 21). *The Province*, p. 5.

¹³⁰ From DISGUSTING ORGIES. (1900, April 18). *The Province*, p. 7.

Hamata came in and bit the boy, and he also bit two others. As the Hamata held the arm of the boy, he cut pieces off with a razor. Then the Hamata went out and came back with a dead human body covered with evergreen. The body was placed on a box, and two chiefs stood up and spoke, calling on [the] prisoner to come and do the carving. Hunt got up and a red cedar turban was put on his head, and he went over and went around the house singing in Indian, and stopped at the body. The chiefs discussed what he should cut the body with. [The witness] saw him take a knife, [after which] he took the evergreens off, and cut the legs off, then the head, and gave the three portions to a chief who handed them to the Hamata, named Wyz-tia, who handed a piece to another Hamata. The trunk was given to a third, and the legs to a fourth Hamata. They ate all the fleshy parts of the body. A chief gathered up the bones and wrapped them up. When the eating was finished, [the] prisoner stood up and advised people not to say anything about it, as it was a serious affair.

Cross-examined, [the] witness said he goes to see Hamata dances all the time. Hamatas never eat deer and do not pretend deer are human bodies. [He] was a spectator. Only he and others of his tribe were there. Spectators filled the house, and [could] sit anywhere they like. Goerge Hunt sat away from him at the other end of the house. The Hamata did not merely pretend to bite. [The witness] saw him bite the boy. [He] didn't know where the body came from. [He] did not bring [the] body himself. [He] was not out of the house all day. Cla-Ka did not act as a dog dancer, nor did he eat anything. [He] is a nephew of Panket, who laid the charge. All who wear the red turban take part in the winter dances and can leave the village immediately if they want. The body was covered with skin. There were three Hamatas, one new one and two old ones. There was a bear dancer, but no dog dancer. None of the Hamatas are here to-day. His uncle did not say he would get any money for testifying. Wah-so-las is his brother.

“Found not guilty”¹³¹ (1900)

The Hunt potlatch case was completed yesterday and the prisoner [was] found not guilty. Several witnesses were called to corroborate the evidence of the star witness for the prosecution, the Indian To-Cop, and Mr. Cane for the crown, rested his case.

Mr. Bowser, in opening for the defence, stated that his case would be a complete refutation of the stories told by the witnesses for the crown. Hunt had been acting as a special constable for Indian Agent Pitcock on the west coast, and had come in rivalry with another constable, and Indian named Plaa-Kette. It was this man who instigated the whole prosecution, and every witness with but one exception was a relative of his. The boy To-Cop himself got the dead body mentioned, his brother and the other witness took part in the dance, and were regular attendants, as they admitted, at these affairs, whilst Hunt attended out of pure curiosity. Hunt was an

¹³¹ From THE ASSIZE COURT. (1900, April 19). *The Province*, p. 9.

authority on tribal customs and had furnished much information to scientists on questions of this kind.

After calling several witnesses who flatly contradicted those for the crown, there was a stir in the courtroom as “George Hunt” was cried. Hunt stated that he had been at the Indian village in Alert Bay and had attended the Hamata dance spoken of, but merely as a spectator, and had to sit with them back of a certain line. After the body had been brought in and placed in the center of the room, he was called by name to come see it. He did so, and when he saw what it was, and was turning away, the Hamatas, and bear and dog dancers, snatched the body and ate, or pretended to eat, it. Hunt denied having the red cedar turban placed on his head, for among the Indians, the wearer of the red cedar cannot leave the village for four days after, under penalty of two blankets to every resident. In this case it would mean three hundred blankets. He left three days after.

The case closed with this evidence, and the jury evidently believed it, for after being out about twenty minutes, they returned with a verdict of not guilty¹³², and the prisoner was discharged.

“Four tribes represented”¹³³ (March, 1901)

At Alert Bay, a big feast of the Indians was being held, there being four tribes represented and about 200 Indians in all gathered. They had a dance in a modern potlatch style without the objectionable features, and the celebration is quite an elaborate one. One tribe gave away to the others over 100 boxes of biscuits, and a number of blankets. Then another tribe attempted to outdo the first, giving away 200 boxes. This kept up until there were over 600 boxes given away, and now the fourth tribe is having a shipment of flour and sugar sent north by the [steamer] *Tees* on the next trip, on which she leaves on Sunday or Monday, and these goods will also be given away like the others.

“The Japanese got wind of a big potlatch”¹³⁴ (March, 1901)

The C.P.N. company’s northern coast steamer Willapa did not call here on her way down this trip, but put into Victoria yesterday afternoon with but few passengers and no freight worth mentioning.

Among the passengers was Provincial Constable Fraser, who brought down four Japanese from Alert Bay who will all spend the next two months in jail, and besides each will pay a fine of \$75. Their offence against the law consisted in taking liquor north to sell to the Indians. The Japanese got wind of a big potlatch to be held at Alert Bay and, thinking to line their pockets with some of the golden fleece, they

¹³² Another accused was not so fortunate: “An Indian boy, charged with allowing himself to be mutilated at an Indian potlatch, [sentenced to] 2 months.” THE ASSIZES. (1900, April 22). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 5.

¹³³ From WIRE FROM SIMPSON. (1901, March 19). *Semi-Weekly World* (Vancouver), p. 7.

¹³⁴ From JAPS FOR JAIL. (1901, March 28). *The Province*, p. 7.

took up eighteen cases of the fiery stuff, but were prevented from landing at Wannock, and at the instance of Indian Agent Todd, the quartet were made prisoners.

“The missionary work at Alert Bay”¹³⁵ (July, 1903)

Miss Rebe Loxton Edwards, matron of the Girls’ Missionary Home, at Alert Bay, and Miss L. F. Humphries, another Church of England missionary from the same place, accompanied by Miss M. Woollicott, and in charge of a couple of little Indian girls who never knew what the light of civilization was apart from what they saw and were taught within their own narrow confines at home, form an interesting party of northern visitors who are now in the city, quartered at the Dominion. [...]

The missionary work at Alert Bay is accomplishing a great deal of good among the Indians, but during the past winter it has had influences of a most abstracting character to contend against, for the season has been one of unremitting potlatching. A week prior to the arrival of the party mentioned, the Indians had just finished what is known as “the grease potlatch,” so named from the vast amount of fish oil and fat consumed. Upward of one thousand natives participated in this celebration, and greatly to the detriment of cannery interests, Indians remained at this function when they should have been employed elsewhere. Indeed, cannery-men had to await the pleasure of the Indians, as they could not be induced to break away from their potlatch until it was over.

“Will attend potlatch”¹³⁶ (January, 1906)

Several Indians from the river reserves have stated that they are going to attend the big potlatch of their northern brethren at Alert Bay next month. The big event, which it is expected will be the last of its kind in the province, will be the occasion for the gathering together of nearly 5,000 of the former owners of the land, and will last about six weeks.

“Six months’ potlatch”¹³⁷ (January, 1906)

Passengers on the Tees brought particulars of extensive preparations being made by the Indians about Alert Bay for a grand potlatch to be held next month. According to present arrangements there will be at least 1,500 Indians from the immediate district taking part, but invitations have been sent and broadcast, and if the tribes from Bella Bella, Bella Coola, China Hat, Hardy Bay and other places respond, as it is expected they will, there will be no fewer than 4,500 of the natives assembled.

Nearly 3,000 blankets have already been secured by the Alert Bay Indians, and these and many other ictas will change hands during the celebration. The Indians

¹³⁵ From MISSIONARIES IN CITY FROM ALERT BAY. (1903, July 7). *Victoria Times*, p. 8.

¹³⁶ From Will Attend Potlach. (1906, January 13). *The Province*, p. 3.

¹³⁷ From SIX MONTHS’ POTLATCH. (1906, January 15). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 6.

are making no secret of the fact that they propose to extend the potlatch over a period of six months, and have practically defied the Indian Agent who has notified them that it must be confined to six weeks, and that if they do not behave they will have to quit even before that. It is feared that a potlatch of such long duration will lead to much trouble.

“Great potlatch at Alert Bay”¹³⁸ (March, 1906)

Eight hundred Indians belonging to points along the northern coast all the way from Fort Rupert to Kingcome Inlet and Knight Inlet are gathered at Alert Bay, engaged in the pleasantries of the largest potlatch held on this coast for some years.

The Indians have been potlatching for a month past. To all outward appearances the gathering is nothing more harmful than a gossiping party, for in front of the eyes of the provincial police and Indian Agent Ward DeBeck the Indians preserve the most decorous demeanor, and the animal dances are all that they should be in the way of propriety.

As the natives expect to keep the potlatch going till the fishing season commences in the North, which will be about the latter part of June, there is no telling what may happen before that time comes around. On principle the Indian Department objects to potlatches, not only because the wholesale exchange of gifts impoverishes the Indians, but because of the pernicious plans the natives adopt in order to get money with which they may potlatch to their friends. The average Indian will go to almost any end in order to make himself a good fellow, or a good thing, as the white man would say, at a potlatch.

“Stopped for a while”¹³⁹ (April, 1906)

The big potlatch at Alert Bay has been stopped for a while. The Indians propose to do a few weeks' fishing, and then the orgies will be resumed. The first session of the potlatch was the source of twenty-five cases for the police.

The Siwash does not hold a potlatch for any other purpose than to afford amusement. The Siwash idea of amusement may differ from that of his white brother in some respects, but in others it runs along the same lines. He wants to fill himself full of joy water and he likes occasionally to gamble.

The white man has made laws that the Siwash during potlatch time breaks whenever he feels like it, and the police were kept busy with men who had been indulging in the Indian substitute for black-jack and stud poker. One Japanese was doing a thriving business for a while selling a whiskey he had made out of acid, wood alcohol and condensed milk. It was as popular among the Indians as Peruna among jag-loving women. If he had only labeled it a patent medicine, he might still be in business instead of in the provincial jail.

¹³⁸ From GREAT POTLATCH AT ALERT BAY. (1906, March 12). *The Province*, p. 1.

¹³⁹ From FIVE LITTLE GIRLS SOLD AT ALERT BAY POTLATCH. (1906, April 4). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 1.

The barter marriages at this potlatch were carried out as usual. There were five of them that were known of, and the price of the girls ranged from \$300 to \$1,000. This barter marriage is an old Indian custom, and is no more reprehensible than the civilized system of selling society girls to titled husbands. Among the Indians, however, it is the girl that has to be paid for. Many of these marriages turn out quite happily, but the Indian is not much better than the white man in this respect, and there are sometimes divorces and sometimes separations, some sanctioned by the tribe, and some carried on like those heard of in Vancouver courts sometimes, without any sanction whatever. If a girl taken in marriage this way leaves her husband without just cause, the father has to restore the cash paid for her, with interest. If another man takes her, he has to make up this payment. A little girl in her early teens was sold for \$750 during the present potlatch. She was secured by a comparatively young man and the young bloods gave them a grand send-off. The young men, dressed in all the good clothes and "fixings" they could get on themselves, escorted the bride and groom to their tepee, singing and dancing all the way. They then gave a good luck dance around the premises. Just how much whiskey the groom supplied to the serenaders is not stated.

The only serious case growing out of the affair is that of Kakanus. Kakanus is an old [Indian] who has been lucky in the securing of barterable commodities and cash. He was able to pay \$1,000 in blankets, canoes and cash for a bride. That would have been all right, even if he was as old as Dowie, but, like Dowie, his polygamous ideas have got him into trouble. He already had one wife and eight children. As the new wife had four children, it is evident that Kakanus was not afraid of assuming a tremendous responsibility.

Someone, perhaps jealous of Kakanus, let the story out, and Kakanus was arrested and charged with bigamy. He was committed and has elected to take a jury trial at the assizes. The interesting question comes up in this case as to whether these barter and sale marriages of the Indians are legal marriages. They have been carried on for years under the sanction of, or connivance of the authorities, and, as said, they are on the whole as successful as white marriages, but then, are they legal? If they are not legal, Kakanus will have to be proceeded against for something else than bigamy. The case will come up at the assizes next month, and as Kakanus is not a pauper and not a fool, except in the matter of wishing to acquire more wife and family than is good for any man, he will likely not go to the penitentiary without putting up a strong fight for liberty. The trial is, therefore, pretty sure to be an interesting one, and will doubtless throw some light on Siwash ideas regarding matrimony.

"He denounces the potlatch"¹⁴⁰ (May, 1906)

Agent Debeck makes a special report to the [Indian] Department from Alert Bay dated October 23rd last. He says that almost every Indian in that agency who favors the potlatch is a slave dealer. Fathers sell their daughters, brothers sell their

¹⁴⁰ From HE DENOUNCES THE POTLATCH. (1906, May 8). *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 1.

sisters or cousins, and he knew of one instance where a son offered his old mother for sale as a slave.

Mr. Debeck recommended as a remedy for the existing evils, first, the putting down of the potlatch, which is really at the bottom of all the evils complained of. He says it should be done with a firm hand, not in the slipshod manner in which justice has been administered the Indians in [the] past; secondly, he suggests a rigid enforcement of the law as regards the sale of intoxicants to Indians; third, he suggests putting a stop to the custom of buying and selling women; and if possible compel any Indians to marry their women legally, and, lastly if possible to keep out the grafters.

Mr. Debeck concluded: "You may legislate for these Indians until Doomsday and they will never do any good until this curse of their whole lives, this potlatch, is completely wiped out."

"Prepare to abandon old wives"¹⁴¹ (May, 1906)

The Indians about Alert Bay watched with interest the bigamy proceedings against Kak-Kaimius, who was brought before Chief Justice Hunter at the last assize. The chief justice dismissed the case on the grounds that the Indians had been used for centuries to dealing with women in the way outlined by the prosecution, and that there was not enough evidence that a marriage ceremony was ever actually performed at all by the Indians.

Parties who know the customs of the Indians of Alert Bay report that the aborigines are preparing for a big "hiu-hiu" on the return of those interested in this particular bigamy case, and that there are many of the Indians simply awaiting the outcome of the case before abandoning women whom they have lived [with] for years in the approved native fashion.

The only witness examined in the bigamy case was Thomas Nowell, who lived with one woman for some twenty-five years. During that time she has become old, crippled and decrepit.

At the celebration it is expected that many old women will be thrown upon their own resources and left to battle against starvation alone. Authorities which cannot be doubted state that Indian women, when they become the wives of their tribesmen, are forced to work to support their own children and to turn over any surplus to their lords and masters, who use the money thus obtained to participate in the "potlatch," at which celebration wives are bought as chattels and, according to the testimony given by one of the chiefs in a court of justice, the wives thus obtained are put aside at any time the husband chooses.

The decision of the court will quiet the fears among the Indians and allow them a certain security that their customs will not be interfered with.

¹⁴¹ From Prepare to Abandon Old Wives. (1906, May 21). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 8.

“He likened it to a miniature Wall Street”¹⁴² (April, 1907)

Among the guests at the Dominion Hotel is H. Pearson, of Alert Bay, an Anglican Church missionary to the Indians of the Kwa-gutl agency. Questioned by the Colonist last night, Mr. Pearson said that there is little change in conditions at Alert Bay. [...]

“About the only news from Alert Bay that I know of,” said he, “is that for the past two months the Zawadinuk Indians have been holding the greatest potlatch which has occurred there since I first arrived in that field, two and a half years ago.”

Mr. Pearson said that it was hard to explain the exact nature of a “potlatch,” its significance being understood by but few white men and hardly understood even by the Indian themselves. He likened it to a miniature Wall Street, everybody trying to get the best of everybody else. The name “potlatch” was a Chinook word, meaning “a giving,” and its application arose from the custom of attaining tribal honors by the giving away of presents, the man giving away the largest amount of goods being held in highest esteem by the tribe and becoming a person of high authority.

“The conditions at one of these ‘potlatches’ are almost indescribable,” said Mr. Pearson. “In this case about 700 Indians from the different branches of the Kwa-gutl nation assembled at Alert Bay. For the shelter of these people there were only about two dozen houses in the Indian village, and the filth and squalor were terrible. The whole time is taken up with gambling and the making of ‘potlatches’.”

Among the customs of these Indians is one which Mr. Pearson thought should be brought to the attention of the provincial government and in regard to which some drastic action should be taken. This is the custom of marriage which prevails, and which is one of the various forms of speculation in which they indulge.

A member of the tribe buys a wife, paying to the girl’s father a consideration ranging in value from that of 500 to 1,000 blankets, according to the bride’s social position in the tribe. The girl herself is not consulted in the deal, and in many cases is not more than a mere child in years. After the exchange has been affected, it is quite permissible for the bride’s parents to make underhanded attempts to induce her to leave her husband and return to them. Should they succeed in the endeavor, it is up to the husband to pay an additional sum in order to regain possession of her. If he declines to do so, the father is at liberty to sell her to another suitor, and in this way it often happens that a girl may have several husbands in turn.

On the other hand, if the girl elects to remain with her husband, after a period of about three years the father has to return to his son-in-law the purchase price of his bride, plus one hundred per cent. Here is where the speculation on the husband’s part comes in, and to illustrate the point, Mr. Pearson instanced a case which came to his notice a few months ago. A man of thirty years of age purchased a twelve-year-old girl, and on being reproached on the score of her youth, replied that he did not want the girl at all. So far as he was concerned, it was a business deal in which he hoped to double his investment.

¹⁴² From INDIAN FATHER SELL THEIR LITTLE GIRLS. (1907, April 10). *Daily Colonist*, p. 10.

Mr. Pearson was very strong in his denunciation of these practices, and thought that the government should take steps to suppress them, as they undoubtedly tend to undermine the moral and physical stamina of the tribes.

Speaking of the general conditions of the Indians, he was of the opinion that they are retrograding rather than advancing. The potlatches, with their accompaniment of filth and immorality, are becoming more frequent and more prolonged, and he expressed the belief that if the laws forbidding these gatherings are not enforced, an outbreak of disease which will decimate the tribes must inevitably occur.

“Potlatch makes canners anxious”¹⁴³ (June, 1907)

A big Indian potlatch at Alert Bay is causing the canners some anxiety lest the Indians should not have finished celebrating when the fishing season starts, which is about June 28. As all the Indians on that part of the coast are gathered at the potlatch, and are not likely to leave till they have finished all the good things provided, Siwashes will be scarce at the commencement of the fishing season.

“Gave a kettleful of ten-dollar bills away”¹⁴⁴ (June, 1907)

Siwashes who a month ago were worth anywhere from \$500 to \$5,000 will be “broke” by the end of the present week when the great potlatch at Alert Bay will be formally declared at an end. Many thousands of dollars’ worth of “iktas” have been given away by the erstwhile John D.’s Pierpont Morgans and Charlie Schwabs of the Indian tribes during the past three weeks.

“I saw one Siwash make an exceedingly good fellow of himself at the potlatch last week – he had an enormous preserving kettle piled high with \$10 bills which he was distributing among the tribesmen,” to-day said Mr. H. M. Keefer, who has just returned from Alert Bay. “This Indian brought the big kettle full of bills into the gift arena, and setting it down in front of him, signaled the others to get into the game. Another brave, evidently a relative of the generous one, stood beside him calling off names from a written list. At each call some Indian would step up and receive a package of three \$10 notes neatly tied with twine. This went on till the kettle was empty.

MACHINES GIVEN AWAY

“There was another Indian there who would put the original Silver King into the five-cent class; he had a wash boiler full of silver fifty-cent pieces, and these were ladled out to any person who came along – I managed to get in line and secure one of them as a memento of the occasion.

“Possibly the most peculiar part of the whole proceedings while I was there was the distribution of sewing machines, blankets and pots and pans. I saw about

¹⁴³ From POTLATCH MAKES CANNERS ANXIOUS. (1907, June 17). *The Province*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ From GAVE A KETTLEFUL OF TEN-DOLLAR BILLS AWAY. (1907, June 26). *The Province*, p. 1.

thirty brand-new machines given away. They had evidently been bought in Vancouver or Victoria, for they were lying on the ground in the knocked-down state in which they are usually shipped. It was a gala time for the klotches.

GIFTS BY THE ACRE

“Blankets, all of them new, were stacked two feet high in a line a hundred yards long, and all were given away by one Indian. It seemed to me that about half an acre of pots and pans were distributed by another – at least these articles covered about that area of ground.

“The Indian police are constantly patrolling the scene of the potlatch, but no other police are apparently represented. The Indian police are down on gambling, but I noticed that when their backs were turned the [Indians] always started up a game of black-jack to gamble away their gifts.”

“In full swing”¹⁴⁵ (June, 1907)

The greatest potlatch ever held in British Columbia is now in full swing at Alert Bay. Fully two thousand Indians, mostly of the Tsimpseans, are taking part, and the value of the goods that have been contributed by those attending must aggregate, say those who have seen the stacks of twenty-dollar gold pieces, bills of all denominations and piles of blankets and household goods, nearly \$30,000. Indian girls of tender age have also been bartered to the wealthy chiefs of the neighboring districts.

The potlatch commenced over a week ago, and will continue until next Saturday. There are many white people at Alert Bay at the present time, and the Indians have welcomed them to their dances, but few of them have been allowed to see the inner workings of the great gathering. The shore of the inlet is one mass of canoes belonging to the visiting Indians, a reasonable estimate placing the number at more than 500. Many of the dugouts contain twenty paddles, and are to be bartered away with the rest of the goods, the owners trusting to good luck and the good humor of their companions to get back to their homes when the potlatch is ended.

The dances are the largest that have ever been seen on the coast, about five hundred Indians taking part at each performance. The men are all dressed in the finest of native clothes, and the riot of color is a scene that those who have witnessed [it] will never forget.

WENT TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

On Tuesday and Friday of last week there was a little celebration that no white people, not even the provincial constable, were allowed to witness. The story leaked out afterward. Two dusky maidens of the Tsimpseans were sold to the highest bidders among the Indians. Prices were high, and only the most wealthy of the natives could bid.

One little girl of nine, who had been brought from Rivers Inlet, tall, handsome and attractive even to the eyes of the white men who had seen her, was sold after

¹⁴⁵ From GIRL SOLD TO HIGHEST BIDDER AT POTLATCH. (1907, June 24). *The Province*, p. 1.

spirited bidding for \$1,400. The two contestants for the little maiden were an old, grizzled Indian of fifty and a young man who was said to have come all the way from the Queen Charlottes [Haida Gwaii] to purchase a wife. There was a touch of romance in the fight of May and December for the handsome little girl, who seemed to fully realize her position. The old man had the longer purse, and she was handed over to him. The potlatch treasury was enriched to the amount of her value. He took her down to where his family were encamped, and her reception by them was so harsh that tears came to her eyes. Another girl, about eighteen, was sold to a young son of a chief. Her color showed that she had a little white blood in her veins. She seemed quite happy with her purchaser, and the sale was evidently pre-arranged, for there was not one bid against the \$1,000 offered by the young Siwash.

Old Jack, a patriarchal Indian well-known to all the white people up the coast, was so impressed with the reasonable prices that he made tracks for his canoe and started for some secret reserve funds that he had cached, promising to return before the end of the potlatch with sufficient funds to buy himself a young wife. One girl, who was probably about twelve years of age, was held in reserve until his return.

IMPORTANT SALE OF [COPPERS]

Although a great amount of the wealth of the potlatch is in coin or bills, there are high stacks of blankets, canoes and even virgin gold in the treasury pile stacked up on the beach and jealously guarded by chosen Indians. There is a huge stack of peculiar-shaped wooden gourds, studded with copper and brass, which the Indians use for exchange among themselves. They are worth about twenty-five cents each, and the pile is nearly twenty feet in height.

An interesting feature of the potlatch has been the sale of what is known amongst the Indians as a “copper”. This is composed of that metal, and is made in the form of a shield or breastplate upon which are engraved hieroglyphics. The intrinsic value of the “copper” is perhaps five dollars, but by association and age the pieces have become exceedingly valuable, and thousands of dollars are paid for them. For instance, this year Chief Tom Harris of the Kingscombe Inlet tribe has planned to give \$4,000 in cash for an exceedingly old “copper”. It is very highly prized amongst the tribesmen, and it is expected that there will be keen rivalry when it is put up for auction. The man who gets it will be the most highly honored in the North in the coming year, and for the succeeding seasons, until he is compelled to sell.

“The recent potlatch”¹⁴⁶ (July, 1907)

Sir – In your edition dated June 28¹⁴⁷ last, there is an article on the “potlatch” which took place recently at Alert Bay. This I feel bound to answer, as the whole article is a gross exaggeration.

¹⁴⁶ From Pearson, H. (1907, July 14). The Recent Potlatch. *Daily Colonist*, p. 11. Written by Herbert Pearson (1867 – 1954), missionary.

¹⁴⁷ This was not the first time the article was published. My transcription is from a slightly earlier edition, published in a different paper.

Whoever your correspondent might be, I feel confident that he knows nothing whatever about the Indians or their customs.

He begins by calling it the greatest potlatch ever held in British Columbia, and that fully 2,000 Indians, mostly of the Tsimpseans, were present. The whole of this is untrue. There was not a quarter of that number present, and as for the Tsimpseans, there was not one of that tribe within hundreds of miles of Alert Bay.

Your correspondent goes on to say that the shore was one mass of canoes, a reasonable estimate placing the number at 500, all to be bartered away with the rest of the goods.

Here again he fails in his statistics; there was not more than a fifth of that number, and had he taken the trouble to enquire, he would have found that canoe potlatches are a thing of the past.

He then tells us that on “two days there was a little celebration that no white people, not even the provincial constable, was allowed to witness.”

This is absurd, for anyone who wishes may witness a dance, feast, or potlatch. The Indian is more pleased than otherwise, when the white man expresses a wish to witness anything that might be going on.

He next attempts to sensationally describe the selling of a little girl of nine brought from Rivers Inlet, who was sold after the “spirited bidding” for \$1,400.

This is mere fiction, for the Rivers Inlet tribe was not represented any more than the Tsimpseans were.

There was a girl of some 12 or 13 years sold, but [she] was not put up for auction, as your correspondent would have us to believe. Indian marriages are not made in this manner, nor anything like it.

As for “Old Jack” making “tracks” for his canoe, and starting for some reserve funds, because of the “reasonable prices,” [it] is too ridiculous for anything.

The next time the writer of the above named article wishes to write about Indians and their customs, I hope he will take the trouble to have his statements authenticated, and doubtless a few lessons in counting would be of great assistance to him.

There are many people who have the welfare of the Indian at heart, and who wish to see the “potlatch,” with its many evils, at an end. But such articles as appeared in the *Victoria Colonist* on June 28th and the *Vancouver Province* about the same time [June 24th], only hinder the efforts made in that direction.

HERBERT PEARSON, Alert Bay, July 9, 1907.

“Potlatch ended; Indians to work”¹⁴⁸ (June, 1907)

The big potlatch at Alert Bay, at which thousands of dollars’ worth of presents have been distributed among the Siwashes with lavish hand, has come to an end, and the Indians have left for the canneries.

¹⁴⁸ From POTLATCH ENDED; INDIANS TO WORK. (1907, June 28). *The Province*, p. 3.

The steamer Venture on her last trip made a special run back from Alert Bay to Rivers Inlet. She took about five hundred Indians to the canneries on Rivers Inlet, most of whom had gathered at the big potlatch; the others she picked up at Kitamaat.

“Now in progress”¹⁴⁹ (July, 1907)

More than two thousand Indians are taking part in a potlatch now in progress at Alert Bay, most of them Tsimpsians, who have come with their different classes of goods to trade with the whites and among themselves. Among other things in which the Indians trade are young [women], uncoined gold, canoes, blankets and wickerwork. One Indian maiden was auctioned for \$1,400 to a grizzled old chief from the Queen Charlottes [Haida Gwaii]. The treasury of the potlatch is said to contain about \$30,000.

“Girls sold at Alert Bay”¹⁵⁰ (August, 1907)

Two Indian girls, pretty little [women], not yet fourteen years old, were sold to the highest bidder in the open market in this village in the cool grey dawn of last Thursday morning. For dramatic ferocity and cold greed, this beastly tragedy of slavery and lust has not been equaled for the last twenty years in any one of the dozens of native villages which line the coast.

Alert Bay has been the center all the year for the northern potlatch. In June, the Indians had to be coaxed away to spare a little time for fishing and canning, but the season was no sooner over than they returned to take up the great red man's burden of proving which is the most influential man in all that great stretch of rocks and seacoast south of the terminus of the Grand Trunk Pacific. The question is still unsettled, for Provincial Police Officer Halliday, disgusted at the tribal practices he is unable to prevent, has ordered them to leave. The celebration must cease by Wednesday evening.

CAMPED RIGHT IN THE STREET

Two weeks ago the tribesmen from twelve villages, as far north as Rivers Inlet, appeared at Alert Bay. They brought pockets bulging with money. The fishing season had not been so very good, but the price of ten cents for each sockeye was a record, and the Indians all had money. They were in fine fettle for the celebration. Really the potlatch was but a continuation of the one they had been carrying on for weeks before the salmon began to be plentiful.

When the northern Indian arrives in a metropolitan village like this, he takes possession of everything within reach and very much that he has to climb after. The villagers for the North did not seek the shelter of the tall timber; they camped in the center of the one narrow street which runs from end to end of the village. Here it was

¹⁴⁹ From YOUNG GIRL AUCTIONED OFF. (1907, July 2). *Weekly News-Advertiser*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ From GIRLS SOLD AT ALERT BAY SLAVE MARKET. (1907, August 28). *The Province*, p. 1.

that their sacks of money were laid out, and here it was, too, that the infamous transactions of last Thursday were brought to a conclusion.

SIDE-STEPPING THE MONEY

So overburdened were the visitors with the paraphernalia of the potlatch that they jammed the narrow roadway from end to end. On either side they pitched their tents, and in the center they placed their blankets, with the cash for gifts and bribes arranged in neat heaps at the sides. With hundreds of boxes of biscuits they built an arch under which visitors walked. This was the entrance to the circus grounds. Just inside, over \$1,400 worth of provisions were given away in one day last week.

Spread on the ground were large mats made of cedar bark, on which were little heaps of money, mostly in bills of ones, twos, fours and fives and an occasional tenner. Here and there a piece of silver could be seen on the bills, and on every heap of money was a little stone to prevent the wind from scattering the bank notes up and down the shore. So thickly were the piles of bills placed in the roadway that one was forced to carefully dodge the little stacks. The weather-beaten sides of the tents and the totem poles in the further distance gave the scene a background of dirty picturesqueness – all distinctly Siwash.

TRIBAL COPPER GIVEN AWAY¹⁵¹

Aside from the sale of the girls, the most interesting event of the feast was the presentation of a tribal “copper”. This is in the form of a shield or breastplate. It is of alloyed metal, half an inch thick, a foot wide and a foot and a half high. The value of a “copper” consists in the number of times it has been handed down from generation to generation, and the mystery of the hieroglyphics which adorn its surface. The copper given away last week qualified for high rank in both respects. It was valued at \$4,000 in real money, and it took half a day to give it away. The ceremony was weird and mysterious, but uninteresting from the Caucasian standpoint.

The giving of the money and blankets is an exciting performance. As the owner is making the distribution he calls loudly the name of the fortunate friend who is to receive the contribution. The man steps forward and with as much dignity as he may be able to summon, the donor hands him one of the piles of money. This operation was gone through a hundred times, and not once in a hurry. The man making the gifts insists on all occasions in telling his auditors of his great wealth, power, and particularly of his unexcelled generosity. Every speech is succeeded by one more exaggerated than the last. After a time the Indians become speechless.

CASH PAID FOR GIRLS

One thousand dollars cash was paid for the girl who was first sold last Thursday morning. Greedy and suspicious, the Indian vendor carried his armful of greenbacks to the home of a white trader, that the money might be counted to see that no cheat was practiced.

Rosa, a dark-eyed and slight girl from Rivers Inlet, was the second put up to barter. For her there were given seven hundred blankets, approximately worth \$700.

¹⁵¹ The following paragraph appears to be partly recycled from an earlier *Province* article published on June 26, 1907, and also included in this collection.

Rosa heard the clatter of the dilapidated drum which brought the Indians to the slave market at dawn, but it never entered her unsuspecting head that she was the victim. The story is told with the exactness of fearful truth. The little girl left her tent with other young women and wandered soon to the group where the auction was to take place.

WAS BODILY CARRIED AWAY

Idly and wonderingly she actually looked on and listened to the cold-hearted tribesmen with the practiced sagacity of trained cattle buyers advancing the price of herself, body and soul, from five hundred dollars to nearly half as much again, payable in dirty blankets. When the bidding was ended the girl was carried – surprised and heart-broken – to the tent of the man who now owned her.

The picture of this deal in humanity is not overdrawn and is not particularly unique in the history of the coast. A girl named Rebecca, now at Alert Bay, has been sold for a wife on three different occasions. She is not yet twenty years old. She has been the mother of five children, all of whom died in early infancy. These girls are not consulted in any way before they are sold. They have absolutely no choice in the matter. Their fathers or their nearest relatives sell them to the men who pay the most for them. Then the vendor in turn is rich, and at a potlatch may be counted a big man.

“They have fallen on evil days indeed”¹⁵² (September, 1907)

Alert Bay, one of the most picturesque spots on the coast, and within a twenty hours’ journey of Vancouver, supplies matter to local newspapers from time to time the general public is apt to look upon as merely the vaporings of over-zealous missionaries, or, at best, as exaggerated reports of casual journalists; and to note, perhaps with a feeling of tolerance largely blended with contempt, that another mammoth potlatch is in progress there, never realizing, surely, that each of these great gatherings is pregnant with cruelty to Indian women and girls, who have no redress, and for whom escape is impossible.

Verily, they have fallen on evil days indeed, when their men may buy powerful tribal positions, not theirs by merit as in the old days, and when our courts silently sanction their enrichment to that end by wife barter that is a disgrace to civilization; that is peculiar, the writer believes, to the Kwaukweutls of Alert Bay and the nine tribes allied therewith – adding two others as mentioned in the medical notes of the Log of the Columbia.

“Oh; but that is just an Indian custom; they have always done that,” some writer exclaims.

So. In all their annals, do you find that they were allowed to buy more than one wife?

“One wife he might have, and though she was expected to do most of the work and bear a full share of the hardship and suffering, he did not wantonly ill-treat her, and was usually faithful to her, as she was to him,” says J. C. Hopkins, in his “Story

¹⁵² From Rhodes, E. (1907, September 15). Indian Lust of Power and Wife Barter At Alert Bay, B.C. *Daily News-Advertiser* (Vancouver), p. 6. Written by Emily Beasley Rhodes (1854 – 1919).

of the Dominion". And this statement is fully borne out to-day by decent-minded natives, to whom the present state of things is revolting.

"With the appearance of white settlers this condition changed unfortunately," continues the chronicler. Yes, unfortunately, indeed, and though it be difficult to legislate for just a section of humanity anywhere, now is the accepted time for the framing of laws for the better protection of these poor women.

ANGLICAN CHURCH MISSION

The Bay is the center of a twenty-five-year-old mission of the Anglican Church, presided over from its inception by the Rev. J. Hall. It is equipped with a pretty little church, a mission boat that plies to distant settlements; a girl's home with a gentlewoman installed as instructress in the domestic arts; a mixed day school, which last year had a roll of forty-one pupils, ranging in age from six to eighteen years, while, somewhat typically, perhaps, the place is flanked at one end by the Government industrial school, symbol of civilization, and at the other end by the heathen cemetery, place of unholy rites and gruesome robberies.

The large old Mission House was the boarding school of early days, and has, under the tender care and efficient teaching of the Rev. and Mrs. Hall, turned out some fine characters, native men and women, whose whole ambition is the uplifting of their race and whose own education is so good as to make them valuable assistants in the spread of civilization.

The lodges of the Kwaukweutls cluster on the shingly beach, and lie sandwiched between mission house and salmon cannery, while in the heart of the village itself stands the day school to which the energetic and devoted Mrs. Hall has trudged back and forth four times daily, never missing [a trip], through the rains of many winters, seeking no reward for her onerous duties but the thought of work accomplished, and throwing what compensation the Government paid for her into the Girls' Home Exchequer.

It was during the twelve months' furlough in England of Mr. and Mrs. Hall last year that the writer ruled as mistress of the village school, and followed with a sad heart the fortunes of her pupils of feminine gender, who are often beautiful in face, always docile and lovable, and many of whom would, in education and deportment, hold their own with their white sisters in large towns.

She is not a missionary, and simply writes from a humanitarian point of view, believing that no human beings can sink too low in the social scale as to fall beneath the notice of their kind. Knowing, too, that good women and true have only to be assured of the condition of these girls to make them cast about for a remedy that shall strike at the root of the evil which moral suasion alone has sufficed to check in many other Indian centers visited by her.

WHAT A POTLATCH IS

Potlatch (so termed by outsiders only) is defined in the Chinook dictionary as a "free gift;" but is in reality a species of warfare, and its ramifications are legion: a warfare waged not by force of arms, but by force of wealth and possessions, and he who can waste most of this world's goods is the winner of proud tribal positions in the council of the [Indians], aside from his merit of character or morals. It embodies, too,

a strange trading, with its rule of high finance being a hundred per cent. on all chattels, including wives. A trading that reduces the affluent of years to pauperism in an hour or two and is, moreover, responsible for the indignities perpetrated on womanhood.

Is there a young couple on the fringe of civilization who have married and started a clean, wholesome, if primitive, home life? Down swoops the so-called "guardian" of the tribe, some beggared devotee of the potlatch, to tear her from the arms of her sorrowing but helpless husband and cast her into the arms of the highest bidder. There are cases where this has happened several times in quick succession. Yes, men have been known to sell the mother that bore them into the vilest slavery, in their wild efforts to retrieve their own broken fortunes!

Each potlatch is preceded by a sacrifice of goods to the axe by a man paid to wield it. Treasures of all kinds are committed to the flames in the strife for chieftainship. Heathen chiefs are buried with gold coins in hands, mouth and ears. Everywhere there is this display of wealth among a people who, while earning in the logging and salmon canning industries of the coast as much as their white brethren do, are yet exempt from taxes that the latter have to meet.

Last year local magistrates elected to make a test case of one Kakanus, who bought a child wife for a thousand dollars; he was arrested and sent down on a charge of bigamy. He was, however, acquitted on the ground that the Indian marriage is not legally a marriage. What is to become of his old wife, who has worked faithfully for him for twenty-three years? Of the thirteen-year-old child, forced into relations conjugal and maternal, with a grandsire? And when he has, according to potlatch rule, received the two thousand dollars in return for the one paid out, what security has she against his taking another wife to further enrich himself?

PANDEMONIUM OF NOISE

Lessons were a problem at the village school during the two months that potlatch lasted, with its pandemonium of noise that ceased not night or day, and perhaps the detailing of happenings as seen will give the best picture of the complex life at Alert Bay.

Boom of cannon heralded the arrival of over eight hundred people, some to stay and share later in the harvest of oolichan from the nearby inlets, a fish that pressed by the bare feet of the klotchmen yields abundance of oil for food and lighting purposes; all visitors [were] to participate in the carnival, where subsequently thousands of dollars changed hands and the usual wife barter swelled the proceeds.

Chiefs and people with the noses of their canoes in lines, and forming a quadrangle, advanced with military precision up the bay to the ramshackle council platform on which the Kwaukweutl chief awaited them, and the lengthy oratory of tribal greeting was punctuated by the piercing rattle, beaten tom-tom and the loud incantations of the medicine-men on shore, whose strange contortions bestrewed the ground with eaglesdown from their masks, and this they groveled to blow away from the visitors as the latter sprang to land in scores, when perorations ended in the thrice repeated formula of welcome, "Kay-la Kazla, Kay-la Kazla, [Kay-la Kazla]".

Then day after day the place was a blaze of color in gaily painted canoes that littered the beach, in intertwined Union Jacks and Stars and Stripes, in vivid color of shawl and kerchief and blanket that hung from pole to pole, while a path was laid from end to end of the village between potlatch gifts, representing enormous wealth. High-priced phonographs by the dozen, sewing machines, elaborate bedroom suites, trunks and tea-sets reposed beside modest domestic requisites. And hundreds of quaintly carved bracelets notched into poles were a feature of the Fort Rupert distribution, which it was said amounted in value to eighteen thousand dollars.

Another potlatch of eleven thousand dollars was that of a woman doubling her bridal worth. It had taken her fifteen years to collect this. How, we may ask? Now that it is paid back to her husband and will eventually double itself to him again, what surety has she, for instance, that another will not soon fill her shoes to further enrich him? And what redress could she find anywhere?

Sleep at the Mission House was almost an unknown quantity from the hideous noises of the night, for the harmatza was out, the tribal mystery worker who is thrown into the forest to live on berries or anything he can find for a fortnight. It was for his support that dirge-like chants, war-songs and simulated howls of wild beasts rent the night air. For him, too, his exorcism of evil spirits accomplished, to be dropped through the roof of some lodge amongst a fanatical worshipping throng, who consider themselves honored if in his half-starved and mad condition he bites flesh from their arms or limbs.

FURTHER SALES OF CHILD-WIVES

The day had brought news of further sale of child-wives. The night, more rowdy than usual, seemed to throb with mystery, when, under cover of darkness, and led by a friendly Indian, the writer crept into a lodge to witness a séance, somewhat fearful of the results of her intrusion.

The gloom of the huge edifice, measuring in floor space about 200 to 260 feet, was relieved only by the flickering light of a solitary candle on the top of the woodpile in the center of the place, though the darkness palpitated with motion, and there was barely time to drop into the assigned spot within the circle on the ground, when all retreats were cut off and guarded, and the whole scene changed with dramatic skill and rapidity.

The four-foot-high pile of driftwood was lighted, and the fat of little fishes poured over it threw a lurid glare over the thousand spectators that circled six deep on the ground, and in its fierce intensity it disturbed many of the sleeping babes in the bunks that lined the walls behind us.

Simultaneously and from nowhere, as it seemed, there sprang a pack of snapping, snarling wolves in realistic make-up, that hopped around the fire, chased by actor-hunters. Then to weird rattle, wild chant or to the rhythmic hand clapping that set time to the dancer's feet, there gyrated a bewildering galaxy of color. Men snapped the great bills of their crudely-colored masks and flung their dancing blankets out in war-like fashion as they hopped about to exhaustion, then dropped on the ground to make way for the strange transformation of beasts and birds. Women danced gracefully, but, lacking all joyousness, moved, indeed, as befitted messengers

from the spirit world, for belief in the law of transmutation is life to the Indian, and the actors in their weird dances are supposedly fresh from contact with the dead – may, indeed, be the embodiment of souls!

BARBARIC SPLENDOR

All through those six hours of lurid glare, or fitful glimmer, nothing flagged, and the spectacular effect of barbaric splendor was thrilling: in it personal fear was lost, and the mentality filled as if by a phantasm of Goethe's creation. [...]

Phantasm and realism certainly bore close relation, as into the arena of the red men of the Bay there leapt the wild man of the woods, in mask diabolical, crowned with a snake that shimmered like a live thing, and with one on which rested a frog, circling each with bare ankle, while the fat of little fishes chased the blue flames heavenward, that displayed his body iridescent with fish-like scales.

Suddenly, as if at a given signal, the clamor within ceased, and from without came long-drawn cries like those of the coyote in challenge, that roused a renewed Babel therein. When the great doors were unbarred, dozens of civilized Indians made exit therefrom, while the writer was assisted to make swift retreat through a conveniently loose plank in the wall behind her, and to feel the pure air of morning blowing across the bay, just as into the firelight within the lodge there stepped an Indian clad in yoke and head-dress of red bark that proclaimed the wild tamanamass dance to follow – the dance of the cannibals.

Red bark is the symbol of heathenism in its essence; of witchcraft and all unholiness. To stay in the presence of its authorized wearer and not wear it means to court insult and probably death in some underhand fashion. For, as the writer was told on good authority, in answer to a question regarding cannibalism:

“No; there is no murder done, but somebody always manages to die at a convenient time.”

A complex life indeed, where men are simply spendthrifts of their own natural genius; spendthrifts of life itself, in their strife for power and position, their lust which is responsible for womanhood being dragged through the very dregs.

If moral suasion cannot, then legal force must, suppress the polygamous marriage of the potlatch. Indeed, a legal suppression of potlatch itself would mean salvation to hundreds of Indians who find it impossible to break away of their own accord.

“Will endeavor to stop sale of girls”¹⁵³ (November, 1907)

In consequence of reports presented to the Dominion government of alleged sales of slave girls at Indian potlatches at Alert Bay, a large school for Indian children, especially girls, is to be established there. Plans are now being prepared at Ottawa and the big boarding-school will be erected this winter. Fifty girls will easily be accommodated in the building.

¹⁵³ From WILL ENDEAVOR TO STOP SALE OF GIRLS. (1907, November 5). *Daily Colonist*, p. 4.

The government has also decided to give increased powers to Indian Agent Halliday, in order that he may deal immediately with cases arising out of the potlatches frequently held at Alert Bay. Mr. Halliday will specially be given charge of the administration of the school.

“Indians leaving potlatch in disgust”¹⁵⁴ (March, 1908)

The steamer Venture came in Sunday from the north with salmon and lumber from the north for Victoria. She brought news of the great potlatch at Alert Bay, and a few Indians who had gone broke gambling and trading came down.

As much as could be learned from the returning redskins, [...] ¹⁵⁵ many of the Indians are going back to their camps disgusted at the lack of hospitality and “ho heap big time”.

The great regret is that no girls are to be sold at this year’s potlatch, and very few blankets and horses are offered either as present or for purchase, while the activity of the police in the neighborhood in preventing the sale of Indian girls at this feast has made the Indians sour.

This will be the first time for years that a potlatch will have been held without a number of young girls being disposed of by auction. The price of Indian girls disposed of at a potlatch varies from a couple of hundred dollars to over a thousand.

“One of the greatest”¹⁵⁶ (March, 1908)

A recent arrival from Alert Bay reports that the Indian potlatch now in progress there will be one of the greatest held for a long time. Chief George has spent thousands of dollars gathering goods for the great event, and only last week he paid \$1,000 cash at the local store for a supply of pilot bread or biscuit, securing a cash discount of 15 per cent. Indians from all points around and from distant coast settlements have been gathering there for the past two weeks in anticipation of the potlatch.

“Potlatched cash among tribesmen”¹⁵⁷ (August, 1908)

A protracted potlatch in which nearly a thousand Indians took part has just ended at Alert Bay. About three weeks ago the fishing season at Rivers Inlet closed, and since that time the Indian fishermen, with their families and friends have held high revel, and many presents have been exchanged. As on similar occasions, bright-

¹⁵⁴ From INDIANS LEAVING POTLATCH IN DISGUST. (1908, March 3). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 32.

¹⁵⁵ The original is corrupted and contains swapped and missing lines. The omitted text reads: “there are about 3000 / be sold at this year’s potlatch and very / either as presents or for purchase, while”.

¹⁵⁶ From POTLACH. (1908, March 3). *Weekly News-Advertiser*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁷ From POTLATCHED CASH AMONG TRIBESMEN. (1908, August 29). *The Province*, p. 7.

colored blankets were much in evidence, and at intervals during the merry-making dozens of pairs were given away from a great heap by the roadside.

The generosity and honor of one old chief who broke in bits a copper valued at about \$4,000 and divided it among the crowd, was only surpassed by one other, who gave to his admirers not less than \$11,000 in cash.

Last Sunday afternoon an at-home at which there was certainly a crush, was given by the wife of one of the chiefs. Hundreds of cooking utensils and pieces of china were piled outside the hostess' door, and a reversal of the usual kitchen shower took place with each guest, after being sumptuously entertained, carried away a memento of her call.

But on Wednesday the shouting and the tumult ceased. Canoes were filled with presents, children and dogs, and the great potlatch at Alert Bay now lives only in the hearts of the Indians and the cameras of visiting tourists.

“One of the biggest potlatches”¹⁵⁸ (February, 1913)

One of the biggest potlatches held on the northern coast for some years past, was held at Alert Bay, near Prince Rupert last week. The attendance of Indians numbered in the neighborhood of a thousand.

Illuminated by large fires and innumerable torches, the Indian village presented an animated appearance, while the various chants, accompanied by the indispensable drums and clapping of hands, resounded far across the bay.

“Charged with a violation of the statute”¹⁵⁹ (1914)

VANCOUVER, B.C., May 6 – Before Mr. Justice Gregory at the Assize Court today, Ned Harris and John Bagwany, two chiefs of the Nimpkish band of Indians, whose homes are at Alert Bay, were charged with a violation of the statute making provision against the giving away of presents at any Indian “festival, dance or other ceremony.”

This is the first case of this kind to be heard in many years, although the law has been on the statute book for eighteen years. Both men are past middle age, and possess features betokening strength of character, and appear to be particularly intelligent specimens of their race.

The alleged offence occurred at a potlatch, and Mr. A. D. Taylor, K. C., for the Crown, outlined the facts, stating that the giving of gifts at any of these tribal ceremonies constituted an indictable offence. They would show that it was especially Harris' potlatch, and that Bagwany had assisted at the affair, which, under the statute, makes him equally culpable.

The evidence would show that over 200 pairs of blankets had been given away at this particular potlatch, which occurred about November 1st.

¹⁵⁸ From BIG POTLATCH. (1913, February 25). *Inland Sentinel*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ From POTLATCH CASE. (1914, May 7). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

Mr. Wm. Halliday, Indian Agent at Alert Bay, said that he had heard that Bagwany was interested in the holding of a potlatch, and had warned him that he might get into trouble if it was held. Bagwany had told him that the potlatch would go on, even if he went to jail for it later.

A week or so later, Mr. Halliday said, in passing through the Indian village he had seen a crowd of 300 or 400 Indians, men and women of the village and visitors from Campbell River, Salmon River and Cape Mudge, seated around it. An Indian named Agwasiaskiddis, whose native cognomen has been anglicized into Johnny Drabble, was acting as spokesman for the occasion, it being the Indian custom to employ an orator to make a speech. The holder of the potlatch, Mr. Halliday said, did not take a personal part in the actual ceremony, securing another man, who gave a talk, and then called out the names of those who were to receive presents and the number of presents to go to each person. Johnny was calling out the names and the numbers, and, as he called, other men carried the blankets to the people designated.

He watched the affair for three or four minutes only. It was, he said, the ceremony commonly known as the potlatch, one of the oldest customs of the Indians. It was kind of a public meeting.

To Dr. D. E. McTaggart, who is appearing for the two chiefs, Mr. Halliday said that it was the first prosecution for many years. He admitted that potlatches had been held during that time with more or less frequency. He was asked if he did not think that the statute was provided to cover forms of a ceremony called the Hamatsa, which included mutilation of the body and sometimes cannibalism and other pernicious practices, but he was of the opinion that it included the giving away of presents without the other accompaniments.

“Do you think that the mere giving of presents is pernicious?” asked Mr. McTaggart.

“Anyone who does not know might think that it was not pernicious,” replied Mr. Halliday, “but it is pernicious.”

“No verdict reached”¹⁶⁰ (1914)

The jury which heard the charge of conducting a potlatch, contrary to the statute, against the two Alert Bay Indian chiefs, Ned Harris and John Bagwany, could not come to an agreement on a verdict today, and, after some three hours of deliberation, they were discharged.

The two Indians will come up for another trial on the same charge tomorrow morning, when it is understood that additional evidence concerning the event which led to the charge will be introduced by the Crown.

¹⁶⁰ From NO VERDICT REACHED. (1914, May 8). *Daily Colonist*, p. 1.

“Chiefs convicted of holding potlatch”¹⁶¹ (1914)

The two Indian chiefs, John Bagwany and Ned Harris, charged with having conducted a potlatch, were convicted at their second trial before the Assize Court yesterday, the jury having disagreed the day before. The statutes cover Indian dances and festivals at which presents are given away, and while the testimony in the first trial only covered the actual distribution of presents, evidence was put in yesterday to show that dancing had taken place, and that the gathering lasted a couple of weeks, the potlatch mentioned being only one of the functions attending it.

DUKE PARTICIPATED

A feature of the evidence was that it was shown that His Royal Highness, the Duke of Connaught, Governor-General of Canada, was a participant in one of those illegal ceremonies during his visit to the Coast two years ago, and that the chief witness for the Crown, Mr. Wm. Halliday, Indian Agent at Alert Bay, had been an actor in the potlatch and had also handed the gifts of the Indians to the Royal party.

The evidence sought to show that the gifts complained of in this case were not real gifts, but were only given with the expectation of receiving something in return for them.

POTLATCH BLANKETS ONLY

Mr. Halliday repeated his evidence of the previous trial as to notifying the Indians that they must not hold a potlatch, and of his witnessing the giving away of the presents on Nov. 1. Additional information was given in that the blankets distributed, some 250 in number, were “potlatch” blankets which were never used for any other purpose. They had been used for years and years at different potlatches, and had never been used on a bed. He intimated that the blankets were in a filthy condition.

There were over 500 Indians present, of which only about 180 were Alert Bay Indians, the rest being people from outside places who had come in for the ceremony. They remained at Alert Bay for some three weeks. These affairs, he said, were always attended by feasts and dancing. He attended one of the dances given at this gathering. There was music and the singing of songs, the men beating time with sticks. He had seen probably a hundred potlatches and this was one of the usual kind. A potlatch, he said, was an Indian festival.

To Mr. D. E. McTaggart, who appeared for the defence, Mr. Halliday said that he had not received gifts from the Indians except when he first took office as Indian Agent, when he was given a dollar bill and a silver bracelet as tokens that the Indians acknowledged his authority.

PRESENTATION TO AGENT

“Those, I suppose, were cultus potlatch?” inquired Mr. Justice Gregory, and Mr. Halliday assented. This was to indicate the difference between the use of the term

¹⁶¹ From CHIEFS CONVICTED OF HOLDING POTLATCH. (1914, May 9). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 4.

potlatch by the Indians. When they give a present with the expectation of having another returned, the present is a "potlatch," but when they give something for which they expect no return and the gift is absolute it is a "cultus potlatch".

On Mr. McTaggart continuing his questions with particular reference to a potlatch held by one Johnny Snow, Mr. Halliday said that he might have received presents, but he did not remember.

"You were present when the Indians gave a potlatch to His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, the Governor-General of Canada, were you not?" asked Mr. McTaggart.

"Yes."

"And you passed the presents from the Indians up to the Duke on the deck of the steamer and they were the same Indians?"

"Yes."

BLANKETS MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE

He was asked if he could swear that the dance he had seen was part of this particular potlatch of Ned Harris, but Mr. Halliday said that it was a difficult question to answer, as there were always a number of gift-givings at these affairs. He said that the blankets were recognized as a medium of exchange in the payment of potlatch debts. Other things, such as silver dollars [and] copper pieces, were also used. He admitted that the Indian custom was that everyone that accepted a potlatch gift was expected to give something in return if he could afford it. A son would assume his father's obligation in that way.

Objection was taken to the administering of the oath to the next witness, one known by the English name of Johnny Drabble. He was asked by the court if he believed in God, and he replied, "I believe those who come to tell us about Him." On being sworn he told of his connection with the potlatch, which consisted in assisting in distributing the gifts. He said he had been in so many potlatches he could not remember the number.

RETURN GIFTS EXPECTED

The Indians who received gifts, he said, all expected to give something back some time or another. Those who did not intend to give back potlatch do not attend. Those who are poor do not give potlatch in return until they get rich.

Ed. Wannock and Dan Cranmer, other Indians who had taken part in the potlatch, gave evidence. The latter said that when an Indian gave a potlatch he always expected something back. It was a custom that they all observed.

No evidence was submitted for the defence. Mr. McTaggart asked for a dismissal, as the Crown's evidence was all from people who had participated or attended what was alleged to be an illegal gathering, and were therefore accomplices. It was a rule of law, and he quoted his authorities, that evidence of accomplices, when unsupported by other testimony, was not sufficient to convict.

Mr. Justice Gregory, however, held that it was only a rule of practice and not of law. He instructed the jury that the giving of gifts, even although there was to be a return for them, was illegal under the act, which specifically mentioned the giving of gifts.

A verdict of guilty, with a strong recommendation to mercy, was returned by the jury after three-quarters of an hour deliberation, and the court allowed the two Indians to go under suspended sentence.

“Guilty of potlatching”¹⁶² (1915)

Assoholus [sic.], an Indian chief of Alert Bay, was charged before his honor, Judge McInnes, yesterday afternoon with potlatching under section 149 of the Indian Act. The offence was committed between the 15th and 24th of January and consisted merely of the giving away of blankets, etc., and the accused and another Indian chief who is to be charged in the Nanaimo court, were committed for trial by Indian Agent Halliday of Alert Bay. It was stated there was no feasting or beer drinking, but that the articles had been given away simply to assist unfortunate and poor Indians. The accused, through his counsel, Mr. Frank Lyons, pleaded guilty. His honor passed suspended sentence.

“Missionary reports slavery conditions”¹⁶³ (1917)

The missionary meeting held last night [in Victoria] at the Cathedral schoolroom in connection with the session of the synod now in progress attracted such a large congregation as to elicit very general comment both from the chairman, Rt. Rev. Bishop Scriven, and the several other speakers. The hall was, in fact, filled quite to capacity, and the pre-announcement that speakers would be limited to fifteen minutes condensed the matter in a way which considerably enhanced its interest.

In opening the meeting Bishop Scriven called attention to the fact that the mission work in Canada, and particularly in the Far West, was being carried on by men who had both a love of God and a desire to save human souls.

ALERT BAY MISSION

Rev. F. Comley, of Alert Bay, was the first speaker, and entered at once into a statement in connection with the outstanding handicap under which the missionary in that place has to labor. This was the potlatch. Contrary to popular belief there was nothing romantic about Indian work, and very little to encourage the missionary. A little over a year ago the government had announced its intention of crushing the potlatch. But three or four of the Indian chiefs determined to continue the practice just the same. They were promptly arrested and taken down by the Indian Agent to Vancouver to be tried. In every case, however, the judge held that a potlatch was not a criminal offence but merely a misdemeanor, the agent failed to get a conviction, and the prisoners were released. Glorifying in their defeat of the law, these men had returned to Alert Bay and were potlatching more than ever.

Now, when the chiefs had gone down to Vancouver they had represented to the magistrate that the potlatch was just as legal as Christmas. But they had not

¹⁶² From GUILTY OF POTLATCHING. (1915, February 10). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 2.

¹⁶³ From MISSIONARY REPORTS SLAVERY CONDITIONS. (1916, February 17). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 5.

mentioned the fact that the bad elements – the selling of girls into slavery – were carried on in connection with the potlatch.

MARRIAGE MARKET

“We boast under the British flag that there is no slavery,” said Mr. Comley. “But what is the difference between the institution which permits the purchase of an Indian girl for \$1,000 and slavery among the tribes of South America?”

Mr. Comley afterwards explained to the meeting that the said \$1,000 was not paid in cash, but in blankets to this value. The potlatch was the Indian’s method of doing business. The man who could give the biggest potlatch became the biggest chief. There were potlatches of blankets, sugar, flour, etc. The Indian who gave the potlatch posed as a philanthropist, but for every bag of flour or sugar or potatoes that he gave, he expected to get back two. The majority of the Indian people did not see through the ruse, but the fact was that about ninety per cent. of the tribe were always poor, and a very few were rich because of the fact. But the very worst feature of the potlatch was the operation of a marriage market in connection with it.

EARLY MARRIAGES

The missionary explained how he had written to the Secretary for Indian Affairs at Ottawa to find out just where he stood as the guardian of a boy in the school at Alert Bay, a marriage for whom had been arranged. At first he could get no reply to the matter, but ultimately, after communicating with Bishop Roper on the matter and getting his lordship’s intervention at Ottawa, he received what amounted practically to a promise from the Indian Commissioner that whenever a “good case” came up in connection with the marriage of Indian girls and boys, he would get it stopped. But in the meantime potlatching was going on – had been going on steadily since Christmas – among the six hundred Indians up in the Alert Bay district. If the hopes of the missionary at Alert Bay rested with Ottawa, the missionary would be a pessimist. But the hope was not with Ottawa. It was with God.

Mr. Comley told something of the mission school at Alert Bay. The government had given an annual grant of \$130 for each boy and \$100 for each girl in the school. In both the girls’ and boys’ schools there were two more than the accommodation had originally provided for, and this year they could have had fifty more boys and fifty more girls had they had the room. He had a testimony to the work of the missions quite recently from the lips of a dying Indian boy whose last words were an appeal for the continuance of the missionary work and an effort to stop the potlatch.

“And we are going to petition the government that if the Indians be allowed to retain the potlatch, the celebration shall at least be robbed of its bad elements,” said Mr. Comley in conclusion.

“Serve sentences for ‘potlatching’”¹⁶⁴ (1919)

Utterly disgusted with the white man’s viewpoint, two Alert Bay Indians were brought to Oakalla prison Friday afternoon by Provincial Constable Matthews to serve sentences for “potlatching”.

The two men are Bruce Seaweed and Johnny Charlie. They had an exceptionally good fishing season last year, and in their desire to stand well in the esteem of their fellows spent some hundreds of dollars in flour and blankets and other things dear to the desire of Indians, and proclaimed a potlatch. They succeeded in distributing their gifts to their fellow tribesmen, but fell foul of the white man’s law, passed in the interest of the Indians, which prohibits the means of divesting oneself of wealth.

“Alert Bay Indians promise to be good”¹⁶⁵ (1919)

Dear to the heart of the coast Indian is potlatching. But as a result of recent events, the red brethren at Alert Bay have agreed to sign a written undertaking to obey the law in consideration of certain prosecutions being withdrawn, though they have reserved the right to seek an amendment of the law and an independent investigation of their historical customs will be demanded.

This undertaking was mentioned before Judge Cawley, Vancouver, when the appeal of Koosteekas and Likiesa against the sentence of two months’ imprisonment for a potlatch, arising out of a wedding ceremony, was before the court. The convictions were upheld, but the penalties remitted in view of the general undertaking which has been given.

One important feature of the case was that Judge Cayley deprecated Indian Agents themselves trying these cases against Indians, for this reason at least, that if their decisions were reversed on appeal, it would seriously undermine their authority with the Indians. He understood, however, the difficulty of securing other justices of the peace in some of the remote settlements.

“Indian gives but white man takes”¹⁶⁶ (1919)

Charlie Nowell, a well-known and well-educated Indian of Alert Bay, does not understand the Dominion law that prevents the Indians from giving away presents of money and goods at the annual potlatches which from time immemorable have been a custom with the British Columbia Indians.

He understands the viewpoint of the whites today less than he did before his experience at the circus on Tuesday. Charlie attended the show, and when he came out was minus a purse of \$60 that he carried in his hip pocket. Through the kindness

¹⁶⁴ From SENT TO PRISON FOR HOLDING A “POTLATCH”. (1919, February 3). *The Province*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ From ALERT BAY INDIANS PROMISE TO BE GOOD. (1919, March 28). *Nanaimo Free Pr.*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ From INDIAN GIVES BUT WHITE MAN TAKES. (1919, August 20). *The Province*, p. 14.

of his friend, Mr. H. S. Clements, member for Comox-Atlin, he is enabled to proceed home.

This morning Charlie urged Mr. Clements to use his influence to have the law against potlatches repealed.

“From the time an Indian begins to talk,” the red man told a Province reporter, “it is taught the doctrine of helping one another. The potlatch is but an exemplification of this teaching, when the wealthy give generously to their fellows. It is a good custom and worthy of emulation by all Christians. Why the government wishes to stop it is more than the Indians can understand.”

Charlie came to the city to visit his 19-year-old son Albert, chief of the Alert Bay Indians, who has been confined to the General Hospital here since an attack of “flu”. The mantle of chieftain fell on him from his mother’s side, in whose family it has been as far back as Indian tradition can be traced. Should anything happen [to] the boy, the honor would go to his eldest sister.

“Indians confer at Alert Bay to save potlatch privileges”¹⁶⁷ (1920)

Northern Indians are excited about the action of the Dominion Government in putting the ban on potlatches, and a big gathering of Indian chieftains has been called this week at Village Island, Alert Bay, to register a protest against the stricture. The Indians are requesting that at least the Government permit a modified form of the potlatch.

Indian chiefs Tom Johns (Kla-kwa-gela) and Frank Walker (Macmosakamy), are organizing the meeting and have sent a telegram to H. S. Clements, the member for the district, requesting his attendance.

“Potlatchers in toils of police”¹⁶⁸ (February, 1922)

Charged with holding a potlatch at which 40 sewing machines and almost as many gramophones, totaling in cost \$10,000, were given away by Chief Billie Assui, 35 Indians of Alert Bay faced trial yesterday, according to word received in Vancouver last night. Holding potlatches is forbidden by the government, but Billie considered it a matter of honor to return the kindness shown him by his friends.

He told them that this was to be his last big celebration. Billie didn’t call it a potlatch. He told the white men that it was a Christmas tree celebration. In fact, it is reported that the big chief went so far as to cut a fir tree and place it in the house where the feasting was held. Around it were grouped the 40 sewing machines and the phonographs, blankets and many trinkets dear to the heart of the Indian.

The crime of holding a potlatch is punishable by a jail sentence, there being no option of a fine. About a month ago, five Indians were found guilty of holding a similar celebration and were sentenced to serve time at Oakalla. The Indian giving a potlatch

¹⁶⁷ From INDIANS CONFER AT ALERT BAY TO SAVE POTLATCH PRIVILEGES. (1920, February 4). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ From POTLATCHERS IN TOILS OF POLICE. (1922, February 17). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 14.

is considered the big man among his tribesmen for a long time to come. The celebration is given to repay the courtesies shown him by his friends, who have entertained him, and his refusal to hold a celebration is viewed in the same manner by some of the tribes as a white man who refuses to play after he had won all the money in a gambling game.

Billie made it a real affair, and today 35 Indians are equipped for all kinds of music and sewing, but have incurred the disfavor of the powers-that-be.

“The Last of its Kind”¹⁶⁹ (1922)

Chief Dan Cramer, head of a tribe of Indians near Alert Bay, gave away at a potlatch a few weeks ago at Village Island about ten thousand dollars in cash and goods. The goods presented to his fellow Indians consisted of gasoline boats, sewing machines, blankets, gramophones, canoes and numerous other useful and fancy articles, besides sums of money amounting in all to three thousand dollars. This was the biggest potlatch held in this part of the coast for many moons, and representatives from all the tribes, including the Campbell River, Cape Mudge, Nimpkish, Churchhouse, and those of the islands to the north, made their way through the whirling waters of the Seymour Narrows, the Hole in the Wall, the Yuculta Rapids, Okishollow Channel and the many passages that lead to the grand rallying point at Village Island.

It is just possible that the Indians had a “hunch” that this was to be their last potlatch, for they brought to Village Island all their gaily-decorated costumes and a host of odd-looking instruments which have been used for a hundred years or more in the weird ceremonial that constitutes one phase of this great Indian festival. On this occasion all their ancient and honored usages were impressively carried out, and Chief Cranmer’s name will likely go down in history as “the last of the potlatchers,” and the story thereof artistically emblazoned on a great totem pole erected probably at Alert Bay, where hundreds of these poles are to be seen, and if possible to understand them would give us many legends of the aborigines and an insight into their ancient customs.

Nobody seems to be able to define the word “potlatch” or to give any idea as to the real nature of the festival, but from the best sources of information on the Indians, generally this annual gathering is of a semi-religious character, besides being an occasion on which all grievances are gravely listened to and adjusted by the heads of the various tribes. The objectionable part of the ceremonial, apparently, is the bartering of women and young girls which is alleged to have been carried on for years, and for this and other reasons the Dominion Government has forbidden these potlatches.

Drastic measures have now been taken by the authorities at Alert Bay to put an end to these ceremonials, and at the conclusion of the meeting at Village Island, thirty Indians, both men and women, were arrested and brought before Mr. Halliday

¹⁶⁹ From GREAT POTLATCH MAY BE LAST OF ITS KIND. (1922, March 14). *The Daily Colonist*, p. 4.

J. P., and ordered to hand over to the police all their regalia, masks and other paraphernalia used at these meetings. All these things must be handed in by March 31, or sentences ranging from two to six months' imprisonment will be passed on the guilty ones. This interference in their yearly gatherings is deeply resented by the older Indians, who have held several indignation meetings at Cape Mudge and other reservations. The younger generation seem to be resigned to giving up the potlatches and will willingly hand over to the authorities all those things held sacred for many decades and used in their annual festivals at various points along the coast.

“Indians agree to give up potlatch”¹⁷⁰ (February, 1922)

Convinced at last that the authorities intend to put a stop to potlatches, the Indians of the North Coast have been holding meetings during the past few days and have signified their intention to obey the law. They have been brought to this state of mind by the attitude adopted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in their districts, who have become active in checking the improvident celebrations of the Indians. Meantime thirty Indians of the Coast tribes, of both sexes, are to be tried for holding a potlatch at Alert Bay a short time ago. It is said to be the first time in the history of British Columbia that a [woman] has been prosecuted for taking part.

Dan Crammer, an Alert Bay Indian, gave the potlatch, and his guests numbered 300. The gifts included sewing machines, phonographs, pool tables, blankets and 400 sacks of flour, the total valued at \$10,000. Associated with Dan as defendants are Chief Owakalagalis of [the] Fort Rupert tribe; Amos Dawson and Harry Mountian of the Mamalilikalas; Billy Assau, chief of the Cape Mudge Indians; Peter Edwards, chief of Alert Bay; Albert Johnson, chief of Kingcome Inlet; [and] Bob Harris, chief of Knight Inlet.

Sergt. Ankerman of the R. C. M. P., who has had charge of the case, has so impressed the red man by his keenness and ability that the tribes have met and practically decided to obey the law in future. Indian Agent Halliday has assisted Sergt. Ankerman in putting clearly before the tribes that in future all such affairs will be prosecuted sternly.

The case has been adjourned until next Saturday at Alert Bay to permit crown witnesses to arrive.

“Prison terms on perjury charges”¹⁷¹ (1922)

Arising out of a potlatch case at Alert Bay, two Indians, Amos Dawson and Bob Harris, were on Thursday convicted of perjury by Judge Cayley and sentenced to four and three months' imprisonment respectively. The evidence upon which the perjury charge rested was given by the Indians during a hearing by Indian Agent Halliday

¹⁷⁰ From INDIANS AGREE TO GIVE UP POTLATCH. (1922, February 20). *The Province*, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ From POTLATCHING INDIANS GIVEN PRISON TERMS ON PERJURY CHARGES. (1922, May 18). *Vancouver Daily World*, p. 3.

on a potlatch charge at Alert Bay. At Thursday's trial Harris pleaded guilty, but Dawson went on trial. The evidence was conclusive in both cases.

“Released after serving their term”¹⁷² (1922)

Fourteen Alert Bay Indians convicted of potlatch offences and sentenced by Mr. Halliday, Justice of the Peace, to imprisonment in Oakalla jail, regained their liberty this morning on expiration of their sentences. They served less than two months, their terms being shortened by good conduct recommendations. Although a telegram had been received here [Vancouver] by Mr. E. K. DeBeck from Mr. Leon J. Ladner, M. P., stating the authorities promised to parole the Indians, no intimation of this has been received by the warden of Oakalla.

“Bootleg the potlatch”¹⁷³ (1929)

The taking over of the [missionary] work among the Indian villages outside of Alert Bay has proven a much more important addition to our work than I at first realized. Certain problems, which before were practically left to solve themselves, now have to be faced, and if possible, solved.

Chief of these is the condition resulting from the enforcement of the Anti-potlatch Law. Before the enforcement of the law, the potlatch was openly practiced in centers where officers of the law and public opinion compelled a certain amount of respect for the decencies of modern civilization. Now, to use a local term, the Indians “bootleg the potlatch”. This means that it is done secretly in the outlying villages, with a return of its worst features, and the gradual growth of the law-breaking habit, which can not but have a degenerating effect upon the Indian people, and if continued will, to a large extent, discount the work of the five teachers and social workers who are making such splendid efforts in the rescue and uplift of these people.

The Indians themselves feel this, and have asked me to come into consultation with them with a view of obtaining from the Indian Department such modifications of the law which will enable them to retain certain parts of the potlatch which enter into their social life, and without which, life in their villages would be absolutely without amusement or recreation. I am wholly in accord with their demand, as I feel that the ruthless trampling upon of the ancient customs of the Indian people, comes not too well from a Christian nation, which after 2,000 years of Christianity, has not been able to eliminate all traces of heathenism from its religious thought and practice.

¹⁷² From Alert Bay Indians Are Released After Serving Their Term. (1922, May 29). *The Province*, p. 7.

¹⁷³ From Antle, J. (1929, June 9). Columbia Coast Mission And Its Beneficent Work. *The Province*, p. 14. Written by Rev. John Antle (1865 – 1949), Superintendent of the Columbia Coast Mission.

BABINE

“For over 125 years”¹⁷⁴ (May, 1919)

The highest-priced cigars ever made in Canada are on view in the windows of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s tobacco department on Granville Street, [Vancouver]. A foot long, nearly two inches thick, and perfectly formed, the big smokes are waiting the time when they will decorate the critical lips of northland Indians. They were manufactured expressly for the special requirements of the Hudson’s Bay Company to be used at the coming potlatch at Babine, northern British Columbia.

In the year 1735 the white traders and the northern Indians inaugurated an annual ceremonial conference to keep alive and strengthen their bonds of friendship. The chief event of the fathering is the “pipe ceremony,” the literal translation of which is that “While the sun visits the different parts of the world, and makes day and night, peace, firm friendship and brotherly love shall be established between the English (H. B. Company) and the Indians.”

For over 125 years these ceremonies have been religiously observed every summer at Babine, and as the great company pressed farther and farther into the western wilderness, new treaties with new tribes were signed, and the annual conference of confidence and gifts established.

About the middle of next month the Indians from all parts of the north of the province will gather at Babine, a point sixty miles north of Hazelton, to meet the white traders. Chief among the white men will be Mr. C. H. French, manager of the fur department of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Then the big “potlatch” will take place. It consists of smoking the peace pipe, of feasting and of gifts, and the huge cigars manufactured for the Hudson’s Bay Company are to be the final delicacies of a multitude of presents. The giant smokes are hand-made from imported Havana leaf and the flavor is that of the rarest after-dinner *perfectos*.

“A good old-fashioned Indian potlatch”¹⁷⁵ (June, 1919)

During the past week Burns Lake was the scene of a good old-fashioned Indian potlatch, conducted on the simple and harmless lines of the old-time Indian. Almost three hundred of the best-known Indians from every settlement from Hazelton to Vanderhoof arrived at Burns Lake by the Monday train, accompanied by the priest of Hagwilget, who was on the scene to regulate the sufferance of their time-honored customs. Everything went merrily in spite of the absence of a representative of the Provincial Police.

¹⁷⁴ From HUGE CIGARS ARE ON EXHIBITION. (1919, May 19). *The Province*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁵ From At Burns Lake THE BABINE GATEWAY. (1919, June 21). *Interior News* (Smithers), p. 6.

“A country of his own”¹⁷⁶ (1919)

Up to a very few years ago every Indian chief in British Columbia had a country of his own. In order to better illustrate this I will take a specific case. Babine, situated at the head of Babine Lake, has, perhaps, 250 natives resident there who are divided into four clans; each clan is headed by a chief, with one or two other head men as his support or council. Each chief has a certain section of the country over which he claims the exclusive right to hunt beaver, and unless a beaver is found traveling from one dam to another, he must not be killed except with the chief's consent, and as the Indian Agents recognize these rights, and the Indian chief prized his preserve and knew the value of this sort of bank account, it was guarded and preserved above everything else.

A chief or clan depends on its wealth or ability to potlatch to hold its own, or his standing in the community, and on account of their customs not allowing them to refuse anything to their neighbor when what is wanted is at hand, their wealth can be preserved better when in the form of beavers in preserves than in any other way. The custom of using beavers as the principal source of wealth likely originated in earlier days, when blankets and clothing were made from this article.

When it is necessary to give a feast and potlatch, the chief talks the matter over with his clan, then arranges a large hunting party which agrees that the preserves will allow of, say, one hundred beavers being taken without depleting it too much. The hunt is made, all the skins are turned over to the chief, and on returning to the village all neighbors are invited and the ceremony commences. Dancing, feasting and potlatching are kept up for days, and the prestige of the chief and his clan is established until another chief and party outdo it, when another one has to be arranged. Power, through worldly possession, is the Indian's glory. To be great he must be able to tell of great feats performed in the past, and make great promises for the future, just as, after all, is the standard by which we civilized people are gauged.

I am telling you this to show why I think that the greatest protecting the beaver can have is the Indian himself, when his hunting rights to any particular part of the country, as in their own custom, is recognized and upheld by the laws of the country.

First, his standing depends on the beaver supply being kept up. Second, he knows the beaver's habits perfectly, and will not shoot one when swimming low, because he knows that low swimming animals are trying to protect their young. He will not set a trap closer than one hundred yards from a house, because he knows that if he does, he will kill a smaller skin that he should, in order to give his own property a chance to exist. He will not break open a house, but will dam up a tunnel and, after poking a stick through the top of a [beaver] house, will select the older skins, and then only as many as he knows he can reasonably afford to take. The same thing applies when using the net.

¹⁷⁶ From French, C. H. (1919, September 21). Beavers and their habits. *Daily Colonist*, p. 13. Written by C. H. French (1867 – 1940), a Hudson's Bay Company “fur chief”.

MEDIUM OF TRADE

We are told by most authorities on the subject, that beavers were the medium of trade in the early trade days of the country, but in the strict sense of the word this was not the case. It is quite true that the official terms used in the book of those days referred to their medium of trade as the "made beaver tariff," but in actual trading the trader or Indian never used these words. The word used was "skin". An Indian arrived at the fort with a bundle of furs; he put one on the counter, and is immediately told that its value is ten skins; then he wants a shawl and is told that the price of that shawl is three skins. In other words, the made beaver tariff we have heard so much of was exactly like our present day money, only the dollar was referred to as a skin, so as to be better understood by the Indian. It perhaps was said that a gun was worth twenty beavers, but may not have been paid for by beavers at all, but by marten worth \$10; twenty beavers being worth perhaps \$300, and if beavers were actually used to pay for the gun, only two skins would have to be tendered. [...]

Up to 1830 beavers were sold by the pound and were used principally for making tall hats, the fur alone being used, and the hide discarded. This mode of purchasing was not satisfactory, because when the fur is least plentiful on the animal the hide is the thickest, and heaviest, so that it was necessary to have a price per pound set for every season and every age of the animal.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

“Life among the Stickeens”¹⁷⁷ (1863)

The fashions here are very strange. They go very heavy on the *cultus potlatch*, but they carry it out well with one another. There is not a day passes but three or four *potlatches* come into the house, consisting of salmon, berries, grease, dried sea weed, etc. I myself have had several *potlatches* given me – such as salmon, two blankets, shot-pouch, etc. You must take no notice of the party who gives you the things at the time they are presented to you. Afterwards, if you like to acknowledge it, it is all right.

Our old man gave a *muck a muck potlatch* the other day. The house being only forty by thirty feet was too small to accommodate all his tillicums, so the grub was moved to the second house above, which was much larger. The grub consisted principally of berries and grease with a barrel of molasses to sweeten it. I had an invitation to go, so I went. It was a great sight. I suppose there were over a hundred and fifty men and women, to say nothing of youngsters – they filled up the holes and corners. There was no time lost. The barrel of molasses was tapped, and they poured something like a gallon or more into a pan. They intimated to me that it was my share of the feast. A *tenas* man lifted the pan and bore it home. The day after I was at one of their drinking bents. The old man would take no denial to his invitation, so I had to go. When I got there the house was chock full, as usual. There was a deal of dancing by a young [woman] and a little boy; both in very fantastic dresses. When that was through with, the doctor then stepped out and, making his way into a corner of the house, sung in a very loud voice. He listened very intently for a few seconds, but receiving no response, he left and went to another corner, and so on, till he had been round the house. At the fourth corner he got an answer in a kind of a whistle. Everybody looked intensely astonished, and on his lifting up a covering of blankets, a figure was lying underneath with a most villainous false face on him; he made no motion whatever. Then up struck the drum, and off they all went in a very lively song, and during the performance the figure disappeared. After that the drinking began, and it was well carried out. Blankets and calicoes were torn up and given away. I got two pieces of calico. As usual, a large amount of liquor was drunk, and a good many of them had bottles-full to pack home with them.

During this time my old man was getting ready to place his big stick¹⁷⁸ on end, and also make a grand *potlatch*. The night before the stick was to go up, the old man had to dance, in order not to lose time the next day, as they would have their hands full for one day in getting the stick on end, and making the grand *potlatch*. During the day everything was cleared away to make room for the crowd that was to assemble at night. And sure enough, all the room was needed. The house was filled to

¹⁷⁷ From Life Among the Stickeens. (1863, April 29). *British Colonist*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Possibly a totem pole.

overflowing. The old man was dressed in a splendid Indian robe and a pair of fancy leggings; the latter were ornamented with bears' claws, to serve also as rattles. The festal music, of course, was the drum, and a song. The dancing was a sort of figuring about and lasted over an hour. During that time, however, we had a great many different songs and dances. They then commenced one of their long *wawas*, when it was interrupted by four siwashes bursting into the house, attired and painted in the most fanciful style. A lively song was struck up, and off they went again to dance. That dance was by far the best I have seen among them. The next morning it was wet, raw and cold, but still they were around and ready for work. They had a sort of a derrick with a tackle, but the heaviest of the work was done by fair lifting. It took them half a day to do the job. Then the grand *potlatch* commenced. One man got 40 blankets, another an Indian robe worth 30 blankets. A good many got as many as five and six. The old man also gave away nearly all the clothes he had, besides axes, muskets, shot, powder, &c. Everybody got something.

Nor was he the only one that *potlatched*; all his friends seemed to be crazy on the subject; they would rush out, fetch in armfuls of blankets and give them away. Of course a good many of them were torn up to enable them to go around such a crowd.

I was jammed up in one corner of the house when I saw an old [woman] come out with a bucket full of powder where there were such a number of lighted pipes, most of them with a large coal of fire atop. They were taking a few puffs and passing them one to another, so that every now and again I thought one of the pipes would fall and all would be over with the powder and us, too. I made an abortive attempt to get outside, but it was no go; there was too much of a jam, so I just had to wait and watch. At last the confounded stuff was served out, and I was not sorry to see it go. I do not think there could have been less than three hundred blankets changing hands. A most miserable dirty-looking old [woman], whom I never thought had a single thing but what she always wore, gave away no less than seventy three-point blankets. I was very sorry to see the Indian robe go, because I intended to have it myself.

“We are to have a grand potlatch”¹⁷⁹ (1863)

We are to have a grand potlatch with the Indians in a few days; they have got plenty of liquor for the grand feast, and I am sorry to say that it is being sold to them in the one public house that is here. The price of one bottle of Old Tom is one blanket, or \$2.00; 1½ [bottles], 1 marten skin, and for cash, \$2.50, and so on. If this is not put a stop to, and that right soon, you will have to publish some more murders at Bentinck Arm. This very day there are upwards of five thousand Indians here [New Aberdeen] from the interior and all round the coast to feast with their friends. I wish the *Chameleon* [gunship] would come here to-morrow and fire on them and their friends with good hot shell.

¹⁷⁹ From FROM BENTHICK ARM. (1863, November 20). *British Colonist*, p. 2.

A blanket potlatch as amends¹⁸⁰ (August, 1871)

Mr. Stevens, C.E., and party, returned yesterday morning from Koskimo, on the northwest coast of V.I., where surveys on behalf of the Government have been made of coal lands. The natives are reported friendly. An Indian was killed with a stone by another, but an *amende honorable* was made by the offending party, in their shape of a blanket potlatch. They had much fear a gunboat would be dispatched to punish the wrong-doers.

“Lasted three days”¹⁸¹ (May, 1872)

Four or five hundred Indians from various sections of the country, attended a “potlatch” given at the Inlet Narrows, and which lasted three days of last week.

“A grand potlatch”¹⁸² (September, 1871)

A grand “potlatch” took place amongst the Thompson River and other Indians at Yale a few days since, at which horses, canoes, muskets, blankets, money, etc., were given away; the whole estimated to be worth about \$2,000. Great sobriety and good conduct were conspicuous among the Indians.

“Nearly provoked a fight”¹⁸³ (August, 1872)

Some 200 Vancouver Island Indians lately visited North Bay to take part in a potlatch, taking with them a keg of whiskey. Mr. Gibson, the agent, found the keg and destroyed its contents; an act which nearly provoked a fight. The affair finally terminated amicably.

“Mounted on ponies”¹⁸⁴ (July, 1875)

Lytton is a miserable place, consisting of a few tumble-down old cabins, situated at the confluence of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. [...] Many Indians were lounging about, and as I was leaving the village fully one hundred others arrived from the upper country, mounted on ponies, dressed in every imaginable style, and with every variety of garment. Almost every pony carried double, generally the lady in front and the gentleman in rear holding on to her taper (?) waist. As they filed past I raised my hat and gave them a cheer and turned my face up the Thompson. I learned

¹⁸⁰ From KOSKIMO INLET. (1871, August 29). *Victoria Daily Standard*, p. 3.

¹⁸¹ From LOWER COUNTRY. (1872, May 6). *Victoria Daily Standard*, p. 3.

¹⁸² From “POTLATCH”. (1871, September 15). *Victoria Daily Standard*, p. 3.

¹⁸³ From NEAR BAY. (1872, August 6). *Victoria Daily Standard*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ From Macoun, J. (1875, July 21). Another Letter from Prof. McCoun. *Daily British Colonist*, p. 1. Written by John Macoun (1831 – 1920).

afterwards that they were to hold a great “potlatch” (free feed) the next day, and many of these had ridden one hundred miles to attend it.

“A mighty gathering”¹⁸⁵ (September, 1876)

There was a mighty gathering of the race of “Lo” at Saanich yesterday. Upwards of 3,000 red-skins in 275 canoes were present, the tribes from Nanaimo, Cowichan, Chemainus, Burrard Inlet, Langley, New Westminster, North and South Saanich, Beechey Bay and Nitinaht on the British side of the Straits being all represented, while the Semiahmoo, Lummie and Clallams appeared for the American Siwashes.

The occasion of the assemblage was a grand potlatch of over \$15,000 worth of goods being given away. English blankets to the value of \$5,000 were thrown from the top of the lodges to be scrambled for by the natives below, who stood armed with long poles stuck full of nails at one end to secure the prize as soon as it fell. In addition to these, some curious “perceeces,” [sic.] made by the natives themselves from the wool of the mountain sheep, were also thrown. Three hundred guns, amongst which were some very fine double-barreled pieces with percussion locks, were then flung down and caused a series of tremendous struggles which lasted in some cases for nearly an hour. Pieces of board representing sums ranging from \$100 to \$500 were then scrambled after the same fashion. Three brothers gave 3,500 blankets as their contribution to the grand gift “enterprise,” which had all been paid for by the products of the chase.

The stock of gifts being exhausted, the natives all got into their canoes and left, thus ending one of the largest meetings of the kind which has taken place for some years and probably the last of any magnitude which will occur, as the rising generation of Indians seem to care little about perpetuating the customs of their forefathers, and this as well as many other ancient practices will soon be numbered amongst the things of the past.

All was conducted soberly, and the Indian Superintendent, Col. Powell, and Police Superintendent Todd, who were present, were both struck by the absence of any intoxication.

“In spite of the warning”¹⁸⁶ (October, 1876)

In spite of the warning of the Indian Commissioner, a number of Nanaimo Indians have gone to the potlatch at Howe Sound. Measures should be taken to prevent them landing and mixing with other Indians on their return, until a thorough inspection has been made, so as to prevent the spread of smallpox.

¹⁸⁵ From Grand Potlatch. (1876, September 19). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ From Nanaimo. (1876, October 14). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 2.

A Metlakatla potlatch¹⁸⁷ (c. 1877)

[In early 1877 (?)]¹⁸⁸ a large fleet of Haidas arrived [at Metlakatla, British Columbia]¹⁸⁹ from several other encampments to attend a great “potlatch”. As they came by special invitation, a great reception had been prepared for them. As their large canoes approached the shore, each propelled by from twelve to twenty rowers arranged in equal numbers on either side of the canoes, a skillful display of paddling was given. Now they made the stroke as one man, without causing the slightest sound or raising a ripple on the water, indicating the stealthy manner in which they approached their foes in a night attack; then at a given signal, with a loud war whoop they dashed their paddles deep into the water, causing the foam to fly, whilst the canoes were almost lifted by the stroke as they made a united dash upon their supposed enemy. Instantly this was changed to a paean of triumph, whilst they kept in perfect time to the chant with their paddles; and lastly, they swept shoreward, imitating the flight of the weary eagle by two strokes and a rest between, alternated with two strokes and a pause. This exhibition was ended by every two oarsmen crossing their paddles in mid-air over the center of their canoes as they touched the shore.

The chiefs and leading men occupied the seats between the rowers, whilst the women and children, with their provisions and bedding, were accommodated on the bottom of the canoes, thus ballasting their light craft. Several of the leading canoes had small cannon mounted on the bows. From these a salute was fired on nearing the shore; but the conclusion was too strong for one of their canoes, as it caused it to split almost from bow to stern and would have proved serious had they not been so close to land. The occupants remained quite composed, although the water was rushing in, and they succeeded in beaching the canoe just as she was sinking. But as the chanting and dancing were well sustained by the occupants of the other canoes, this accident passed almost unperceived by the others.

Many of the dancers wore head-dresses and wooden masks of various patterns, but in every case the mask or headdress indicates the crest to which the wearer belongs. Thus the masks and headdresses worn by the members of the eagle crest bear a resemblance to the eagle either by the likeness of the nose to the eagle’s hook-shaped beak, or by the white eagle feathers surmounting the mask. The members of the finback whale crest wear masks surmounted by a large fin; whilst the wolf, the bear, and the frog are all well represented by the members of the crests of which these are the signs.

¹⁸⁷ From Collison, W. H. (n.d.). *In the wake of the war canoe*. Toronto: Musson Book Co. Written by William Henry Collison (1847 – 1922), Archdeacon of Metlakatla.

¹⁸⁸ The original account provides dates only infrequently. The last one mentioned before this episode is November, 1876. Context clues suggest the potlatch took place in very late 1876 or early 1877. I’ve tentatively chosen the latter given the difficulties of canoe travel in winter.

¹⁸⁹ This is “old” Metlakatla, near Prince Rupert. In the 1880s the Christian mission at that location would move to “new” Metlakatla, in Alaska. Metlakatla, B.C., forms part of the traditional territory of the Metlakatla First Nation.

It is not a little significant, however, to find how very closely the use of the ermine skin by the Indians of all the tribes on the north-west coast approaches the use of it in the state dresses of royalty and nobility in England. The higher the rank of an Indian chief, the greater the number of ermine skins he is entitled to wear attached to his *shikeed*, or dancing dress, and hanging from it down his back, in rows of three and six. The Master of the Robes in the English court is careful that neither duke, earl, or knight may adorn himself with more ermine skins than is permitted by court etiquette. And, as it cannot be said that the Indians have adopted the custom from the whites, and we hesitate to admit that the whites have acquired it from the Indians, we can only recognize in it the similarity of human nature, and admit that here, indeed, the extremes meet in the tastes and adornment of the highest civilization and the gay trappings of the untutored Indian chief.

A great feast had been prepared for the visitors in the houses of the leading chiefs, and to this they led, preceded by the dancers. On entering, great fires of logs, piled several feet in height, diffused a glow of heat around, and the blaze was intensified by slaves pouring seal oil and olachan¹⁹⁰ grease in large quantities upon the fires. The visitors having been seated according to their rank, their entertainers entered arrayed in their dancing costume, of which the most attractive objects were the *dudjung*, or dancing headdress, and the *shikeed*, or dancing robe. The crown-shaped receptacle on the top of each of the dancing headdresses was well filled with the swan and eagle's down, and, as they danced in and around before their guests, they bowed before each, causing a shower of the down to fall on each guest, a most significant mark of both peace and honor. The dance was accompanied by the music of the chant and drum, whilst the words of the chang expressed their pleasure and the rank and record of their guests. When the *lthdanua*, or down, had thus been scattered, their feasting began.

It was not uncommon to place a small canoe filled with berries, preserved in greasae and mixed with snow, before a number of their guests. The chief dishes were served up in wooden bowls and trenchers, skillfully carved, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Dried salmon and halibut with olachan grease followed, with boiled seaweed (dulse), also mixed with fish and grease, and, lastly, as dessert, a bitter-tasting berry (*hūgutlite*), beaten up with water until it became a mass of froth. This was eaten in a peculiar manner, with long, narrow wooden spoons (shaped like miniature oars or paddles), being pressed out of the mouth and quickly drawn in again in order to expel part of the air with which it is mixed. This is attended with an unusual sound, and in endeavoring to imitate and executed this native custom, the white man, if a guest, is seldom successful, and must be prepared to be greeted with salvos of laughter at his failure.

The first item in the program of this great "potlatch" to which these visitors had been invited was the erection of a great totem or crest pole. Amongst all the tribes of the coast, none surpassed the Haidas in the construction and erection of these totems. In this, and in the designing and fishing of their war canoes, the Haida

¹⁹⁰ A fatty fish also known as the oolichan, eulachon, and "candle-fish". Oolichan grease was a major trade commodity for Indigenous communities of the Pacific Northwest.

Indians excelled all the coast tribes, whether in British Columbia or on the Alaskan coast. They had one natural advantage, in the very fine cedar trees which were to be found on their islands.

A tree, proportionate to the dimensions of the totem required, and free from large knots or blemishes, was first selected, roughly prepared, and conveyed to the camp. Then the chief of a crest differing from that of the chief for whom the totem was to be carved, was invited to enter upon the work. If he was not sufficiently skillful himself, he called one or more of the most skillful of his own crest to assist him in the undertaking. Having received instructions as to the various figures to be represented, their number and order, proceeding from base to top, the workmen commenced operations.

In the carving of a totem pole very often a legend or tradition in which the ancestors of the chief and his crest were the chief actors is selected, and thus the totem is but an illustration of the legend. In some villages may be seen totems surmounted by figures resembling men wearing tall hats. This indicates that the owner's ancestor or ancestors first saw the white men who are here represented. Standing by a skilled carver on one occasion who had been engaged to carve a very elaborate totem, I was surprised at the apparently reckless manner in which he cut and hewed away with a large axe as though regardless of consequences.

"Where is your plan?" I inquired. "Are you not afraid to spoil your tree?"

"No," he replied; "the white man, when about to make anything, first traces it on paper, but the Indian has all his plans here," as he significantly pointed to his forehead.

Having cut the outline roughly with the axe, he then proceeded to finer workmanship with an adze, and on my last visit I found him polishing off a perfect pattern with the skin of the dogfish, which is much more effective for this purpose than sandpaper. When it is remembered that formerly all such work as the preparation and carving of the totem poles, the construction of their well-proportioned canoes, and the building and decoration of their dwellings, were executed with stone tools, it will appear less surprising that they can accomplish such work now with the improved tools and implements which the white man has introduced. The chief or chiefs who are engaged to carve the totem or crest pole are not paid until the "potlatch" takes place. They are then rewarded, not according to their time and labor, but rather according to their rank and the amount of property at the disposal of the chief for distribution to those who have been invited.

But there were yet other customs among the Haidas connected with the "potlatch". One of these was tattooing. I had occasion to enter a lodge one morning shortly before a "potlatch" took place, and was not a little surprised to see all around the lodge men in every attitude undergoing this painful operation, some on the chest, some on the back, and others on the arms, all being tattooed with the figures peculiar to their own crest, which in this instance was the eagle and the beaver, as they belonged to the eagle crest.

The operators were evidently quite expert in their work. Each of them had a number of thin strips of wood of various widths, in which needles were firmly fixed

as teeth in a comb. Some of these sticks had but two or three needles, others more, according to the width of the pattern or device to be marked. The peculiar sound caused by such a number all pricking the skin of their subjects caused quite a nervous sensation in the bystander. Blood was flowing freely from many of them, and that it was rather a painful process was evidenced by their faces. Many were smoking, thus seeking to conceal their misery and console their feelings with the pipe. Others had their lips firmly compressed, but not one by either sign or sound indicated the painfulness of the process. That the subsequent suffering when inflammation had set in was severe I discovered by a number of them coming to me for some application to subdue the swelling and soothe the irritation. This was caused by the poisonous colors which had been rubbed in.

Not a few of the Haidas had their faces tattooed when I first went amongst them, and these reminded me strongly of the Māori of New Zealand, but the few of those who now remain are ashamed of their disfigurement, especially on embracing Christianity. When the “potlatch” took place these men who had been thus tattooed were rewarded by receiving blankets or other property proportionate to the honor which they had thus rendered to the chief. But yet worse practices were sometimes resorted to in the erection of the totem at a great “potlatch”. It was not uncommon formerly, when the opening had been dug out in which the totem was to be erected, to bind one or more slaves, either male or female, and cast them alive into the opening. Then, amidst shouting and clamor which drowned the cries of the victims, the great totem was hoisted up into position by hundreds of helpers and the opening around it filled in with stones and earth firmly beaten down.

On one occasion, a young woman, a slave, fled to our mission over one hundred miles in order to escape such a terrible fate. The night before the day fixed for her destruction she succeeded in launching a small canoe unaided and unperceived, and fled. The punishments and privations which she had passed through had prostrated her, and although we used every means to restore her to health, she succumbed to her injuries three weeks after her arrival. There was hope in her death, as we had with the assistance of another freed slave endeavored to lead her to a saving knowledge of the [Christian] Truth. With the introduction of the teachings of Christianity and the advances of civilization the “potlatch” has been denuded of all its worst associations.

When the day for the great event has arrived all the property is brought forth and exhibited in heaps within and without the lodge. The guests are then arranged around according to the rank, their first or inner row being formed of the leading chiefs. Behind them sit the sub-chiefs, or those of the second rank. Next appear the “haade,” or free men. These are the counsellors to the chiefs. The next rows are arranged according to the social position in the tribe. On the outside are assembled the slaves. The presiding chief then delivers an introductory speech, recounting the rank and deeds of his ancestors and his own exploits and position amongst them. Not infrequently this opportunity is used to resent an insult either actual or supposed, or to inflict one. The chief’s assistants, being sub-chiefs of his own crest, then call out the name of each recipient, and the amount and description of property given.

Often large numbers of slaves were first given away, then copper shields, furs, blankets, either in bale or numbered, guns, rifles, canoes, and latterly, as currency has become more common amongst them, both gold and silver is distributed; also whole pieces of print, white calico, and flannel. These latter are generally torn up in pieces and strips, and given away to the rank and file, as also blankets, &c. At one of the latest “potlatches,” where I was permitted to enter and conduct a short service, I observed near where I stood a wash-basin nearly full of silver, in one-dollar and half-dollar pieces, for the “potlatch”. Much has been said and written, both for and against this custom, principally by outsiders who are unacquainted with the social life of the Indians. Having resided amongst them for three decades, and learned their languages, Tsimshean, Haida and Nishka, I can testify from knowledge and experience that the “potlatch” of to-day is not what it was in the past. The same may be said of the heathenism of the present as compared with that of a quarter of a century ago. Both have been reformed by the influence of Christianity. The tearing and devouring of dogs and human flesh was then almost a nightly practice in every heathen camp. Now it is unknown. Slavery has been abolished. Sorcery is ashamed to declare itself, and the medicine man has been denuded of all his terrors.

Notwithstanding, the “potlatch” is a hindrance to the advancement of the Indian. The tribe or band which follows it cannot become thrifty or prosperous. It is a barrier to industry. Note the number of weeks lost to the Indians when they assemble for the “potlatch”. During this time they are almost constantly engaged in gambling. How are they clothed? For the most part they have only a dirty blanket thrown around them, and their habits are filthy, very seldom attempting to wash themselves or clothing. The heathen “potlatch” is incompatible with Christianity and civilization. It tends to demoralize and degrade its followers, and it has been proved that the civilized and industrious Indian earns and expends five times more than the devotee who wastes his life in the practice of the “potlatch”.

“Subsequently applied for relief”¹⁹¹ (1877)

The annual report of the Department of [the] Interior contains the reports of Indian Superintendents Powell and Lenihan of British Columbia. [...] The case of one Indian who had given away \$700 worth of property at a *potlatch* and subsequently applied for relief, which he only got by promising to curb his generous impulses in the future, is mentioned.

“Indian disturbance at Chemainus”¹⁹² (April, 1878)

Official information was received on Saturday night stating that a disturbance has taken place among a large number of Indians assembled for the purpose of holding a *potlatch* at Oyster Harbor, Chemainus. The natives, having smuggled a great quantity of liquor from Washington Territory, proceeded to indulge in an orgy

¹⁹¹ From Indian Affairs. (1877, March 15). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 2.

¹⁹² From Indian Disturbance at Chemainus. (1878, April 2). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 2.

of a most degrading nature, when constable Stewart of Nanaimo, accompanied by several special officers, arrived on the scene and made several arrests. The Indians, enraged at this interference and infuriated by the villainous compound they had imbibed, attacked the constable and his escort, rescuing the prisoners from the arm of the law and threatening the officers and white settlers generally, should any further attempt be made to prevent a continuance of the orgy.

On receipt of the information the naval authorities at Esquimalt were communicated with, and the gunboat Rocket was dispatched on Sunday morning to the scene of the disturbance, where every effort will be made to carry out the law and maintain order.

“They accepted five horses from him”¹⁹³ (August, 1878)

The Indians at Boston Bar have been holding a grand *potlatch* for the past few days, and all their tillicums from the upper country and below here have been up there assisting the celebration. To lend an additional interest to the festivities, an Indian murdered his klotchman while the spree was at its height. It is said that he got jealous of her apparent attentions to another redskin. [...] ¹⁹⁴ But “a guilty conscience is its own accuser,” and he confessed the murder to her family. They accepted five horses from him as a compromise and sent for Mr. Teague, Government agent here, who arrested him and lodged him in gaol to await a trial.

“Had it not been for this”¹⁹⁵ (July, 1884)

James Claplanhoo, the hereditary chief of the Matkah tribe, gave a great potlatch yesterday, at which hundreds of Vancouver Island Indians were present. Had it not been for this, Victoria and Port Townsend would have had much larger delegations of Indians present at their festivities. As it was, however, a good many Makah Indians participated in the regatta with whaling canoes.

“A horrible crime”¹⁹⁶ (August, 1887)

Qumlet, a Salmon River Indian, was charged yesterday afternoon before Mr. E. Johnson, S.M., with the murder of Dring and Miller. [...]

On the 8th of August [...] a force proceeded north in a steamer and succeeded in arresting Qumlet in a canoe at Comox. When he was brought on board the steamer, Qumlet said to the woman who was on board the steamer that if she would keep her mouth shut and not say anything, he would give her a large canoe worth \$150. He said, also, that he knew that the white men were after him and he was very glad that

¹⁹³ From Letter from Yale. (1878, August 7). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ I've omitted graphic details of the murder.

¹⁹⁵ From Indian Powwow and Potlatch. (1884, July 5). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁶ From A HORRIBLE CRIME. (1887, August 27). *Daily Colonist*, p. 4.

he had got through his potlatch, as he had nothing now to give away and he would not be afraid to die.

“Repaid it with 100 per cent”¹⁹⁷ (1888)

Macamoose, an Indian, was arraigned on a charge of murdering Henry Moore on the schooner *Sea Bird* in Blenkinsop Bay on June 29th, 1886. [...]

Narkamalis, sworn deposed – Am a Matilki Indian. [...] I gave a potlatch at Midlatum village. I gave away 300 blankets – it was before the murder. A man that they call Quakwesaultos gave me the 300 blankets, and I gave them away as a potlatch. Quakwesaultos, when a young man, got in debt for 150 blankets and repaid it with 100 per cent., viz: 300 blankets. It is three years ago since I gave the potlatch of 300 blankets.

“A practical joke”¹⁹⁸ (April, 1889)

The Indians of Vancouver Island relish a practical joke as well as anyone, a fact that was illustrated clearly at the great potlatch held up the coast a few days ago. A large box of soda biscuits was among the supplies sent to the feast. The box fell into the hands of an aboriginal joker, who removed the eatable contents, substituted three or four old boots, and passed it on to the banqueters. As an article of diet the boots were a decided failure.

“There is a fictitious currency”¹⁹⁹ (1889)

Among the Kaw-gutls [...] on many houses are painted numbers of daubs, each representing a canoe given away or destroyed in some potlatch and absurd inscriptions are to be seen referring to the numbers of thousands of blankets distributed. There is a fictitious currency, depending upon the potlatch, consisting of “coppers” or escutcheons equivalent to gold, blankets equivalent to silver, and in ancient times shells equivalent to copper. Escutcheons are often valued at from one to two thousand blankets, depending, according to the experts, upon their age and ugliness, just as old china is valued among ourselves. When the potlatch is really prohibited, as it is now in theory, the fall in value of “coppers” will be a heavy loss to the Indians.

¹⁹⁷ ASSIZE COURT. (1888, July 7). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ From Little Locals. (1889, April 21). *The Colonist*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ From THE COAST INDIANS. (1889, July 13). *The Victoria Daily Times*, p. 1.

“On Bowen Island”²⁰⁰ (May, 1890)

The Indians are preparing a big potlatch on Bowen Island on the 17th of June, and yesterday four large canoes pretty heavily laden with goods of all description left the City Wharf. One of the occupants of the boat said that the natives would be glad to see their white friends at the entertainment, and would not expect them even to bring along their own flasks.

“Gradually more tolerable”²⁰¹ (1890)

“Potlatch” is a word that carries with it a heathenish signification, and was at one time an orgy of the wildest and most depraved kind. Since their contact with civilization, however, the Indian potlatch has become gradually more tolerable, the old scenes have disappeared one after the other, and the occasion has become now almost as dignified as a country fair. In fact, it has assumed all the characteristics of an industrial mart, where each family disposes of its particular wares. Thus those who make mats find a market for them, and as the prices range according to quality, the makers are incited to greater and greater efforts so as to excel their ordinary skills and thus secure the highest price possible. Other productions are governed by the same rules, and the Indians are thereby immersed in the fever of trade instead of passion and revelry.

“On the North Arm of the Fraser”²⁰² (June, 1892)

The Colonist [reporter] drove to the Mosquim Reservation on the North Arm of the Fraser, where the gathering of Indian tribes of the entire province has taken place. He was welcomed as a “tillicum” and greeted by many warm-hearted “Klahowyas”. [...] Towards evening we were recalled to the settlement by Pilot William Brown of the Nanaimo tribe. Two thousand and fifty Indians were lined up in readiness for the unusual ceremony.

Big Jim, of the Nanaimo tribes, is an orphan, his father, the chief of the tribe, dying many years ago. For a long time Big Jim has been saving “tehalete hyu chickamen” for the purpose of giving a big potlatch and asserting his rights as heir-apparent to the title of Grand High Tyee of the tribe of Nanaimo. The potlatch is over now. Jim “halo weight chickamen, stop still,” though but yesterday a humble member of the tribe of red men, is, to-day, the aristocrat of the bluest blood, even if he hasn’t one nickel to rub against another. The dance was soon at white heat, dark painted figures going in, out and around for 55 minutes. The presiding klotchman was prepossessing, and when the dancers became exhausted she went through the usual process of sprinkling them with cold waters. When affairs got to such a pitch, “something had to drop”. Down came blankets, goods and chattels from aloft, where

²⁰⁰ From THE CITY. (1890, May 31). *Daily News Advertiser* (Vancouver), p. 8.

²⁰¹ From Indian Improvement. (1890, June 11). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

²⁰² From THE BIG POTLATCH. (1892, June 5). *Daily Colonist*, p. 1.

Big Jim was perched in a rather undignified position for a chief. The articles were lifted on poles and carried away by the tribe amidst great rejoicing.

The following chiefs were present: Jim Hyda, Jim Nanaimo, Dick Simpson, Bill Rupert, Johnny Bob; Comox, Bob Stelepkalum, Charlie Teahkum, Hank Sanach, Louis Seimo, and Lummah Squamish, Klunkhomslete Chemainus and many others. Parties of six or a dozen are still coming in from all over the province. Two potlatches have been held, and three more are to be held, when the eccentric but innocent orgies of this strange people will be at an end till some other aspirant of the many tribes has enough “chickamen” to make himself solid with his people. [...] Verily it seems that a Siwash is not esteemed among his people until he impoverishes himself by giving all his worldly possessions away among his tribe, while his voluntary action is made the subject of public rejoicing.

“\$40 worth of shirts”²⁰³ (October, 1892)

Peter, a Seshat Indian, gave a potlatch last Saturday in the Opitches-aht village, giving away about \$300 in cash and \$40 worth of shirts.

“They diminish in liberality”²⁰⁴ (October, 1892)

Mr. Hugh Grant, the well-known logger, came down from his camp yesterday, and reports that the Guclutuc Indians are still potlatching. As the potlatches proceed they diminish in liberality and extravagance. Sub-Chief Nechass was holding forth when Hugh left the reservation a few days ago, but as he had only 500 blankets and \$1,000 to distribute, the potlatch was pronounced “cultus”. How the mighty have fallen! The potlatch started with 8,000 blankets, and the bonfire was fed by ten canoes. Poor Nechass had but one to supply the fuel, and while not more than 500 danced around its lurid flames, the former potlatch givers were honored with the presence of from 3,000 to 5,000 grateful participants.

“A potlatch all his own”²⁰⁵ (November, 1892)

The steamer Danube, Captain Meyer commanding, returned yesterday morning at 5 o'clock from Northern British Columbia ports, completing a voyage of two weeks. [...]

Andrew Wright is the very matter-of-fact name claimed by yet another passenger, who, if he could write his autograph in his native language, would find it principally composed of “h’s” and hyphens. He is a river Indian, whose heart yearned for the joys of a potlatch – not a potlatch at which he would be a guest, but a potlatch all his own.

²⁰³ From ALBERNI. (1892, October 15). *Daily Colonsit*, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ From Potlatch Redivivus. (1892, October 16). *Daily Colonist*, p. 7.

²⁰⁵ From NUGGETS FROM THE NORTH. (1892, November 23). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

The desire to bid his friends come and partake of his hospitality and share in his blankets grew stronger and stronger, and finally Andrew did make himself the hero of a potlatch of modest dimensions. All the Indians in the district attended, danced and said “great is Andrew Wright” – and wondered where the money came from, for potlatches are expensive.

Andrew’s father did not wonder with the rest, and believes that he had a good reason for not being mystified, which good reason was subsequently explained by Andrew being arrested, charged with burglariously entering his parent’s house and taking therefrom a sum of money. He was charged with robbery, and committed for trial.

“The Clayoose Indians”²⁰⁶ (January, 1893)

The Clayoose Indians are enjoying a big potlatch, and blankets are the order of the day, four thousand of these very acceptable articles having been distributed up to date. The local store has been completely cleaned out, and supplies from all quarters are pouring in. It is calculated that Chief Tom will dispense gifts to the amount of \$2,000.

“A good deal of money”²⁰⁷ (1893)

The *potlatch* is a peculiar Indian institution, combining the essential features of a free lunch and a free blanket scramble. Perhaps, indeed, the indiscriminate giving away of presents by the chief surpasses in interest the banquet. Potlatches are all the rage after the fishing season is over, and it is astonishing with what delight the Indian [Indians] indulge in them. Here is an account of one, given in the words of a prominent canner, about a year ago:-

“Last year,” he says, “I had an Indian working for me who earned \$1,400. He drew the whole of this in a lump sum, and laid it out in eight muskets, a dozen boxes of crackers, and the balance – about \$1,200 – in blankets. Then the noble red man called all the Indians within reach together, and announced his intention of giving a grand potlatch.

“The blankets were spread out in a two-acre field, with the crackers on the outside for his friends to lunch on, and the muskets in the center. When the appointed time arrived to begin the ceremonies, the Indian waded through the sea of blankets to where the muskets lay. Here he climbed on a box and began a long oration, at the end of which time he picked up the muskets one by one and smashed them over the box, signifying that all enmity between the tribes present was forever ended, and rifles would be no longer needed. Then he gave the signal that the potlatch had commenced, and the Indian women sailed in and packed away not only one pair of blankets, but as many as they could carry, and in a few minutes there was not even

²⁰⁶ From THE CITY. (1893, January 15). *Daily Colonist*, p. 7.

²⁰⁷ From Gowen, H. H. (1893). Salmon fishing and canning on the Fraser. *Canadian Magazine*, 2(2), pp. 159-165. Written by Herbert Henry Gowen (1864 - 1960), Anglican Missionary.

a single blanket left for the use of the generous contributor. This grand giveaway, of course, made the Siwash very popular, and a few days after he was elected sub-chief of his tribe. A few weeks later this same Indian came to me dead-broke, and got a sack of flour on credit.

“As a rule, the headmen of the tribe do this sort of thing, but once in a while an ambitious young Siwash tries to make a name for himself. Last fall a young fellow who had made a little money fishing for me came into the office and got \$150 in silver. With this he climbed on top of a shack, and after addressing the multitude for an hour and a half, scattered every cent of the money among the people below. This young Indian is looked upon as a coming man, and by the time he has squandered the earnings of half-a-dozen seasons’ fishing, he will be made a chief.”

However, as a good deal of money is left to circulate in our midst, and the Indians go home well satisfied, it is not for us to grumble. Indeed, grumbling is at a discount after the fishing, or should be, for it is the harvest of the year – a blessing to the fishermen, a blessing to the canners, a blessing to the tradespeople in our cities, and let us hope, a blessing to the world at large, which tastes our Fraser River salmon as fresh a year hence as on the day they were caught. Long may the world be grateful for the industry which brings the wealth of the seas to those far inland who may never have heard the music of old Ocean’s voice.

“Selling into slavery the little white boy”²⁰⁸ (1895)

The preliminary hearing of the case of Peter Bellinger, charged with selling into slavery the little white boy Arthur Lamour, ended yesterday, in the committal of the prisoner for trial. [...]

Toutanose was the first witness of the day, and his testimony, as interpreted into English by the Rev. Father Nicolaye, was as follows:

“My name is Toutanose and I am of the Checkelesat tribe the second chief. Our home is on the West Coast. I saw the man Peter, the accused, for the first time at Checkelesat about two months ago. He came there on a schooner that is called the Nootka, owned by an Indian whose name is Toquit. He had the little boy Arthur with him, and landing from the schooner he took the child and a big trunk to Toquit’s house, where he remained for a space of two months. The accused did no work, so far as I know. During the two months of his stay at Toquit’s house I did not speak to him, though I saw him sometimes going about among the Indians.

“About twenty days ago one of the chiefs invited the Kyuquot Indians to a potlatch at our village. The Kyuquots remained six days, and on the evening of the last day the prisoner came with the child to my house. At that time the Kyuquot Indians were all busy preparing to leave for their own homes. The accused, Peter Bellinger, asked me to buy the child. When he first asked me I held down my head, feeling full of shame, and I did not know what to think concerning the matter. He asked me a second time to buy the child. I still made no reply. He asked me yet again.

²⁰⁸ From COMMITTED FOR TRIAL. (1895, January 5). *Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

I considered the matter, and knowing that the prisoner neglected the boy and took no care of him, I thought it was my duty as a chief to take care of him now that he had been brought among my people.

“The prisoner, Peter Bellinger, said ‘Give me \$100 for the child.’ I replied, ‘No, I cannot give you \$100, but I will give you \$90 for the boy.’ He answered me, ‘All right, \$90 then, but be quick about it – hurry up.’ I got up and went to my trunk where I kept my money. I counted out the \$90. It was in one \$20 gold piece, two \$10 gold pieces, and the rest in silver. I gave the money to the prisoner and he counted it carefully and afterwards tied it up in a little handkerchief – a white handkerchief with red spots. He then spoke to the child, I think telling him that he had sold him, and the child began to cry. The accused then left, taking the money with him, and I saw him getting into a canoe with the Kyuquot Indians.

“During the sale of the child my klootheadman called Matinsk and the witness John Tsalwoikinne were present with me; Matinsk saw and heard the whole transaction. John saw the money counted and paid to the accused, and also saw him count it afterwards. The accused went direct from my house to the beach and went away with the Kyuquots; I did not see him again till I saw him in the priest’s house at Kyuquot in charge of the three constables. After the accused left, I kept the boy and gave him in the care of my wife, and she took him around among the other children to play with them at their games.”

Cross-examined by Mr. Powell, the witness continued:

“I have a daughter; she is married and was not at Chekelesat at the time of the buying of the boy. Bellinger, when he brought the child to my house, said at the time of the buying of the boy. Bellinger, when he brought the child to my house, said “makook tenas,” which means “buy the child,” both in Chinook and in the Indian tongue. I don’t know a Kyuquot [Métis] named Jimmy; there was no [Métis] present during the negotiations for the sale of the boy.”

To the Court:

“When the child cried, when the accused spoke to him after the money was paid, the accused spoke very harshly. My wife then took the child on her knee and he ceased crying. The witness John asked me in the presence of the accused if I had bought the child; I answered yes – that he had brought the child to sell to me, and that I had purchased him.”

Matinsk next took the stand and gave evidence very similar to that of her husband regarding the coming of Bellinger with the boy to the Chekelesat village.

“He – Bellinger – would not work,” she said, “he used to go from house to house for food, and he also went to all the potlatches, the child following him. As far as I know the accused lived altogether upon the Indians.

“I remember the great potlatch to the Kyuquots. It lasted six days. On the evening of the last of the six days, when the potlatch was over, the accused came into my house and he said, ‘Why don’t you buy this child? I want to go down to Kyuquot.’ He repeated again, ‘I have this child for sale – give me \$100 for him and he is yours.’ He said again, a third time, ‘Buy the child, for I am in a hurry. Give me \$100.’ My husband said, ‘We had better take the child; Bellinger does not take proper care of

him and he is filthy and dirty now'. Then he said to Bellinger, 'I've not got \$100; I have but \$90.' The accused said he would take the \$90, and he told my husband to hurry up.

"My husband went to his trunk and brought out \$90 – one \$20 gold piece, two \$10 gold pieces and the rest in silver. My husband Toutanose counted out the money, and the accused counted it after him; then he tied it up in his handkerchief and placed that in his pocket. The child then began to cry. When the boy wept I took him on my knee and tried to soothe him. Bellinger spoke harshly to the lad, but I don't know what he said. He did not shake hands with the child nor kiss him before he left him and went down to the canoes."

To Mr. Powell:

"John did not hear the negotiations for the boy – only Toutanose and myself. The accused opened the conversation by offering the boy for sale. He used the word 'makook,' which means the same as 'buy'. The accused picked up the money from the floor; my husband got the child and nothing else for the \$90, nor was any other consideration mentioned or thought of by us." [...]

The evidence having been formally read over, Bellinger was asked if he desired to make any statement or proposed to call any witnesses. His counsel replied that they would reserve their defense, and Bellinger answered: "I have nothing to say."

"Plenty of fun may be expected"²⁰⁹ (October, 1895)

The *City of Nanaimo* [steamship] brought over a large number of Indians from Howe Sound last night, and the potlatch was commenced in earnest to-day. The shores of the harbor which fringe the rancheria are covered with canoes, and the potlatch house itself is densely packed with every variety of Siwash. A great heap of blankets has already been disposed of, but there are many more to follow. Dancing began about 3:30, and plenty of fun may be expected this evening. Excellent order seems to be maintained, and a careful search of almost every hut in the rancherie failed to disclose any illicit whisky drinking.

"Want of systematic arrangement"²¹⁰ (1895)

The Indian potlatch loses a good deal of outside patronage chiefly owing to a lamentable want of systematic arrangement. For example, nobody knows at what hour the natives will exemplify the national dance, and many curious visitors to the rancheria are compelled to go away disappointed. Of course the latter have no rational ground for complaint, since the Siwash does not hold his potlatch or dance his war dances for our own peculiar benefit, but in order to observe a time-honored custom.

²⁰⁹ From INDIAN MANNERS. (1895, October 31). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 8.

²¹⁰ From BRIEF MENTION. (1895, October 31). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 4.

“A peep at the potlatch”²¹¹ (1896)

“Well, chief, having a good potlatch?”

“Yes, good potlatch, lots of Indians come.”

The question was addressed to Edward Halpertson, chief of the Penelahunt and surrounding tribes of Indians, the cause of my visit being my curiosity to witness a big potlatch held “by special permission” on Kuper Island.

Accompanied by Andrew Wilson, my interpreter, I found myself at Penelahunt ranch, a most picturesque spot overlooking the islands towards Cowichan Gap with a beautiful background of snow-clad peaks in the Cascade range of mountains across the Gulf of Georgia.

Along the shore at the foot of the hill on which we stood were some 250 canoes and boats of all sizes and descriptions hauled above high water mark, and here and there were groups of Indians chatting, and children playing on the beach.

A general inspection of the ranch and introductions to the various “tyhees” occupied the first day of my visit, which lasted two weeks, and many were the interesting conversations held with the Indians, who displayed great kindness and readily afforded all the information asked for. The Indian lawyer was my particular friend. His name, as near as I could catch it, was Bill Inlatsaloc. In conversation with him I learned much of the customs of these people.

“Well, what is the programme for the potlatch?”

“The first day we are going to have sports and baseball matches, then canoe and sailing races and then the feather and mask dances and the big distribution of presents. The giving of blankets is going on now at intervals – that is the paying of debts. The Indians always pay their debts before they give presents.”

“Do they always pay their debts?” I asked.

“Oh yes, and Indian debt is never repudiated; even if an Indian dies his relatives always pay his debts, and so in the case of a dead Indian his debtors hand what they owe [the] deceased to his nearest relative. Sometimes it may be years before the debt is paid, but in the end it is paid. All business transactions between us take place in the presence of witnesses and a lawyer, and it is the lawyer’s duty to remember the transactions and the names of the witnesses and to call on them at the proper time – on such an occasion as this – to bear witness to the discharge of the obligation. This is our receipt. If an Indian repudiated a debt which witnesses proved against him, he would be an outcast of the tribe. The fact that Indian debts are always paid affords a sense of absolute security to the lender, so that any Indian who is in bad circumstances can count on assistance from a friendly Indian who is better off than himself. The Indian is never poor in the sense a white man is poor. The spirit of the potlatch makes the Siwash rich.”

“Who is giving this potlatch? Who invites all these people?” I asked.

“There are ten men here who have invited all who owe them anything and all to whom they wish to make presents, on the understanding that these presents will

²¹¹ From POTLATCH. (1896, May 16). A PEEP AT THE POTLATCH. *The Province*, p. 9.

be returned at a future date, with interest, perhaps when they are old and feeble. They are young and strong now and have no need of all these blankets and guns and canoes which they are giving away and which represent money, but by-and-bye they will be unable to earn, and will then be glad to get them back.”

“Have all the people who owe them debts accepted the invitation?”

“Yes, except some Indians on the American side, and we have heard that the missionary in charge, who should have handed them the invitation which our agent sent, did not approve of the potlatch and suppressed the letter. You must understand that all these people were not invited, only the chiefs, but it is always the custom of the whole tribe to come and settle up their debts ‘on the side,’ and they are the ones who scramble for the things the chiefs throw to them, so that all shall have a chance of getting something, but the articles scrambled are a ‘*cultus* potlatch’ – they are not expected to return them. The scrambles are only fun. We scramble for all kinds of things – guns, canoes, trunks, horses and cows and anything of value.”

“What! scramble for a live cow?” I asked with surprise. “Rather rough on the cow, isn’t it?”

“Ha! ha!” laughed my friend, “it might be if we threw it to the crowd, but we do not do that. We throw a long pole, say twenty or thirty feet long, and everyone who can get a hand on the pole has a claim on the cow; the man who offers the highest bid in money to the rest of the crowd to let go gets the cow and buys off the others at the figure he bids. The same with articles which cannot be divided, but blankets are managed differently. The only blankets scrambled are made of mountain sheep’s wool by our klotchmen. Suppose you were in a scramble and got hold of a piece of the blanket, it would be cut off for you, and when your klotchman had time she would shred it all up; when she had enough collected she would weave it into another blanket.”

I was invited to participate in a scramble, but after witnessing one I decided not to. If the reader will imagine 100 or 150 strong, able-bodied s-----s scrambling with all their might to get hold of the blanket thrown down to them from a roof, he may, perhaps, understand why I hesitated to collect a store of wealth in the form of sheeps’ wool for my “klotchman” to work with, although, as old Bill remarked, “it keeps them out of mischief.”

Many of the customs it was my good fortune to witness are of very ancient origin, so old, in fact, that the Indians who always perform the ceremonies handed down by the ancestors of their particular family have lost the meaning of them, but they are religiously performed. This gives rise to many strange performances, such as loading a canoe with gifts for a scramble, and at high water going out a few yards from shore and throwing everything into the water for the crowd to scramble for.

One remarkable trait in the Indian character is their affection for their children. If an Indian has lost a relative he never forgets it, nor does he forget to show his sorrow on the occasion of a potlatch.

Let me try and convey an idea of the solemnity of this affection. Chief Halperston, having recently lost a child and wishing to impress the fact on the minds

of those present at his distribution of gifts, called up some twenty of his friends and formed them in line in the circle of spectators.

The lawyer was fee'd with a blanket and made an oration on the good qualities of the little child – its brightness and playfulness, described its sad illness and sadder death, and many an eye was moist. A portrait of the child was then carried in solemn procession in front of the line and each man looked steadfastly at it, offering the parents what consolation he could in the meantime, and retired after receiving a blanket or some toy the deceased child had been fond of – some trifling memento of the lost one. An Indian never forgets or ceases to love his dead relatives.

I had many conversations with the Indians on the subject of the suppression of the potlatch, of which one with Old Bill Qulatsalve may serve as a sample.

“What do I think about potlatches being stopped? I think it is very unwise to stop them. What harm do they do the white people? We only give away what is our own and we do not beg from the white man; we earn our living. What other recreation can the Indians have? We are scattered over a large area of land and this is the only way we can meet. We are not dishonest; we pay our debts before we are generous. Does the white man do this? Why do the whites have their gatherings and dances if we may not? We have no other amusement; they have many. We cannot read. We need something to look forward to, something to work for.

“Mr. Taite says what is not true when he states that potlatches make our women immoral. Our women are not immoral, and they would like to talk to Mr. Taite on that question for a little while. Of course, there are bad women but, tell me, are there not bad white women? The potlatch does not make them bad, neither does it make our women bad. We do not like the religion of a man who is bigoted, and we will not listen to him. Our potlatch is quite innocent – as innocent as the white man's dances. Why does Mr. Taite not stop the white dances? Are all the people there good and honest? Do they all pay their debts, and are there not many who make themselves poorer than the Indian, who can always get help from his friends, in order to give big presents and be generous? Does Mr. Taite want the Indian to give him all his money instead of giving it to his friends?”

In conclusion my thanks are due to Mr. Lomas, the Indian Agent, who did much to secure me the courtesy and kindness of my “dusky brothers.” The greater part of two weeks was spent in the company of the Indians, and a better-behaved lot of human beings could not be found.

It seems a pity to forbid this innocent and picturesque custom in an age when the old customs are so fast dying out, especially when the fact is taken into consideration that it will eventually die out of its own accord. It is conceived and carried out in the spirit which some of its opponents profess to uphold – the spirit of good-fellowship and charity, and on the principle of “doing unto others as we would they should do unto us.”

Albert Edward Edenshaw, Chief of the Haidas²¹² (1897)

Until he became chief he bore the name Gwai-gu-un-lthin, or “The man who rests his head on an island.” [...] He was born at a village called Althins Kwun, which stood on the promontory now known as Cape Ball, on the eastern coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, not far from Skidegate. The date of his birth is uncertain, but may probably be placed somewhere between 1810 and 1815. His youth was passed in stirring times, for the Haidas were then a very warlike race and terrorized the entire coast from Sitka to Vancouver Island. In the slave-capturing raids they were in the habit of making, the Skidegate and Clue Haidas, under a warrior named Shkug-ga, took a prominent part, and young Edenshaw and his two brothers are said to have distinguished themselves by their energy and daring in many a fierce encounter. As early as 1842, when the ship *Canada*, of New Bedford, visited Skidegate, her first officer considered Edenshaw of sufficient importance to write for him a commendatory certificate.

About this time Edenshaw removed to North Island, at the northwest corner of the Queen Charlotte group. Here his uncle, bearing the hereditary name of Edenshaw, was already established as a powerful chief. According to Haida custom the chieftainship descends, not to the chief's son, but to his sister's son, who is supposed to marry the chief's daughter. In the present case the chief had no daughter, and young Edenshaw, who was his uncle's legal heir, married the daughter of an Alaskan Haida. On his uncle's death, Edenshaw succeeded him, inherited all his property, and took his name. The property included six slaves, and as his wife brought with her a dowry of ten slaves, young Edenshaw's domestic establishment was liberally supplied with attendants.

Being now his own master, he had full scope for the energy and capacity he possessed, and soon added considerably to the prestige he had inherited. Knowing that the man who could make the most potlaches – i.e., the largest distributions of property – was unanimously accorded the supremacy, he set himself to acquire wealth, which in those days consisted chiefly of slaves, blankets, furs and coppers. The “coppers” were flat sheets of metal about 2 by 1½ feet in size, on which a device was etched. In olden times they acquired a fictitious value, one copper being considered worth ten slaves. Edenshaw's friends say he never captured slaves himself, though he constantly bought and sold them. He obtained them chiefly from Skidegate and often went as far as Sitka to sell them. He used to travel in state in a dug-out canoe twelve fathoms long, elaborately painted at both ends, manned by a large number of slaves and dependents. By means of constant trading he accumulated a large quantity of property, and in the course of his life made no less than seven large potlaches.

He had not long been chief when he had a narrow escape of his life in an encounter with some Tsimshians on the river Naas. He had gone over with a large party of Haidas to sell a slave and a large copper. The Naas people recognized the

²¹² From WORTHY HAIDA CHIEF. (1897, June 26). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

slave as one of themselves and claimed him. This led to an angry dispute during which Edenshaw and a Tsimshian chief engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. A bystander raised his gun to shoot Edenshaw, who adroitly swung his opponent round and made him receive the charge, which instantly killed him. Edenshaw then rushed towards his canoe. On the way several shots were fired after him and two bullets struck him, but he managed to reach his canoe and escape, though he carried the bullets, embedded in his flesh, all his life.

“A 60-pound box of soap”²¹³ (1898)

The siwashes in this vicinity [Albernie] have been having their annual potlatch and festivities. One young chief of Dodge’s cove, captured a Hoppocheset maiden amongst the potlatches. One siwash purchased a 60-pound box of soap, distributing the same amongst his friends.

A Departure Bay potlatch²¹⁴ (1899)

Departure Bay was only six miles away from Nanaimo, and we walked up there after we had bought some provisions at a store. Our plan was to find a deserted shack on the edge of the forest and ensconce ourselves there for the Winter. We would have an easy time of it there along with the Siwash Indians who lived round about. Bob and I had heard such a lot about them and the calm life that they led, that we thought it would be as well if we took it on for a time. White men in Victoria told us that there were lots of shacks lying around that fellows had deserted after the life had palled upon them.

It turned out as we had been told. We did find a suitable shack. Also we found quite a number of white men who were living with the Indians. Many of them had taken [women] for their wives. They were most hospitable, and lent us the pots and pans we needed. One old man had lived there for 20 years. He gave the life big praise. He said he wouldn’t live in civilization now for anything. There was nothing for it but to work all your days like a dog, and die in the end like a cur! His talk put me in mind of the poor old Canadian who was knifed by the big Chilkat.

These Siwash Indians were in no way like the Chilkats, who were big, strapping, straight fellows, with savage eyes. The Siwashes were smaller, stockily-built men, with flat, mild faces. They liked white men, and tolerated the missionaries who gave them religion mixed with presents. Some of them were the quaintest-looking little men I had ever set eyes upon. With their tall, conical hats made out of bark, they looked exactly like large gnomes. One could imagine them stepping up from out of the earth.

Their language sounded most strange. It was an odd, moist language that seemed to be without consonants. It was hard for a white man to get the hang of it.

²¹³ From ALBERNI. (1898, November 22). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 7.

²¹⁴ From Kennedy, B. (1899, August 16). LIVED WITH INDIANS. *Daily News Advertiser*, p. 2. Written by Bart Kennedy (1861 – 1930).

When talking to a Siwash one had usually to fall back upon Chinook. Chinook was a polyglot language invented by the traders so that they might the more easily do the different tribes of Indians out of all they had. This language only contained about three hundred words, and was easy to learn.

Soon after we got fixed up comfortably in our shack, all of us white men were invited by the Siwashes to assist in a most curious ceremony – that is, it was most curious from the standpoint of practical, civilized ethics.

A POTLATCH WAS GIVEN

A potlatch was a big feast, and it was got up in the following manner: A Siwash would save up all he could for years. Sometimes, indeed, he would be saving up all his life. He would deny himself everything so as to be able to gather together wealth of all kinds – rifles, blankets, fishing-nets, knives, ammunition, money and everything. When he had become rich, he would give a feast. To this feast everyone would be invited; it mattered not whether they were of the tribe or not, it mattered not whether they were strangers, friends or enemies. Even race did not matter. The stray, passing white man – of the race who had crushed them and robbed them of their country – was invited to the potlatch as warmly as if he were of the tribe. And the feast went on. Presents were given to everyone. Everyone ate and drank and made merry till the last of the wealth was gone.

This was a potlatch.

The Indian who gave it had, as reward, the knowledge that he was honored by his tribe as a good and generous man. To give a big potlatch was the great ambition of the Indian's life, just as it is the great ambition of the white man's life to amass gold for himself, even though he knows he must get it out of blood and sin and misery.

The religion of the Indian taught him to amass wealth so that he might give it to others.

The potlatch was given in a great tent far in the forest, and Bob and I got for presents blankets, ammunition and some things of which we were in need for our shack. The feast lasted four days. We had the finest time men could have – singing, and dancing and eating and drinking. We felt so much at home. This Indian hospitality was so sincere. You were not asked because they knew you, or because you might be interesting. You were asked because you were a human being.

There was an old Indian with whom I got on particularly well. We both tried to tell each other all we knew. He was a nice old fellow, with an intelligent face and kindly eyes.

When the potlatch was over we white men went back to our shacks on the edge of the forest, and the old fellow, who had lived out of civilization for twenty years, and who had had experience of many potlatches, told me that Bob and I ought to settle down with the Indians and live our lives out with them. Lots of white men had married [women], he argued – he had married one, in fact! – and they turned out to be the best wives going. And the life was easy, too! You did what you liked, and you were responsible to no one but yourself. In the Summer time you could get all the salmon you wanted, and you could salt enough down for the Winter. Flour and tobacco were easy to get, and the forest was full of game. And so the old man ran on.

But “Bart” Kennedy did not stay long with the Indians. He was a rover. So he went to San Francisco and got on the stage.

Chief Billy’s potlatch²¹⁵ (December, 1899)

At Esperanza the big potlatch, of which Chief Billy gave local sealers notification, was in progress. All the members of the neighboring tribe, the Nootkas, were in attendance and, on the next trip of the Queen City, the steamer is to take 150 or more of the Ahousett Indians to the scene of festivities. The celebration will be continued throughout this month, and possibly 90 per cent. of the natives on the coast will ere long be gathered at the place, so that Chief Billy’s timely warning to the sealers, not to look for Indian hunters until the big event is over, may prove more called for than many had thought.

A Yale First Nation potlatch²¹⁶ (1900)

After an absence of many years, I went back among my people for a few months, and I saw again some of their customs which must appear to white people very strange, and sometimes very wrong – but I think it is because they do not understand.

The potlatch is always one of our chief affairs. It is our way of paying for the burial of our dead. The Indians would not think it honoring the dead just to pay in money the people who help to bury their dead, just the same as they pay the people who build their house – that is a common way, but to pay for a funeral they have to save for years, and the workers are willing to wait for a long time, years and years, to be paid in what we think the right way. I think you would call it etiquette, and the Indians are very particular about it.

The potlatch and the Indian dance always go together, and they are always held about the fall of the year. I don’t know exactly the reason why; maybe because it is for the dead, but the Indians would never think of having the Yale Indian dance any other time than near wintertime or at the first snow-fall.

I will try and tell you in a few words about the Indian dance. It is not fun like the white peoples’ dance; it is always mournful, and makes you feel inclined to cry. The dance I went to this Fall was given by Chief Sam. It was a big affair, but he had his son Peter and his daughter Mary to help him. He had a large number of friends from North Bend and Spuzzum, and all the Yale people, and some from the Lower Fraser too.

The guests were all comfortably settled in old Tom’s big house. Poor Tom can no longer see, but it is astonishing how he went about talking to his dear “tillicums,” and knowing almost everyone around him. So Tom entertained them until supper time. Chief Sam would often come in and tell his guests, in a long speech, how glad

²¹⁵ From Arrivals from West Coast. (1899, December 2). *Daily Colonist*, p. 4.

²¹⁶ From Mali. (1900). Among our Indians. *All Hallows in the West*, I(3), 66-67. This journal was published by All Hallows’ School in Yale, B.C.

he was to see them, and thank them for coming, because he knew they had come a long way from their homes to comfort him. You see it was something like a funeral feast, although Chief Sam's wife died nearly nine years ago. The funny part was that Sam could only talk in Yale Indian, and a great many of his friends were Thompson and they could not understand, but they knew he meant something kind.

When supper was over the dance began. First some planks were put 'round the room in front of the people who were sitting on the ground, and then small sticks were given to them. There was no kind of music but everyone just beat time, who knew how, to the dance, and everyone who could sing the dancer's song joined in it, but if anyone made a mistake in beating time, that offended the dancers. The first one who danced at this party was an old woman, and she began moving slowly, waving her arms about to the time of the beating sticks, and the singing and all was so mournful, then it got a little louder and faster still, but altogether in time, singing, beating and dancing. When the old woman got tired, someone else began, and so on till all had their turn. I do not mean everyone danced, only those who knew how, and they were mostly the very old people. Old Tom, blind as he is, danced as good as ever, better even than the others. One man danced too much; he danced until he could not stand. He was like a naughty child wanting sweets and not knowing when he had had enough, but no one else did that, I am glad to say. It was very late when everyone went to sleep. The next day there was nothing done, but dancing and singing and beating time began in the evening.

And it was that second evening, Chief Sam and his sons piled blankets, and Indian-made blankets in a heap in the middle of the room, and the real business of the potlatch began. All those who had helped to bury Sam's wife, and his brother's wife and child, had to receive first. Tom made a speech explaining everything, then one by one each blanket was lifted up and given to the person it was intended for. After Sam's debt was paid, what was left was given away to other people. Sam's potlatch was not a very grand one, because he is an old man and poor, but everyone got something, either in money or strips of Indian-made blanket. No guest went away empty-handed, and he was glad, he said, that nothing went wrong, no gambling, or drinking until they fell ill.

Formerly the Indians used to go and dig up their dead and wrap them round in new blankets to keep them warm, but now the government does not let them do [thing] like that, and being Christians they begin to understand, slowly, that they must leave their dead undisturbed, and in God's care until the Resurrection Day.

Potlatch is an old custom, and I do not think the Indians will ever give it up: but it is changing in some ways, and people are not so extravagant as they used to be in giving them. It is a very solemn kind of meeting of the living, in memory of the dead.

There is someone at home who is thinking of having a small potlatch for his little son, who died a long time ago. I think if some of our friends, I mean our real white friends like the Sisters and Miss Moody would come, they would see for themselves: you cannot understand unless you see, and the Indians would be so glad, and there would be a chance to teach them more to be good Indians and Christians

too, and not what they often feel, that to be Christians they must leave off being Indians and try to be like white people, giving up even what is harmless in their old customs.

“Why the Christian community is against the potlatch”²¹⁷ (1900)

*In connection with the Indians’ defence of the potlatch, I give below a verbatim report made by W— F—, a Christian Indian of the L—-K—. It speaks for itself and shows why the Christian community is against the potlatch. – Ed.*²¹⁸

I come before you to make a complaint, because I am being very much persecuted concerning the death of my uncle, G— of Git—²¹⁹.

I really belong to the Git— tribe of which my uncle was chief, but I have been living for some years at L—-K— mission. My uncle’s house was burned at Git— two years ago, and I then invited him to come and live with me, to which he agreed. He then went up to Git— to bring down his things, but the people there took him against his will and performed Halaid upon him, so that he could not move after that for fear of breaking the Indian law which they put on him, thus my purpose concerning his welfare came to naught, because they tied him up hard and fast to their potlatch law. They then persuaded him to rebuild his house, and helped him by free labor.

Two years after that, his canoe capsized on his way up the river, and both he and his wife were drowned. Immediately on hearing this I left L—-K— and went up to Git—, where I organized a party to go out and search for the body. Chief W— then called me into his house and made a speech to me, urging me to accept my late uncle’s chieftainship and paper of authority – a piece of moose skin with my uncle’s name on it. They then performed Halaid upon me, and acknowledged me as rightful heir to my uncle’s position in their village. The party I had sent out searched the river two days, and on the third day returned without having found anything. I then paid them all for their time, so much a day, spending altogether \$150.00.

After that I remained in my uncle’s house, and in a short time they called upon me to make a potlatch. They threatened to put me out and take the house from me if I refused. I replied that I would not potlatch, because the Agent had already proclaimed the law against it on the river. But I promised to respect my uncle’s dignity, and said I would erect a marble monument to him in the village. But they rejected my proposal, because I would not potlatch. And now they have given me notice to quit. But I do not intend leaving the house, for the potlatch has no longer a right to tyrannize over one’s private family affairs. And now they have agreed to deprive me of my chieftainship by a general vote of the tribe, and offer it to my cousin who, they say, is willing to make potlatch. But I choose to stand upon my rights within

²¹⁷ From W. F. (1900, October 31). How the Potlatch Works. *Caledonia Interchange*, p. 18.

²¹⁸ Anglican missionary James Benjamin McCullagh (1854 – 1921), a determined anti-potlatch lobbyist.

²¹⁹ Possibly Gitlaxt’aamiks or Gitwinksihlkw, Nisga’a communities in the Nass (formerly Naas) River valley.

the law, and I say that as government has seen fit to prohibit potlatch, it should support me now in my position. I make this complaint so that if there be trouble about it on the river, you may know how the case stands.

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT

Made one month after the above (Decr. 1898)

On Tuesday evening last I was in my house at Git— when two men came for me to attend a council meeting of the chiefs. I accompanied them to W—'s house. When I had entered and taken a seat, W— addressed me thus:

“I spoke to you when you first came up in the autumn, saying you are the rightful heir to your uncle's chieftainship. I say the same thing to you again now. But if you wish to take the title and position of your uncle, you must give up Christianity and civilization, and come back to heathenism.”

Chief A— also spoke to me, saying, “I say the same thing to you now, that you must give up religion and civilization and come back to be a heathen and make a potlatch.”

Chief M— also said the same thing, and N— and G—.

A— G— then stood up and opened a paper, from which he began to read or pretend to read, saying:

“Any person coming to this village for the purpose of settling must do so by making a potlatch, and if he deceive the people of this place by not doing so, he shall be cast out forthwith. And any person found causing excitement in this place shall be cast forth. Thus saith the great lawyer's law and the government and the Queen. For we have heard that you, W— F—, are going to place a teacher at this place to teach our children and thus cause trouble and excitement.”

To all this I tried to reply wisely. A— again spoke, saying:

“If you will give up Christianity and return to the potlatch we will fire off our cannon for four days and nights, and you shall be our king in this place. If you promise to do so it will be quite enough; we will do it merely on your promise.”

Then G—g— arose and said, “And after you shall have made your potlatch, we will all arise like one man and become Christians.”

To this I also replied as wisely as I could, declining to have anything at all to do with breaking the law, for I know that although the government takes no notice of these people breaking the law, yet I do not think I should escape.

“A number of potlatches”²²⁰ (December, 1900)

A number of potlatches are going on along the Coast. At Nootka and Kyuquot are the largest. At the latter point the feasting and dancing are of the old and now passing style. Several passengers of the *Queen City* [steamer] who were present in the large hut of Chief Atla during the progress of the potlatch, say it was a most interesting affair. The Siwashes for miles up and down the coast had gone in their canoes to Kyuquot, and a large crowd foregathered in the long hut on the rancherie.

²²⁰ From News of West Coast. (1900, December 4). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

At night big driftwood fires were made in the center of the hut, and all the guests sat around, the men and women being grouped separately. A few in the foreground were beating Siwash drums and chanting, and there was dancing galore. The war dances were danced, although the dancers did not look very war-like, and, after other, tribal dances and specialties had been seen, the wolf dancers came out.

This is the great feature of the potlatch. Selected dancers – the best the tribe affords – are garbed in wolf-like costumes, with headdresses, masks and long tails. These Indians, looking like fiends, run around, jumping and rolling about until they begin to foam at the mouth, and are in a perfect frenzy. They snap and bite at the spectators, and finally several klootchmen are dragged out in the center of the hut, near the fire, and pulled about by their hair by the dancers, without protest from either the women or spectators. After this spectacle has been in progress for some time, the dancers give several unearthly yells, and, lifting the women, dash off to the woods.

The wolves are then supposed to have dashed into the village, secured their prey and fled to their haunts in the woods. For three or four days the klootchmen taken by the wolf dancers are kept hidden in the woods, and at last they come dragging into the hut – timing their coming at night, when the hut is filled with spectators, an act which suggests that they are not hidden far from the rancherie. They come back with faces and shoulders scratched, with clothes torn and hair disheveled, with blood discoloring them in several places – in fact, made up most realistically to represent the fact of having been preyed upon by the wolves the dancers are supposed to represent.

When the women return, the chief calls for cheers to chase the wolves – and it was to this state that the spectacle had advanced when the passengers left. This was the big event, but there were many minor features of Chief Atla's potlatch. Chief, sub-chiefs and tyees of the tribe gave of their goods to those present, the white men being included. They came in for four bits or a dollar in several distributions of wealth, which was made in the new manner of handing equal shares around, and not in the scramble method sometimes adopted by the givers. A number of Indians had given \$300 or \$400 away, and on the day following the departure of the Queen City, a tribesman was to give away to the guests \$400.

The Feast of the Bear (1900)²²¹

Few men have been fortunate enough to “drop in” upon a whole tribe just about to sit down to a sumptuous, if somewhat highly flavored banquet, the first solid food the tribe had enjoyed for months. This was the luck of Mr. Gerald H. Cross, a courier in the service of the Dominion government a few weeks ago. Mr. Cross has just returned to the haunts of civilization, and recounts his strange experience with great

²²¹ From Grahame, T. L. (1900, December 30). THE FEAST OF THE BEAR. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 9. T.L. Grahame died before 1909. “Mrs. Graham, widow of the late T. L. Graham, of the London Daily Mail and formerly in newspaper work in this city, is enroute to Victoria, having left the Old Country on the 3rd.” SOCIAL AND PERSONAL. (1908, April 9). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

gusto. He has seen many potlatches amongst the British Columbia Indians, but this one was the queerest of them all. While away on this trip to the extreme north of Vancouver Island, he made the interesting discovery that the potlatch is not all it has been alleged to be. It is not according to Mr. Cross, the generous, open-handed, reckless redistribution of goods that is popularly believed. The person giving the potlatch has invariably a keen eye to the main chance. If he gives away one blanket he expects two in return at the potlatch which may be given by the recipient at some future time. On the occasion in question the potlatch did not take the usual form of a blanket distribution, but was a free offering of the spoil of the chase by the young chief of the tribe, the Koskimos²²², who dwell north of Seymour Narrows, along the eastern side of Vancouver Island.

The whole tribe has been suffering severely from want of food for some time back, on account of the fishing having turned out badly, and no provision having been made to meet such a contingency. Just before Mr. Cross and his party arrived at the camp of the Koskimos, the young chief (Charlie is his “white” name), had been lucky enough to bring down a huge bear in the woods near camp. To the people who had been living practically on roots and herbs, with an occasional old moccasin in the pot *au feu* to lend it something the consistency of soup, the news of this fortunate bag came as tidings from Heaven itself. The whole tribe went wild with glee – but the bear was Charlie’s to do with as he pleased. Would he “act ugly” and skin the animal and let the carcass rot as some sulky members of those tribes will do when they have a sullen fit; or would he potlatch it?

Charlie was one of the right sort and magnanimously invited everybody in the camp, and the strangers who had just entered the gates, to come and make merry over the monster of the forest. He was a giant indeed. When dressed he tipped the beam at seven hundred pounds, and showed plump and juicy-looking, so that the Koskimos’ mouths watered even before the steam of the flesh pots mounted to their grateful nostrils. Every operation connected with the dressing, cutting up and cooking the carcass was shared by every man, woman and child in the tribe, amid continuous merry laughter and noise. The news of Charlie’s luck had spread like a smallpox scare, and all occupation was dropped to aid in the preparation of the feast. Charlie was, of course, the most popular man in the whole country, and his every appearance was hailed with immense demonstrations of joy. The first thing to do was to dismember the animal; this was done early in the morning, and the various portions were put into big kettles, with the exception of the heart, liver, lights, kidneys, brains and other portions of the interior economy, which were carefully placed in a pot themselves. This pot was put on to simmer gently on a separate fire, while the monster kettles were kept bubbling all day. Toward evening the Indians, who had been driven nearly insane sniffing the odors from the steaming caldrons, began to gather round rubbing their stomachs and chattering with great animation on the prospect of a glorious gorge. In the lodge where the feast was to be held, for even the Indians draw the line at open air banquets when the rain is coming down steadily, fires were kindled, one of them at the farther end in a huge blazing Yuletide affair,

²²² The Gusgimukw tribe of the Quatsino First Nation.

that at the end nearest the door being smaller. The big pots with the plain meat throwing off an appetizing steam were deposited near the large fire, whilst the smaller pot with the tit-bits was placed near the lesser fire.

The white men were accommodated with chairs (where on earth they got them from is a mystery, for those Indians do not use this article of furniture) and they were invited to sit down and enjoy themselves. They were seated at the lower end of the lodge facing the old chief, who squatted in the center of the floor. In a semi-circle near him sat the older chieftains of the tribe, on their haunches; the klotchmen sat outside this half-circle, and behind them the [Indians] and lads. The oldest Indians and their klotches occupied what were the places of honor. Clustering thickly around the door were the small fry, noisy and mischievous as their white prototypes. They were eagerly waiting for the scraps. Behind them, again crowded the dogs of the camp, a motley throng, snapping and fighting and waiting for bones. All the Indian adults were arrayed in their best festival attire. The klotchmen in particular were resplendent in gowns of every imaginable form, size and color, the undoubted belle of the assembly was a lady who was addressed by the others as queen. She was fantastically rigged out in a crimson satin gown, evidently an old ball dress; it was trimmed with what had originally been yellow lace, but now was a deep chocolate shade; she wore on her surprisingly shaped feet – little, narrow high-arched, curving feet, a pair of brand new kid boots, buttoned well up the calf; over her head was thrown a multi-colored shawl, the ends of which were brought bewitchingly under the chin and knotted. To cap the climax she carried a little lap-dog, a black-and-tan with a solid silver collar. The girl had evidently seen something of so-called high-life, for her attempts to assume the languishing airs of the grand dames and at the same time repress her natural desire to join in the boisterous merriment of the other klotches, was so ludicrous, that the visitors had the hardest kind of work to suppress their inclination to go off into roars of mirth. She occasionally favored them with a tired smile and ravishing glance of the eyes, from behind the folds of the shawl, and every time this happened Mr. Cross and his friends had to have a fit of uncontrollable coughing. The lady's fingers were simply crusted with rings, some of them tawdry enough, but others of considerable value. They were chiefly of wrought silver, with here and there a copper one richly engraved. She also wore a silver necklace of massive design and solid gold bracelets. Those bracelets were made out of twenty dollar gold pieces, and showed the workmanship of a famous Haida goldsmith who lives at Fort Rupert, and who does nearly the whole of this sort of work required by the richer Indians up and down the coast. His chasing is exceedingly beautiful, and it is to be doubted if any white gold or silversmith could surpass the craftsmanship so displayed on those bracelets. The pieces of twenty are beaten out flat and engraved with the wonderful Haida filigree work.

The young Indian queen was perfectly conscious of the havoc she was making amongst the [Indians], and took every opportunity to show off her finery. Her adaptations from the latest fashions were faithfully copied by the other women, sometimes with the most comical results.

As each Indian arrived on the scene he was heartily greeted and welcomed by the old chief, and bidden to his place in the circle. This he took generally with a grunt. The extreme, indeed the affectionate care the Indians took of their old chief was noted by the visitors with much pleasure. He was not allowed to walk a step or stand alone, two stalwart [Indians] supported him on either side. When all had arrived he was tenderly seated in his place by the two attendants. The pots were then carried to their places, each caldron requiring four of the strongest men to lift it. The little pots with the intestine and other portions of the inner bear, was set before the old chief, along with one of the big pots; the other big pots were placed amongst the Indians at the lower end of the lodge.

Men provided with immense forks made out of wood, and resembling hay forks, then took their stations beside the pots, waiting while the old chief pronounced some sort of incantation over the meat and, as it seemed, the assemblage in the lodge. The meat was then lifted from the pots amidst very audible drawing in of the breath and licking of lips, and was thrown into long wooden troughs, somewhat like those used in feeding hogs. At a given signal the Indians began their meal, falling to like hungry wolves. A curious thing was here observed by the visitors. Several of the Indians helped themselves to the food with the aid of chopsticks, very similar in appearance to those used by the Chinese. Upon enquiry it was found that this custom had prevailed amongst those Indians from time immemorial. Some of the other practices of the Koskimos reminded the strangers strongly of the Orientals. Such, for example as the salaam when entering a house. This is the same low obeisance as the Japanese and Chinese make on such occasions.

Rows of matting had been laid down in front of the Indians previous to the meat being taken out of the pots. This matting was dirty beyond description. When the Indians encountered a particularly tough piece of the late bruin he would lay the hunk of meat or bone on the mat, put his foot on one end of it and pull with all his might to sever the fibers. The servitors who dispensed the meat to all, carried it round in broad wooden platters, giving to each guest a share so exactly equal as to preclude the possibility of cavil; it was a marvel of measurement. After the pots had been emptied there was absolute silence. The Indians munched and gnawed away as before, but the conversation had completely stopped. One tall Indian had got possession of a section of the contents of the small pot, by special favor of the old chief, and he was busy stowing this way in his capacious mouth. Some four feet of the delicacy hung down from his champing jaws and a smile of utmost content suffused his big, round, red, greasy face. He offered Mr. Cross a couple of feet of the dainty, but Mr. Cross was only too happy to decline. The old chief placidly gnawed a bone and glanced solemnly from time to time over the company. The white guests had noticed the absence of the young chief, to whose sure aim the whole tribe were indebted for the meal. Just as they were about to make enquiry regarding this strange circumstance, two shots, as from a shot gun, were fired close to the entrance of the lodge, an in quick succession. Immediately afterwards the door was thrown violently back on its hinges of raw hide, and in strode the young chief, accompanied by one attendant, and both dressed in bearskins. The majestic bearing of the young fellow,

and his prideful stride forward to the large fire won the admiration of all. In his hand was the smoking gun. This was the nimrod of the tribe, Charlie, and the companion who had been with him at the time the lucky shot sped that fetched down the monster bear. They had smeared their faces thickly with grease, and then scattered the contents of a feather pillow over their heads; the effect being most grotesque.

“Breaking” his gun at the breach, and taking his place inside the fire, with his comrade alongside, Charlie then called out in a loud voice the name of every member of the tribe, who was then present, repeating each name three times, and receiving a response each time. Now and then he would call the name of some dead member of the tribe, at which there would be perfect silence, the Indians reverently bowing their heads. This portion of the ceremony over, Charlie then made a speech, during which he wrought himself up into a tremendous passion, using both arms and his body in his violent gesticulations. He jumped from side to side like a man possessed, fell down on his face, leaped up with extraordinary agility and ran the length of the lodge, and back again, the very eyes of the Indians starting from their heads with excitement as they watched him. He was completely exhausted when he finished his harangue.

His companion then took up the thread of the discourse with a glowing panegyric upon Charlie’s prowess as a hunter, and provider for his people, and predicted that he would be a father unto his own people. This was applauded by the Indians in many grunts. In this speech he referred to the honor of the presence of the white brothers. The young chief then went over to the small pot and with his own hands gave each person present a portion of the choice meat. Knowing that the white visitors did not care for bear meat, the young chief procured three raw carrots and pressed them upon Mr. Cross and his companions in a manner so earnest that refusal was impossible. Soon the white men were munching the carrots with the best grace they could summon.

Mr. Cross asked the fat Indian sitting at his left if he were enjoying the huge portion of meat which he was endeavoring to tear to pieces with his teeth and hands, and was astonished when the Indian paused in his operations on the meat, grinned, and answered: “You bet.”

The great bones of the deceased and succulent plantigrade were broken and every scrap of marrow sucked out. At the close of the feat there was not a fragment of the bear left, the only memento, except the broken bones being the fine skin. Mr. Cross then addressed the Indians through an interpreter, and thanked them for their kind invitation, and told them how much he had enjoyed the very excellent carrots which their generosity, or rather, that of their esteemed chief, had provided for the white men. He hoped Charlie would be as lucky every time he went into the woods, and that the tribe’s shadow would never grow less than it was at that present moment. This did not provoke a smile, but a heavy grunt of satisfaction.

The potlatch of the bear wound up with songs and dances round the fires, those festivities being kept up far into the night.

The Koskimos have one specialty in which they excel, and that is in the beautiful basket work. The specimens displayed by them to the white party were the finest any of them had ever seen. It is made out of the cedar bark, which is operated

upon by a curious looking instrument. This is a piece of whalebone with ridges on it. The bark is rubbed between the ridges till it is as soft as a silk handkerchief, great care being taken to see it does not break or tangle. When finished the product is as strong as rope. Mr. Cross received as a present from the chief a curious stone, which he was assured had been used in the wars of the tribe in the early part of the present century. He was also persuaded to accept as a gift a crown which had belonged to one of the chiefs. It is made of birch bark wound round with string which makes a perfect pattern. At the front and back are bows made of cedar bark, looking just like cloth. It is lined with a piece of ordinary white and red print.

The potlatch at Ahusett²²³ (January, 1901)

The steamer *Queen* brought to this city the news of a big Indian potlatch lately held at Ahusett²²⁴, at which the chiefs gave away a big value in money and goods. The feast was attended by 300 Nootkas, who were brought down on the last trip of the vessel; by Neuchatlessits, Ahatasetts, Mucheleets, Kilsomits and Hesquoits. There was a great throng of the assembled tribes and a monster potlatch was held, accompanied by the usual dances, feasts, etc., so dear to the Siwash heart.

Atleo, the Chief of the Ahousetts, gave away \$1,300 in three days. The first day he gave \$300 to his guests, the next \$800, and the last day \$200. Keetla, a sub-Chief and brother of Atleo, gave away \$1,200 in silver coin, two sewing machines valued at \$60 each, four guns aggregating in value \$180, four clocks worth \$8 each, one silver watch, one large war canoe valued at \$150, and two sealing canoes valued at \$30 each. "Billy," another sub-Chief, gave away three \$60 sewing machines, one gun valued at \$50, two saws valued at \$7 each, one boat worth \$40, and two stoves each worth \$18. With these things the chiefs gave food, blankets and a large amount of heterogeneous old "ictas".

The potlatch ended just prior to the sailing of the *Queen City*, and that vessel will take the Indians home to their several rancheries on her next trip. Another potlatch was held at Uculet, where a large number of Clayoquots had gone, but no news was learned of this affair.

"Passing of Chief Shakes"²²⁵ (1901)

The steamer *Boscowitz*, which arrived yesterday morning, brought news of the death of "Old Shakes," chief of the tribes living on the "illahees" near Kitkatlah on the 15th instant. Shakes, who was a very heavily built man with venerable-looking white hair, was one of the foremost Indian chiefs of the North, and when the steamer passed down the tribes from many rancheries in the vicinity had gone in flotillas of canoes to the villages there and were wailing, chanting death dirges and holding

²²³ From NEWS OF THE PROVINCE. (1901, January 10). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 6.

²²⁴ At Clayoquot Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

²²⁵ From Passing of Chief Shakes. (1901, March 5). *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 7.

sorrow dances because of the death of Shakes. He was buried with great *eclat*, on the 22nd, and Ed. Gamble, a [Métis], elected chief in his stead.

The dead Indian chief is the hero of an anecdote connected with Her late Majesty Queen Victoria. Some eight years ago, after a prosperous fishing season – he maintained the rights of fishing in a river at the reservation which was well-stocked with salmon, and his seines caught many of the fish taken to Lowe Inlet – he held a potlatch, and after the feast concluded and gifts had been given to all the native chiefs and others, he decided to make a “potlatch” to the “big chief,” Queen Victoria.

He took five twenty-dollar gold pieces to one of the missionaries in the North, together with an otter skin, and asked the missionary to send them with Shakes’ best wishes as a “cultus potlatch” to Queen Victoria. The money was brought down to [the city of] Victoria and handed over to the Indian Department, and in due course was forwarded to the Home Society through that department, and presented to Queen Victoria. The Queen sent the five twenties back with a letter telling of her thanks for the potlatch and for the many expressions of loyalty sent with it by Chief Shakes, and she sent out to the chief a photograph of herself and a fine shawl for his klotchman.

When the photograph arrived, there was a big celebration. A potlatch was given, and the picture of the Queen was viewed by hundreds of Indians, who bowed to it and treated it with the most ceremonious reverence. The picture and shawl are still in the house of Shakes, and money can not buy them.

The funeral of the dead Indian chief will be observed with all the rites and customs of his tribe, and bids fair to be attended by many hundreds.

“A British Columbia wolf dance”²²⁶ (1901)

Among the Euclataw Indians of Vancouver Island a yearly festival known as the dance or feast of the wolf is held, the occasion being observed with many extraordinary ceremonies. In the heraldry of the coast Indians of British Columbia, the wolf has held, from time immemorial, a singular and honored place, next, in fact, to that of the bear and eagle. In the badges of many clans the wolf is prominent, and the wedge-shaped head of *Lupus* is to be found on every totem pole along the coast.

The tribe of the Euclataws occupy that portion of Vancouver Island along the western shore of Seymour Narrows, a region of giant forests [and] fierce, swirling tides, as the currents of the ocean force the sea into the narrow channel bearing the name of one of the old admirals who commanded on this station many years ago. And it is a region overlooked by lofty mountains, grand in their wild chaos of cliff piled on cliff, and crag on crag; with forests of pines crowding the gulches, glaciers and snow wreaths feeding a thousand tumbling streams, and the rain never far off at any tiem of year.

It is there the “grey beast of the would” stalks through the underbrush, or awakens the lazy echoes of this afternoon land with dismal ululations to the moon on winter nights, when the Indian camps are slumbering.

²²⁶ From Grahame, T. L. (1901, April 15). A BRITISH COLUMBIA WOLF DANCE. *The Province*, p. 9. Written by Thomas L. Grahame (c. 1864 – 1908).

This Vancouver Island wolf is somewhat different from his neighbor of the plains and mainland. His coat is dark grey, almost black; he stands high on his strong, sinewy legs, and he has a formidable head, with powerful jaws well armed with fangs, under which anything in the shape of flesh and bone would stand but a poor chance of resistance. The eyes, disproportionately small, have, in life, a gleam that invariably reminds one of the sinister glitter of dim light on an old dagger blade. He is an athlete, and it is lucky that he has not the habit of his kind on the mainland, of hunting his prey in bands, but that he pursues his own way, wages his own battles, and seldom attacks humankind, unless at the winter end, when game is scarce and all kinds of food are scanty.

The Indians have a sort of veneration for the wolf, and their legends are rich in wolf lore; in the superstitions of the tribes he is an emblem of war, and no theme is dearer to the heart of the unperfected human than that of war.

When the time for observing the wolf dance comes round, the tribesmen gather at the headquarters of the clan – generally a village by the shores of the Gulf of Georgia, at the edge of the woods. As in all other functions observed by the fat and easy-going red man in the favored western land, eating forms a most important portion of the ceremonies. Therefore, great store of food is laid in: salmon, fresh, salted, smoked; bear and deer meat; duck and other waterfowl; and these with the leathery Bannock baked on the moment of the function, and washed down with copious draughts of home-made brew, and, too often, home-made “poteen” of more than ordinary potency, constitute the fleshly side of the rites.

Unfortunately, the Indians have learned the pernicious art of making whiskey out of potatoes and several other strange materials; and in spite of the efforts of the authorities to put a stop to it, they succeed too often in providing themselves with a sufficient quantity of the tipples to make all sorts of mischief when there is a “potlatch” forward.

When all is ready for the wolf dance, the tribe seat themselves in a big circle round a huge fire of pine logs, and wait. First there is heard a series of the most lugubrious howlings and cries from the adjacent underwoods, varied with screams of blood-curdling intensity, solo and in chorus. Then there is a fearful outburst of the howlings, and amidst this hideous din twenty or thirty young men, clad from head to foot in wolf skins, with bunches of wolf tails streaming down from the back of their heads, their faces streaked with varicolored paints, leap madly into the glow of the firelight and immediately proceed to go through the queerest antics, shrieking and caterwauling in the most awful manner.

Round and round they go, almost into the fire, then almost bursting out of the circle of silent spectators.

Madder and madder rises the orgy, faster and faster the leaping wolf-dancers go, louder and louder become their screams, till, at a given signal, they stop, and the silence that follows is almost painful by contrast with the uproar of the preceding moment.

Then one of the dancers goes up to the chief, taking from under his cloak of skins a wolf cub, which he offers to the chief, who accepts the gift in dead silence. A

knife is then brought, the struggling cub is placed upon a block of wood and at one sweep its head is several from its body. All the Indians crowd forward and dip their fingers in the blood, touching their foreheads with the wetted fingers. This is supposed to impart extraordinary courage and endurance.

The remains of the cub are then placed in the fire, the dance is resumed, this time to the music of a strange, crooning chant which sounds weirdly among the forest gloom, with the reddening reflection of the fire upon the giant cedars and pines and the wild group careering round the funeral pyre of the wolf cub.

When the mournful wail of the chant ceases to echo through the forest, the feast begins; sometimes there is a free distribution of blankets or other useful articles by a member of the clan – a “potlatch” or gift – in which the donor often gives away his last dollar.

Profound and, it is to be hoped, dreamless, is the slumber that overtakes the celebrants of the wolf feast when the ultimate bone is gnawed and the final scrap devoured.

Conflict at Kingcome Inlet²²⁷ (November, 1901)

The conquering legions have returned from Kingcombe Inlet, and with the victors arrived the prisoners this morning on the steamer Amur.

There is plenty weeping, plenty wailing and much gnashing of Siwash molars up on the bleak and lonely beaches at the head of Kingcombe Inlet, and there is a deficit in the bank account of Kaote, hereditary chief of the Nimkish tribe, for the old man had to cough up not less than \$100 to preserve his liberty at the hands of the stern King George men represented by Supt. of Provincial Police Hussey and four of his constables.

The rout of the enemy was complete, and was accomplished without bloodshed of any kind, and the peaceful soul of Capt. Walbran, of the roop-ship Quadra, erstwhile in the Dominion government survey service, is joyful thereat.

To go back to ancient history becomes necessary, that the reason of the expedition may be intelligible. Back in September, a Port Simpson Indian was relieved of a check for \$262, in this city [Vancouver], and two Kingcombe Inlet Indians were the beneficiaries. They skipped, and toward the latter part of the same month Constables Wolcott and Hudson, of Alert Bay, went up to Kingcombe Inlet to arrest the thieves. The Indians were in the midst of a potlatch, and under the influence of whisky they threw the constables out. It was then determined that a lesson must be taught the rebellious natives, and accordingly Supt. Hussey headed the expedition which has proved so successful.

One week ago this morning the Quadra sailed from English Bay with the members of the expedition aboard. On Saturday afternoon the Quadra arrived near the head of Kingcombe Inlet and dropped her anchor. The approach of the Quadra had been noted by the Indians several hours before she finally cast anchor, and not

²²⁷ From INDIANS IN THE SKOOKUM HOUSE. (1901, November 21). *The Province*, p. 1.

an Indian was to be seen from the deck of the troop-ship as she lay in the placid waters of the inlet. Superintendent Hussey avers that the Indians have perfected a system of wireless telegraphy unknown to the whites, and in his judgment their method is certainly a success.

The prospects of having to go ashore and beat the underbrush for the thieves and those who aided and abetted them in evading the law, was not an inviting one to Superintendent Hussey, who knew how futile such a proceeding would be, and decided to try diplomacy should an unlucky Indian fall into his hands. A scouting party was landed, and from the interior of a dirty shack the searchers returned triumphantly to the Quadra with no less a personage than Chief Kaote, who apparently had not thought it worthwhile to sneak away through the brush with his [Indians]. Shortly after Kaote was landed in the toils, two others of the tribe were secured.

Superintendent Hussey, while not strictly a believer in Theosophy, avers that Chief Kaote must have lived in days gone by, and he was probably a member of Croker's Tammany gang in that life that went before. To lend color to Superintendent Hussey's theory that old Kaote had learned well the power of money when a man is in a scrape; it is only necessary to state that for the first time in his life the superintendent was approached with a bribe. Before he was taken aboard the Quadra, Kaote called the superintendent aside and offered him two hundred round iron dollars to take his avenging angels whence they came. The old man's earnestness must have been quite amusing to observe, but his wealth availed him nothing, and he was carried away a hostage till the other offenders were produced by the tribe. Before he was arrested, Kaote was asked to aid in securing the two men who had stolen the check, but he refused.

The arrest of Kaote bore fruit among the members of the tribe, in that it impressed them with the power of the police, and although no offenders were produced on Saturday night, one was ready first thing on Monday morning. This man was Frank, one of the men who stole the check. The tribesmen then made advances for the release of the chief, but were told that he could not be given up till all the men were produced. Afraid that the Quadra would sail away, the Indians did some tall rustling, and by nightfall had Leslie, the other thief, in the toils, and he as well as two others, was handed over to Superintendent Hussey.

A trial then took place aboard the Quadra and the chief and his six subjects were arraigned before Captain and Stipendiary Magistrate Walbran, the chief, his son, Klakoclilas, Jack, Dick and Billy, on charges of obstructing the police in the discharge of their duty, and Frank and Leslie for breaking custody. All pleaded guilty. Chief Kaote was let off with a fine of \$100 in compensation for the aid he had reluctantly lent the police, but all the others received six months' sentences. Frank and Leslie were not tried on the charge of stealing the check, but will receive a hearing later on. In the meanwhile six aborigines are comfortably housed for the winter in the New Westminster jail.

After the apprehension of the prisoners the Quadra sailed south to Alert Bay, and the punitive party disembarked there to await the Amur. Superintendent Hussey

remarked this morning that the settlers in the vicinity of Kingcombe Inlet felt much relieved that the Indians had received a lesson as regards their deportment in the future.

“Protest against the wire”²²⁸ (November, 1901)

“The medicine wire” is what the Indians call the Dawson telegraph line. [...]

At Kitgegalum, on the Skeena, a potlatch was in progress when the linemen reached the village with the wire, the occasion of jollity being the raising of a new totem. The Indians were dancing when the men arrived with the wire, and the Indian curiosity overcame the love of ceremony. The potlatch was abandoned to protest against the wire being stretched from post to post. The missionary resident there satisfactorily explained the workings of the wire to the Indians, and the trouble was averted.

“All have a respect for the law”²²⁹ (April, 1902)

The waterfront was not as busy as ordinarily yesterday. The only arrivals other than the regular steamers, was the steam schooner delta, Capt. Quadros, a trading vessel, which runs to the Indian villages between Victoria and Knight’s Inlet, selling everything from potatoes to oolichan oil. [...] The Indians are engaged in potlatching at many of the villages, but there are no large feast gatherings as in past seasons when the village tribes go in flotillas of canoes and remain at the neighboring village for weeks. This year the tribes spend but a day at the neighboring tribe’s village, scrambling for blankets, masks, money, and other property, according to the manner of the potlatch. The Rivers Inlet tribes are at Gilford Island, where one of the larger feasts [is] in progress, and the tribes were making merry feasting and dancing after their manner. These potlatches, given by one tribe to another, are given on the understanding that the tribe receiving the entertainment is to return the potlatch in due course, and return double the goods potlatched at the previous feast. The Indians are all quiet, the experience of the Kingcombe Inlet tribe²³⁰ having had a salutary effect on the majority of the villages, and all have a respect for the law.

Old Joe’s potlatch²³¹ (December, 1902)

[Chilliwack:] Old Joe, the Indian near Mr. Crankshaw’s, gave a potlatch one night last week, or rather one morning, as the affair was postponed, and dancing and feasting engaged in all night till the constable left. As soon as the officer of the law was out of the way, old Joe “potlatched” ten blankets and a number of Indian manufactures to his friends. These fellows are growing bold and should be dealt with

²²⁸ From Call It the Medicine Wire. (1901, November 29). *Semi-Weekly World* (Vancouver), p. 4.

²²⁹ From Along the Waterfront. (1902, April 1). *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 7.

²³⁰ A number of tribe members were arrested in late 1901, as reported elsewhere in this collection.

²³¹ From PROVINCIAL. (1902, December 16). *Semi-Weekly World* (Vancouver), p. 8.

summarily by the law. Another great “feast” is to be given by Uslik, about Christmas time. They announce these affairs as feasts, but they potlatch on the sly. It is reported by one who knows that they have strong drink also.

A potlatch at Ucluelet²³² (December, 1902)

[The] steamer Queen City [...] carried 172 Indians from Clayoquot to Ucluelet, where the biggest potlatch held on the West Coast for some time will be commenced today and will probably be celebrated for about three weeks. The Ucluelet Indians have been laying in a store of blankets, pilot bread, oragnes, etc., for some time past, and to show that they have a “klosh tum-tum” towards their “tilikums,” there will be a great distribution of property before the potlatch ends. Several noted dancers from the Clayoquot rancherie and two well-known Coast “hamatsu,” or medicine men, accompanied those who went from Clayoquot. On the next trip of the steamer she will take up a large number of the Nitinats, and Indians of other rancheries to join the celebrants in the illahees on Ucluelet Arm, where the driftwood fire will burn on the beaches and the skin drums will clatter in the illahees for many days to come until, after the dances are over, and the feast-givers no longer affluent – their goods being distributed to their friends – the Indians will return to their villages.

A rumored potlatch²³³ (January, 1903)

A big gathering of coast Indians – a potlatch with a civilized veneer – is to be held next week on the reservation at the North Arm of the Fraser River. This afternoon, large shipments of bread and other provisions were being made from Vancouver, and the “hi-yu” time will be brought off early in the coming week.

It is expected that 300 Indians will be present from different places on the coast. This gathering is a quadrennial affair, and the like will not be seen again for several seasons. There will be the usual New Year’s distribution of blankets and furs. Not a drop of any kind of liquor will be allowed on the reservation, according to the statement of the Indians.

“Knows nothing of the proposed potlatch”²³⁴ (January, 1903)

There was a rumor several days ago that the old-time potlatch would be resurrected by the Indians on the Fraser. On enquiring at the Indian agent’s office, Mr. Devlin stated that he knows nothing about any such celebration going to take place. “Furthermore,” said Mr. Devlin, “three-quarters of the Indians have denounced the old system of celebrating, and would not attend or assist at a potlatch.”

²³² From QUEEN CITY RETURNS. (1902, December 22). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

²³³ From “HI-YU” TIME AMONG INDIANS. (1903, January 2). *The Province*, p. 1.

²³⁴ From SKOOKUM. (1903, January 8). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 5.

An Indian chief who was in the city a few days ago knows nothing of the proposed potlatch. He said maybe a few of the Indians would gather together in one house “and have skookum dinner, but not potlatch.”

“A genuine copper”²³⁵ (1903)

I was lucky enough to have a friend whose house occupied one of the highest points in Victoria. [...] Inside the house is [...] a genuine “copper,” the most valued treasure of the chief of the [unspecified] tribe. This is a sheet of native copper, cut in the conventional design of the head of a halibut – actually resembling a flat, wide violin, with a T-shaped ribbing down the middle of the handle and across the lower half of the face. The value of this T, for some mythical reason, is about three-fifths of that of the entire instrument, though the area it covers is comparatively small.

When the chief has given away, or destroyed, all his possessions at a “potlatch,” just to show what an important personage he is, he falls back on his “copper,” and breaks off a small piece and casts it into the sea. If his rival’s heart fails him, then the victor’s copper “scores” that of his opponent, in exactly the same way as small boys at school “fight” with horse-chestnuts hung on bits of string. This particular copper had lost about one-fifth of its surface, broken away in similar contests.

“Obstructing the course of justice”²³⁶ (1904)

The [Vancouver] criminal assize concluded its labors Friday. [...] Sentence was given in the case of the chief of the Nawhitti Indians, charged with obstructing the course of justice, the sentence being nine months in jail. The chief advised his tribe not to tell the authorities about the mysterious murder²³⁷ of an Indian girl of the Nawhitti tribe. On being asked if he had anything to say why sentence should not be passed on him, Chief Sehweid created a sensation in court by telling what he knew of the murder. Thus the ulterior object of the provincial police in arresting Chief Sehweid, which was to induce him to confess, has been successful.

The chief’s statement was a long rambling one in which an Indian whose name is Tom figured. [...] The old chief’s story was to the effect that an Indian woman living with Tom told him, the chief, that Tom and another Indian had killed the Indian girl at their shack to get her money to put into the potlatch, as she was known to have a roll of bills given her by a young Indian who was to become her husband.

²³⁵ From Hanbury-Williams, J. (1903, April 4). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 11. Written by Sir John Hanbury-Williams (1859 – 1946). The original article, in an evident typo, credits Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams, an 18th-century Welsh satirist.

²³⁶ From PROVINCIAL NEWS. (1904, November 5). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 7.

²³⁷ “Kivesitt, an Indian woman from a tribe whose ‘illahie,’ or country, is on the west coast of Vancouver Island, was murdered on Sept. 10 at a potlatch given by Chief Sehwid at his rancherie, on Hope Island, in the northern waters of the gulf.” CHIEF SEHWID CONFESSES. (1904, November 8). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 2.

Sehweid says he knows Tom²³⁸ killed the girl, because when he, the chief, had summoned the tribe to consider the murder, Tom and his woman were the only ones who stayed away. The chief further explained that Tom was a particularly bad Indian, being credited with the murder of a white trader some years ago and being charged by another Indian with the killing of a Waatsha Indian.

Winter festivals at Gwayasdums, Gilford Island²³⁹ (1904)

It has been the custom of modern writers to depict the Indian as a cruel and relentless foe of the White man, thereby retarding immigration, and assaulting a race that is fast disappearing before the onward march of the civilizer.

Less than a century ago Christian teachers took hold of the aborigines, and, today, fewer crimes can be laid at the door of the Indian than are attributable to the White men and Chinese. The Indian has his vices and abominations. He is wedded to custom; superstition is ingrained in his nature. The environment of the White man does not conduce to his welfare, as is seen in all settlements where the Indian is permitted to mingle with our race. Intoxicating liquor is the bane of the native. Where the few are attempting to build up, for the love of God, preaching and teaching in the lonely settlement and leading the Indian from idolatry to the way of the Cross, the worthless Whites and Chinese are attempting to make these poor creatures worse by supplying them with intoxicants. As wards of the White men, and the original owners of the country, we should aid them in every way to better their condition. We owe them a great deal, and if their decimation is accelerated in this way the modern civilization of which we boast will be a blemish on the pathway of a race which glories in according justice to all.

The Coast Indians are under the common stature, their face round, with high prominent cheeks, noses flattened at the base, with wide nostrils, low foreheads, thick lips, well set teeth and small black eyes. The color of their skin is of that cast noticeable in the natives of Japan, the expression of all being dull and phlegmatic. They are nomadic, traveling from place to place in their large cedar canoes, hollowed out from the trees growing along the Coast. During the summer months they hunt and fish, and, when winter approaches, they return to their Reserves, traveling hundreds of miles in a few days.

It was my privilege, a short time ago, to be sent by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs to a Winter Reserve of the Kwawkewlth Tribe, located at Gilford

²³⁸ "Chief Sehwid says Tom Noot and Thonookwa, two bad Indians, killed Kivesitt for her money". *Ibid.*

²³⁹ From Deasy, T. (1904). *Winter Festivalss of the Indians of British Columbia*. In KWAWKEWLTH AGENCY - GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING STEPS TO CURTAIL POTLATCH AMONG THE INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS). RG10, Volume number: 3629, Microfilm reel number: C-10110, File number: 6244-2. Item ID number 206083. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada. Written by Thomas Deasy (1857 – 1936). The original is a damaged typescript, so I have cross-referenced it with the version published on p. 9 of the *Victoria Daily Times* of April 23, 1904 to fill in the gaps.

Island. The Reserve is called Gwayasdums, and it was my duty²⁴⁰ to keep a strict watch over the ceremonies practiced by the Indians assembled there.

Before proceeding further, I might state that writers of fiction, and men who should know better, have been giving out to the world that the Indians practice cannibalism, and other outrageous vices, at their winter gatherings. Few, if any, of the writers ever attended the ceremonies, and the reports, gathered from [Métis] and Indians, were colored to suit the imagination of those relating the weird stories. Many years ago, the Indians were at war and captured slaves. They tortured their enemies and were known to have slaughtered them at their winter meetings; but the advent of the White men stopped all this, and the Hamatsa is becoming a thing of the past.

[A VISIT TO GWAYASDUMS]

Gwayasdums is not on the route of any regular steamer and is deserted during the summer months. It is an ideal camping place, on a plateau, sheltered from the North wind by a wood-covered mountain. Streams of fresh water run down ravines at each end of the village. Along the sandy shore numerous canoes were drawn up, and on top of the sloping banks, large houses built of cedar shakes were occupied by the Indians. The buildings were adorned with Totems, including the mythical Thunderbird, Sea Serpent and other beasts and birds. The wooden Sea Serpent is fifteen feet long, and is endowed with two heads and eight feet – one head on each end – shaped like the head of a crocodile, and four of the feet turned towards each head. The Indians claim that such a monster existed in prehistoric times. The wooden Thunderbird kept guard over the residence of the principal chief and was minus head and wings. The Indians informed me that the appendages were stored in the building. Along the banks were numerous Totem Poles, covered with devices. On one of the buildings was a painting of a Raven (according to the native style); it was all wings, without body or head. The beauty of everything seen was in the crudeness of the works.

A visit to the Head Chief was simply repaid by a shake of the hand and head – he understood neither English nor Chinook. His wife produced a baton presented to the Chief by the Superintendent, some years ago, and an interpreter desired to know what was the best use for the Chief to make of it. I informed him that it was a souvenir, showing that the Chief had authority so long as the baton remained in his possession. When this was interpreted, the old fellow nodded his bewhiskered head, closed his eyes, and settled back on his haunches.

Should any person desire to see the Indians in their native glory, a winter trip to Gwayasdums would be of interest. The men are splendid specimens, without doubt the best-looking congregation in this Province. The women are not above the average; but the whole of them showed that the ravages of disease and drink had not attacked them. Few spoke any other language than Kwawkewlth; they do not associate with the Whites and allow no person from the outside world to attend their ceremonies. They wore blue and red blankets, with a strip of cedar bark round their heads. Some

²⁴⁰ The author worked as a constable for the Indian Department, and was specially tasked with preventing the sale of alcohol to Indians.

wore hats or shoes. They were holding the winter festival and the custom was to appear as Indians.

POTLATCH

While proceeding through the village I noticed a number of men and women squatted on the ground, in the center of the encampment. Before each Indian was a pile of old blankets. When I arrived there the natives looked askance and remained silent. Presently an old [Indian] arose, before his pile of blankets, and commenced an oration. Then a woman arose, walked over to the pile of blankets, and selected one, returning to her seat, placing the blanket on her pile, and again squatted down. The man continued to talk and, eventually, made way for another orator. Several natives added to the pile of the man who was speaking. Then a man arose, walked over to me and inquired, in Chinook, what I desired in the village. I replied that I hardly knew, myself! That I was there, a lonely White man, amongst hundreds of Siwashes, and that something might turn up before I left. He asked when my visit would end, and I replied that it depended on the return of the Indian Agent, so far as I was concerned; but that “man proposes, [God disposes]”.²⁴¹ We talked on various matters, and he informed me that the ceremony in progress was the famous potlatch.

“Did you notice the woman extracting the blanket from the pile of the first speaker?” he asked. “She will keep it until the next meeting and will then return two blankets. Whatever is taken is returned two-fold. A single blanket is worth 25 cents, and a double blanket is worth \$1.00. The man who spoke last asked for the return of the blankets owing him. The men who added blankets to his pile were called on by him to return them. Every Indian tries to become the owner of a number of blankets. The more an Indian owns, the greater man he is. Some give away five thousand blankets – they will bring back ten thousand in time. Our big men are trying to excel one another in this way.

“We have what is called the Copper. It is valued according to the number of blankets given for it. One of our coppers is worth 5,000 blankets; others are of less value. They are pieces of metal about three feet long, and two feet wide. We know them all by their marks, and they are always held by the man giving the largest number of blankets for them to the man who desires to dispose of them. Sometimes trouble is caused by the holder of the Copper. When he has a mortal enemy he steps out, in front of the tribe, and tears off a piece of the Copper.

“We do no harm in holding our winter meeting. In the summer we fish and hunt, and in the winter we meet to have a good time. Some men make money out of the meeting; but we do not destroy anything. The old Indians delight in this, and it is all we have left of our tribal customs; but it will die as it has done in other places where the Indians adopt the ways of civilization. We allow no White men to bring liquor here, and we are peaceable. We are not like the Indians on the prairies. They have their farms and are settled. We fish and hunt along the Coast and separate during the summer..

²⁴¹ A common saying at the time. It dates back to a 15th century European text – *De Imitatione Christi*, by Thomas à Kempis.

“We listen to the Missionaries and do our best; but the whiskey traffic is killing off the Indians. Some years ago the Bella Bella Indians killed a number of our tribe right here. We do not like them; but the law of the country says, ‘No revenge,’ and we obey the law. The lonely white settler does not fear us; loggers and farmers live along the Coast, and they are not troubled by us. The vagrants round the hotels tempt us to buy liquor when we are traveling, and that is the reason why we are poor. It is better to buy blankets than the whiskey, and it is better to barter them than to be drunk as a great many of the Indians are near the cities.”

The Indian walked away and I looked back, in fancy, to my boyhood days, on the banks of the Fraser River. The birthday of the late Queen was being celebrated, over thirty years ago.²⁴² Thousands of Indians lined the banks of the River, in their canoes. At mid-day the war ships fired a salute, which was a signal for the commencement of a potlatch. On the Cricket Ground, where the Insane Asylum now stands, heaps of edibles had been placed on the grass. Sugar was piled up in mounds; barrels, filled with molasses, stood with their heads taken off; flour had been piled up, and, at a given signal, the Indians rushed from their canoes, attacked the good things, and carried off everything in sight. Each Chief then received a British flag and the thousands of Indians paddled away to their homes. Then I recalled the time when the Songhees gave their potlatch in the center of the city of Victoria, when the blankets were thrown from a high platform, and struggled for by the large assemblage. The Stock Exchange then broke in on my cognition and I wondered whether there was any more harm in the Indian potlatch, with its visible supply of blankets, [than in] the Wheat Pit, where men struggle to wrest gold from imaginary fields of cereals.²⁴³ When I awakened, the Indians had retired to their houses to prepare for the Cedar Bark Dance.

CEDAR BARK DANCE

Night was approaching, and a number of Indians were engaged in carrying sticks of wood into the largest building. They built a four-cornered pile in the center of the place, on the earth floor. Soon every man, woman and child in the Village wended their way to the structure, and I entered with the motley crowd.

The bonfire was started. In tiers the Indians ranged themselves round the hall. Near the doorway sat the old, head Chief. The fire threw out both light and heat, which was given an additional impetus by a copious supply of pitch. At the Eastern end of the hall an upturned canoe and a large dry-goods box stood, in front of a white screen on which was painted a mythical Raven. Four lusty [Indians] constituted an orchestra. They squatted on the ground, beside the canoe, produced sticks, and commenced a song, beating time on the canoe with the sticks. The gist of their song was “Ugh – Ugh – Ugh,” and the sticks kept time to the one-two-three.

Six sedate Indians marched to the front of the orchestra and stood there. Then six more blanketed heroes appeared and faced the first contingent. In a few minutes an Indian woman appeared from behind the screen and commenced pirouetting round the hall, keeping time, with hands and feet, with the music of the orchestra. She was

²⁴² This is a description of the government “potlatch” on May 24, 1864.

²⁴³ Using the market for wheat futures to speculate in “paper bushels”.

dressed in a red blanket which was covered with mother-of-pearl buttons. On her head was a crown of cedar bark. Around her neck was a wreath of bark, and sprinkled on her hair was a quantity of the down of the Eagle. Three blanketed young men then appeared and danced backwards, in front of the maiden. They encircled the hall four times when two almost nude figures entered the building, seized the woman, and carried her off through the main door.

As they cleared the doorway the congregation arose and commenced an uproar that drowned the music. The word "Hamatsa" was on every lip. I asked a native what it all meant, and he replied that the dreaded "Hamatsa" had abducted the daughter of the Chief. Soon a number of men came running in; they were unwashed and unkempt. They rushed round the building and disappeared in the outer darkness. Indians, dressed in bear skins, with large ugly masks on their heads, ran in and out.

The noise continued for about five minutes and ceased when the Chief started to sing a death song. When the Chief finished, the orchestra commenced the "Ugh – Ugh – Ugh" again and the audience settled on their haunches.

Another application of wood and pitch was made to the bonfire; the white screen dropped, and a little girl, dressed in tights, was seen on a pedestal. She kept time, with hands and feet, to the music, swaying her body meanwhile. The screen was then raised and a woman appeared who went round the hall to the music of the tree-step. Four young girls, dressed in red blankets, with Eagles' feathers in their crowns of cedar, and four more feathers in their hands, approached the bonfire, and commenced swaying, at the same time putting the feathers in their hands at the fire, and withdrawing them. This portion of the ceremony relates to the salmon fishing, and is a precursor of a good season's fishing.

When the girls retired, a woman took up the dancing. She went round the bonfire until the down was scattered from her head. When the main performers tired, one of the Chiefs called out a name and two men carried the blanket, wreath, crown and a bag of down to the person named. The woman arose, was dressed in the attire, and she took the floor.

At intervals the Indians dressed as bears appeared and ran off with several of the children, causing quite a commotion amongst the little ones. When midnight approached a large number left the hall and I retired.

[THE HAMATSA OF YORE]

Within the lifetime of men in this community the Hamatsa was performed in a manner that deserved condemnation. When the numerous tribes went to war they returned with scalps and slaves. The young warriors were compelled to prove their fitness as [Indians], and the children grew up in the belief that death itself had no terrors. As the young ones attained a certain age their sole ambition was to become "Hamatsas" and take their places in the war canoes of their people. In order to attain this end they were subjected to a test which would cover them with glory or place them among the [women]. The Indians relate that the Hamatsa was turned out in the woods, naked. Day and night he would roam and would not appear until called by a signal flag erected over the meeting house. Should any wayfarer cross his path,

the "Hamatsa" would bite a piece of flesh from his arm. On his return slaves would be killed and the flesh eaten before the assembled tribe.

To impress the younger boys it would be given out that the "Hamatsa" died from exposure and would come to life at the meeting. A body would then be secured and placed in a wooden box. The head would be prepared to resemble the "Hamatsa". In the box a number of colored powders would be placed with the body. Near the large bonfire a number of small sticks of wood were placed, and on the night of the exhibition the supposed "Hamatsa's" body was placed on the wood. In the meantime, a drain had been dug from the outside of the building to the place where the wood lay. In the drain long, hollow seaweeds were placed, with one end outside the building and the other end under the pile of wood. A quantity of pitch was then thrown on the sticks, and the fire started. Through the tube made of seaweed groans were heard. The colored powders gave our red, blue and green light as the fire reached the interior of the box.

The supposed "Hamatsa" burned and the real tableau commenced; with thongs around his arms and legs the "Hamatsa" was led into the building. He jumped and tore around like a madman. Through the skin on his shoulders skewers of wood were inserted; to these skewers the thongs were tied, and he was raised from the ground and left hanging to the rafters of the building. Without emitting a sound, the "Hamatsa" tore and struggled until he broke the flesh and dropped to the ground. If this was accomplished without whimpering, the young man was taken in charge by the principal men and considered one of them. Should he show one sign of cowardice he was lowered and given a place with the [women]. This was the ancient manner of initiating the "Hamatsa".

[THE HAMATSA OF THE PRESENT TIME]

I will now relate how it is performed at the present time, as seen during my visit. After leaving the Cedar Bark Dance I heard a noise away up on the mountain-side, resembling the bark of the wolf. This was followed by numerous bird and animal calls. The "Hamatsa" was up there, and the bark of the wolf was made by him. A number of young braves were hunting him and they carried wooden implements, which, when blown into, made the noises resembling the calls of animals and birds. They kept this racket going all night, and at daylight the noises ceased. When I looked out all that was apparent of the ceremony was a blanketed Indian sitting on a knoll, gazing towards the mountain. After a few minutes I went round the camp and found Indians seated on every eminence, all gazing towards the mountain. Through the roof of the meeting room, and rising up about forty feet, was a new totem pole, and on the top of the pole was a blanket. Inquiry elicited the information that the blanket-flag meant the recall of the "Hamatsa".

Later in the day the men, women and children showed considerable excitement. They kept running from house to house, peering round the corners of the dwellings, looking up towards the mountains and making preparations for some unusual event. The day passed in this way and night approached. The Indians assembled again in the meeting house. The bonfire burned once more. The canoe

orchestra took their places, and were augmented by a performer on a packing box. The head chief took his seat and the other head men walked sedately in.

Everything was quiet for a few minutes. Then the orchestra started the “Ugh – Ugh – Ugh”. Through a hole in the roof a man was seen. He took hold of the Totem Pole and encircled it four times, then dropped to the ground inside the building. It was the “Hamatsa”. With the exception of a pair of trunks his body was bare. His face was streaked with red and black paint. His hair hung over his face and he looked the picture of despair. Before he made a step twelve blanketed young men encircled him. In their hands they carried rattles, which they shook. The “Hamatsa” tried to break away from them; but the twelve Indians kept him in the corral. He pranced round the bonfire; they followed without touching him. Now and then the “Hamatsa” would crouch down on the ground. The attendants would yell at him and he would stand up and make attempts to break away. After a time the twelve men walked around outside of the “Hamatsa” [sic.] while one lusty [Indian] encircled the fire, apparently to keep the seemingly demented man from jumping on the blaze. Then the “Hamatsa” fell on the ground and was covered with a blanket held around the sides and ends by the twelve Indians. Apparently the “Hamatsa” was exhausted.

The noises ceased, and everything remained quiet until a masked man entered the building carrying a long pole, to which was attached an old blanket. The masked man walked to the bonfire, after making four turns round the hall. He placed the blanket on the fire and left it there until it started to burn and emit a dense smoke. He then withdrew it and waved it over his head four times, uttering guttural sounds as he did so. He then walked round the fire four times, still waving the blanket. Then he stooped near the fallen “Hamatsa” and waved the blanket over the latter. The “Hamatsa” gave an unearthly yell, crawled from under the blanket, broke away from his captors, and ran to the head chief. The chief stood up and the “Hamatsa” fell weeping on his shoulder. The head chief consoled him, patting his head. The twelve [Indians] then marched over to the “Hamatsa,” placed the crown of cedar on his head, sprinkled him with down, encircled his neck with the cedar bark wreath, and covered his body with the button-covered red blanket. The orchestra started up the “Ugh – Ugh – Ugh,” and the “Hamatsa” commenced dancing.

After a time the wife of the “Hamatsa” joined him in the dance, then the women and children commenced swaying and dancing. The men took up the dance and the whole congregation commenced singing and dancing. Midnight passed before the dancing ceased. The orchestra then stopped, everyone settled down, and the father of the “Hamatsa” arose. He delivered an oration, which was followed by two women walking around and presenting the females with strings of beads. When the oration was over two men commenced distributing blankets to the persons whose names were called out by the father of the “Hamatsa”. The name Laksiqua was called out, and the two Indians walked over where I was seated and placed a blanket at my feet. In a few minutes they returned, placed a piece of money in my hand and took the blanket away. I returned the 25 cent piece. As each party received a donation he gathered his blanket round him, called his family and departed. Soon the meeting room was almost

deserted. The “Hamatsa” accompanied his father to his house, and the ceremonies ended.

[LEAVING THE ISLAND]

On the following morning the Indians started off hunting and fishing in their canoes. They engage in no work while the dancing season is on. The boat arrived to carry me to civilization, and I left the scene after a sojourn of four days and nights. During that time the Indians were peaceable and friendly. In their peculiar way they made the stay as interesting and pleasant as possible. The older men stated that the customs of their forefathers, and their manner of living, were such as they wished to continue. I visited the places where they placed their dead on the branches of trees. Some of the boxes were forty feet from the ground; others had fallen down and remained where they dropped.

The place is picturesque in the extreme and would well repay a visit. The Totem Poles, houses, woodland and streams make up a picture that is both interesting and instructive. There I found the Indian in his element, uncontaminated by disease and drink. Watched over by those who now govern the simple ways, it certainly is a revelation to the writers of fiction to note that life and property is as safe along the rocky coast of Vancouver Island as it is in the British Isles. With a few officers of the law scattered here and there, sometimes hundreds of miles apart, it is seldom their services are required. The Native passes along, in his cedar canoe, troubling no one, sometimes bartering his fish, skins, and basket wares and returning to his home to pass the winter months in his peculiar fashion.

[THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY]²⁴⁴

During the month of January last I was ordered to proceed to Alert Bay and report to the Indian Agent there. When I reached that place, I found [the Agent,] Mr. DeBeck, absent and the Provincial Police Officer, Mr. Wollacott, leaving for Bella Bella. The latter was absent for a month, and it was several days before Mr. DeBeck returned. The wife of Mr. DeBeck provided me with board and lodging, for which I paid her \$1.00 per day [...]. On the return of Mr. DeBeck, he questioned what to do with me. Finally, he decided to take me to a settlement called Gwayasdums, where he left me for four days and nights, without any definite instructions. The Indians there were orderly, and [...] they were the best-behaved body of Indians that I have ever seen in my lifelong experience in this country. When Mr. DeBeck returned I reported, verbally, to him, and we sailed away for Salmon River, where we met a large number of Indians leaving for their homes.

After calling at Rock Bay and Shoal Bay we returned to Alert Bay. Mr. DeBeck thought it would be advisable for me to go to Quatsino. It was midwinter; my funds were low, and no offer was made to take me in the launch to Hardy Bay. I asked how the trip should be made, and Mr. DeBeck said to take a canoe to Hardy Bay, cross over the trail and stay at the only hotel at Quatsino – the place where it was supposed the liquor was supplied to Indians. The trail was covered with three feet of snow and

²⁴⁴ From a letter by Thomas Deasy to A. W. Vowell, Esq., Indian Superintendent, at Victoria, B.C. The letter is dated May 26th, 1904, and is part of the same archival collection containing the typescript of the *Victoria Daily Times* article.

the country unknown to me. I found that Provincial Officer Leeson was in that locality and considered that it would be advisable to report in person to [the Indian Superintendent] before undertaking such a journey. In fact, Quatsino was on the regular route of the steamer from Victoria, and if it was necessary for me to go there on the work of hunting for presumed whiskey peddlers, the trip from Victoria would be most advisable. Under the circumstances, I therefore returned [to Victoria].

The *Times* reporter asked me for an account of my trip, and I gave it. Indian Agent DeBeck allowed me to write a more extended report on his typewriter, which he read and with which he found no fault. The whole of the remarks made, and published, are truthful, and cannot be refuted. [...] The article published was not prompted by anyone. It was as clear and concise as I could make it. Some years ago I was employed on the *Times* newspaper and Senator Templeman knows whether I would state anything but facts.

[AN INDIAN AGENT OBJECTS]²⁴⁵

Alert Bay, B. C.
May 17th 1904

Sir, I have the honor to call your attention to an article appearing in the *Victoria Times* of 23d of April, on the Hamatsa and potlatch as practiced by the Indians in this Agency, by Mr. Thomas Deasy.

The article in question is so far from being a truthful account of what these ceremonies really are that I am afraid the Department will get a wrong impression of these degrading customs of it is allowed to go unnoticed. In order to give you an idea of the absurdity of Mr. Deasy's contention that he saw the real Hamatsa, I may tell you that he went to Guyadums [sic.] (where he claims he witnessed the ceremony) in company with the Indian Agent and well loaded with revolvers, brass buttons, and handcuffs, he remained there four days, and proceeds to write a truthful account of the Hamatsa and potlatch and have it published in the Daily papers. [...] I wonder he did not, while he was at it, get the Indians to commit a murder or two by way of entertaining him.

The garbled and untruthful reports on these Indians by outsiders from time to time appearing in the local papers, make trouble enough for the Agent here without those in the employ of the Department helping things along in the same manner. I have been told by yourself that servants in the employ of the Department were not allowed to enter into Newspaper controversies and trust that you will call the attention of the Department to this violation of its rules, [and] thereby put a stop to the spreading of these vile reports by ignorant people.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) G. W. Debeck
Indian Agent.

²⁴⁵ From a letter from Agent DeBeck to A. W. Vowell in the same collection.

[THE DEPARTMENT'S REPLY]²⁴⁶

As to his attack upon Mr. Deasy the Department can only say that it fails to find anything in the report itself or the correspondence relative thereto, either to justify the Agent's aspersion thereof, or his aggressive attitude towards Mr. Deasy, and the Department certainly sees no reason to withdraw the confidence which your reports have led it to repose in Mr. Deasy, and is of opinion that the style of the apparently wanton attack upon him by Mr. Agent DeBeck is to be greatly deprecated.

“Strange disappearance”²⁴⁷ (July, 1905)

The mystery of the strange disappearance of Walter Stanley, a settler on Helby Island, opposite Bamfield creek, has never been solved. Many residents on Alberni Canal believe the missing man was murdered by an Indian.

Stanley disappeared at the beginning of July. He lived alone on his small island ranch in a tent, and was last seen on July 3rd, when he told a visitor that he intended to do some slashing to clear his pre-emption. [...]

July 8th an Indian was seen in the neighborhood, but this fact elicited little comment at the time, as the settler's island was in the way followed by Indian canoes in going up and down Alberni Canal and Barkley Sound. However, an Indian known to have had a grievance against Stanley has been missing since that time.

It seems that Stanley had incurred the enmity of some of the Indians and of this man in particular. Stanley, a short time before his disappearance, had gone to a potlatch held by the Indians of the section at Numukamus, a little village on Alberni Canal. While the dancing was in progress, the settler had painted his face and jumped out from the assembly of Siwashes seated about the fires in the lodge, to join the dancers. Stanley had hopped about and jumped after the manner of the Indian dancers, mimicking the movements of the natives. This angered the tribesmen a good deal.

Later, one of the Indians, who was notorious for his bad disposition, had a quarrel with his kloodchman. The woman had left him. She wanted to get her effects from the lodge of her late husband, and asked several Indians to get them for her. They, fearing the husband, would not do so. Stanley volunteered to get the woman's "iktas" for her, and did so, thus incurring the enmity of the Indian. [...]

Although the theory of foul play is held by many, there are many others who are of the opinion Stanley was accidentally drowned while bathing.

²⁴⁶ From a letter to A. W. Vowell by an Indian Department Secretary signing only as "L. D. McL." Dated Ottawa, August 14, 1904. From the same collection.

²⁴⁷ From *Murder Theory Now Advanced*. (1905, October 3). *Daily Colonist*, p. 3.

A Nawittle potlatch²⁴⁸ (October, 1905)

News came down by the Union Steamship Company's passenger steamer Cassiar that the biggest potlatch ever held in British Columbia took place last week at the Indian reservation on Blunden Harbor. Big Chief George of the Nawittle tribe was the host, and made large presents to everybody. Chief George gave away to his guests no less than \$2,960 in good gold coin of the realm. [...] Runners were sent out to all men of the Nawittle tribe to gather at Blunden Harbor on Tuesday morning, and from the moment the first ray of daylight showed on the waters, canoes could be seen coming in from everywhere. The sight was one of the most picturesque ever viewed along the northern coast of British Columbia, and for hours Indians were landing near the reservation and unloading blankets and bedding for a three days' stay. The potlatch lasted three days and wound up with a big feast in which all the Indians of the tribe participated.

"Squamish potlatch"²⁴⁹ (December, 1905)

The most largely attended potlatch given by the Squamish Indians for several years was brought to a most successful conclusion on Tuesday night, when Charlie Douglas free-handedly spread his hospitality before three hundred Indians. Included among those in attendance at the affair, which took place in the Squamish Valley, about seven miles above the mouth of the river of the same name, were Indians from Cowichan, Musqueam and False Creek. The potlatch lasted about a week, and an interested attendant was Provincial Constable Munro, who saw to it that no liquor was consumed by the Indians.

The best potlatching done on this occasion was by old Chief Billy of the Squamish tribe, who gave away several hundred dollars' worth of blankets to the visitors, while his wife dispensed dozens of the most gorgeous-hued shirtwaists among the women of the tribesmen. Dr. Jim furnished food for the gathering in bountiful supply on several occasions.

Potlatching is against the law. The Government considers that the Indians impoverish themselves at these festivities, but according to all accounts Chief Billy and Dr. Jim are not broke, although there are some doubts about the financial

"Preparing for big Indian potlatch"²⁵⁰ (December, 1905)

The Indian potlatch season is now on along the northern coast of British Columbia. Passengers arriving on the steamer Venture yesterday report several in progress and others to follow in the course of the next week. The Indians every year celebrate Christmas in this manner, and turn out in large numbers bedecked for the occasion in war paint and feathers.

²⁴⁸ From LOCAL NEWS. (1905, October 11). *Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

²⁴⁹ From SQUAMISH POTLATCH. (1905, December 8). *The Province*, p. 7.

²⁵⁰ From PREPARING FOR BIG INDIAN POTLATCH. (1905, December 21). *The Province*, p. 13.

One of the largest this season is to come off at Takush harbor, which lies in a snug cove just off Queen Charlotte Sound, and near the entrance to Smith Inlet. The chief of the Takush Harbor tribe is making great preparations for the occasion. A large house is being filled with blankets of all colors and sizes, sugar, beans, flour, pilot bread and other staple provisions usually kept on hand by the natives. Besides these, the big chief will distribute gold-pieces among his tribe and the visiting Indians. It is expected the chief will spend at least \$1,500 to \$2,000 in one way and another among the Indians.

The Indians all along the coast from Alert Bay to Milbank Sound have been extended an invitation to attend the potlatch, and one of the largest gatherings of Indians held on the coast for many a year is expected to congregate at Takush harbor during Christmas and New Year's holidays.

A feature of this potlatch will be the music to be supplied by Indian bands. A large cash prize is offered for the best, and it is said there will be at least three bands in attendance. This will guarantee a high old time, and dancing will probably be kept up day and night, one band taking a rest while another discourses the discordant strains to which the Indians will attempt to keep time.

The day of the big potlatch is gradually passing away, and people living in the North believe it will not be very long before the custom is dropped entirely.

“Lasted three weeks”²⁵¹ (February, 1906)

The Clayoquot Indians have been entertaining their friends from Ucluelet to a big potlatch, which lasted three weeks. Visiting Indians have now returned to their homes, and are all getting ready for the coast sealing cruise.

“How ‘Tinshop George’ became a chief”²⁵² (August, 1906)

Samuel Smith, a recent arrival from Rivers Inlet, yesterday told of a recent siwash potlatch at the Owekayno village, at the head of Rivers Inlet, at which “Tinshop George” of the Owekaynos showed his “klosh tum-tum” and became “Captain George” and a chief. He said:

“When the fishing season was over and the Indians had finished fishing, ‘Tinshop George,’ an Indian who had been saving his money and blankets for the past four years, sent his big canoe to all the different canneries loaded with happy Indians, and with flags flying, to invite all the different tribes to his potlatch. Next day the Indians started to arrive at the Owekayno village, and there was great rejoicing. Every tribe had its skin-drum band, and every chief had to make a welcome speech and tell how big a tyee he was. Then there was the feast,” which “Tinshop George” had got ready for the tilikums who came from [the] Storm Islands, from Blondin Harbor, from Alert Bay, from Knight's Inlet and from Kingcombe. Fifty boxes of apples, barrels of “soapollie” berries (worked up till they looked like a lather), big

²⁵¹ From Queen City From West Coast Ports. (1906, February 9). *Daily Colonist*, p. 10.

²⁵² From HOW “TINSHOP GEORGE” BECAME A CHIEF. (1906, August 18). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

tubs of oolichan grease and lots of dried fish and piles of biscuits were ready, and then the potlatch started.

“Thinshop” George’s men started by distributing a pile of 200 blankets. Calling the names of the different Indians who were to receive the presents, he gave to each one his share of blankets, according to his standing in the tribe, the chiefs, of course, getting more than the common Indian. But everyone got a share, and all were happy.

Then they gave away about \$2,000 in money and loads of pots and pans. A big dance then started, which lasted all night, and this finished the potlatch and made “Tinshop George” of the Owekayno tribe no longer plain “Tinshop George,” but Captain George, a proud Indian chief.

“Indians are forming a kilties’ band”²⁵³ (April, 1907)

A well-known commercial traveler who has just returned from a north coast trip is authority for the statement that the Naas River Indians are forming a kilties band of forty pieces. They have asked for quotations on forty kilt uniforms, but have not yet decided which clan tartan they will adopt. They are also asking prices on six hyas medicine bags with latlah-sticks (bagpipes). They are also looking for an instructor in the gentle art of soothing savage beasts by means of drum, fife and bagpipe.

The decision was arrived at during the proceedings of a recent potlatch, when it was demonstrated to the aborigines that these functions were beginning to get too tame, and it was necessary to introduce new and enlivening features. A kilties band, they think, will produce the desired result.

Mr. Fregon on the Quatsino First Nation²⁵⁴ (1907)

At the Queen’s Hotel is a pioneer of the west coast of Vancouver Island, Ned Fregon, who since 1878 has been a storekeeper at Quatsino Sound. He has a general store located in a little bay off the sound not far from the narrows and adjacent to the village of the Koskeemos [Quatsino First Nation]. From his verandas he looks out to the great pines and the wooded islets of his little bay. It is indeed a picturesque outlook.

Mr. Fregon, as might be guessed from his name, is a French-Canadian. He is in Victoria for more stores and incidentally for two sheets of copper which he may tell an enquirer is intended for an Indian carver of the Koskeemos who is to fashion therewith a “copper”; but it is understood that the old-time trader and a partner are looking to a deposit of black sand on the northwest coast of the island, and the copper sheets are to be covered with amalgam and used to catch the gold in that sand.

The trader has seen many changes since he came to the Pacific in 1855 as a youth. He has also seen many changes at Quatsino, watched the changing conditions

²⁵³ From INDIANS ARE FORMING A KILTIES’ BAND. (1907, April 22). *The Province*, p. 11.

²⁵⁴ From GOSSIP OF THE HOTELS. (1907, December 28). *Daily Colonist*, p. 10.

of the natives, the gradual incoming of the settlers, the invasion of the prospector, timber cruiser, and other pathfinders of a new country.

He could tell of barbaric dances he has seen at old time potlatches in the ramshackle illahees that front the shingle beach near the narrows, where in the fringe of the forest the Koskeemos have their home, strange rites performed by hamatsus at the old-time tamanamass dances in the big un-plumbed lodges of cedar planks. Many a strange tale of the potlatches which for some years past have been forbidden by law, could be recounted by the trader if he happened to be in a reminiscent mood. He has also witnessed many of the tragedies of the Koskeemo village, as well as some comedies.

The sorrow dances held for the lost sealing schooner Pioneer were a part of one of the tragic tales that Mr. Fregon tells. The schooner Pioneer, with a crew of hunters from Quatsino, went to [the] Bering Sea on a sealing cruise and never returned. To this day the Indians of Quatsino Sound give as the reason for the disaster that an Indian known as Louis, believed by them to be a murderer, was one of the crew, and the "Sakkalee Tyee" (the great Power) sunk the schooner on that account during a heavy storm.

The medicine man of the Koskeemos some years ago had a wondrous tale of a drifting schooner with the skeletons of the Indian hunters lying on the decks. But Indian medicine men are great romancers, and nothing was ever heard of the Pioneer.

The lodges of the hunters who were on board were burned, as is the Indian custom, and a great sorrow dance was held at which women wailed bitterly and scratched their faces until the blood flowed. Since then the Pioneer and her crew have been forgotten.

The Indian village, from which Mr. Fregon draws most of his trade, is a unique settlement. Fronting one of the houses is a great sign which tells all and sundry that it is the residence of the chief "who 'gived' away more blankets at a potlatch than any other chief on Vancouver Island."

"A pitiful sequel"²⁵⁵ (June, 1908)

A pitiful sequel to the sale of an Indian girl at a Northern British Columbia potlatch two years ago culminated in the realization of one of the greatest desires in semi-civilized circles, an automobile ride, for Annie Suella, a full-blooded Indian woman, brought down from Owikano Lake for detention in the provincial asylum.

Many months ago Annie confided to a friend that she would simulate insanity in order to be cast out from her husband's tepee, and shortly after she commenced acting in a strange manner, declaring that she could not eat except when asleep, and that her blood was running backward in her veins. Months of stolid refusal to partake of food, except surreptitiously, finally unhinged the woman's mind until the day came when she really believed herself afflicted with the peculiar afflictions she had conceived. Her detention by the provincial police followed. She was brought down the

²⁵⁵ From HER FIRST AUTO RIDE. (1908, June 19). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 1.

coast and escorted to the city in an automobile. A large number of [Indians] gazed open-mouthed at the sight of one of their people being given a ride in a swiftly traveling auto, little realizing that she was being hurried to the provincial asylum.

“Potlatch given by the whalers”²⁵⁶ (August, 1908)

News was brought from Kyuquot by the Princess Ena that the steam whaler St. Lawrence has been making good catches. Her record for July was 70 whales. This is the biggest month’s work yet made at either of the whaling stations on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The St. Lawrence has been bringing in four or five whales every day, and one day no less than nine were worked up, eight humpback and one sulphur. One sperm whale was also taken during the month. In all, the St. Lawrence has taken 208 whales this season.

There was a potlatch at Kyuquot on Sunday, and it was the most novel potlatch held on the west coast. Some days ago the Indians, who had been working very steadily at the whaling station since they moved from the illahees at the head of the Sound to Narrow Cut creek alongside the whaling station, began to think it was time for a potlatch. Visions of whale meat, berry mush, and other Siwash dainties came to them, and they looked forward to one of the old-time Indian potlatches, when dances would be held while applauding people sat about a great driftwood side at the edge of the sea. The boss suggested the idea to the manager of the whaling station.

The manager promptly announced that he would give a potlatch – a feast to celebrate the capture of the 200th whale. It would be a white man’s potlatch.

Arrangements were left in his hands. No blankets were assembled for distribution, no dancers notified to prepare for the festivities. Instead cooks were busied getting pies and other delicacies ready; candy was assembled in big boxes, pilot bread secured, and when the steamer left Kyuquot on Sunday all was ready for the potlatch to begin that night.

“Vancouver man is now Indian chief”²⁵⁷ (March, 1909)

When the steamer Cowichan reached port last night from Northern British Columbia ports she had on board a mighty ruler in the person of Chief George of the Church House Indians. In ordinary life the great chief is Mr. Stanley Brown of Vancouver, but on Thursday he was installed as ruler of the Indians at the place named.

Mr. Brown and his father before him have always been closely connected through business with the Church House tribe, and when the chief died recently there was dissension among the Indians as to who should succeed him. There seemed no hope of a settlement until some Siwash statesman suggested that Stanley Brown should fill the office. This idea tickled the Indian fancy, and when Mr. Brown struck the camp he was informed that he was selected unanimously as chief. A potlatch was

²⁵⁶ From POTLATCH GIVEN BY THE WHALERS. (1908, August 4). *Daily Colonist*, p. 10.

²⁵⁷ From VANCOUVER MAN IS NOW INDIAN CHIEF. (1909, March 9). *The Province*, p. 7.

prepared and the Vancouver man was installed with all due ceremony, receiving the name of Chief George. He was placed on a throne and given a wand of yew, which corresponds to the scepter used by monarchs of the effete old world, and as Chief George he will rule the Church House tribe.

The chief returned on the Cowichan last night in company with his prime minister, Mr. Buck of the Vancouver Timber & Trading company.

“Shot through heart at Indian potlatch”²⁵⁸ (January, 1910)

A tragic beginning of a big potlatch at Kyuquot took place a day or two ago, when the steamer Tees was on the West Coast. About one hundred Indians from Clayoquot and Nootka had been invited by the Kyuquots to attend a big winter celebration at their village. They took passage on the steamer Tees and arrived safely in Kyuquot Harbor. Debarking on the opposite side of the harbor from the Indian village they approached their destination in canoes. They were met on the beach by their hosts and there was great shouting and firing of guns, the cartridges in which were supposed to be blank.

Suddenly one of the young siwashes dropped, and his neighbor thought he had been stricken with paralysis or heart disease brought on by the intense excitement. In a short time, however, a red mark began to form on the outside of his garments and examination proved that he had been shot through the heart with buckshot. He was quite dead when picked up.

The potlatch had to be delayed until after the funeral.

“Where history is written with the chisel”²⁵⁹ (1910)

There are modernized totems in some of the coast villages. At Quateine, on the west coast of Vancouver Island there is a broken telegraph post with a carved board step, and beneath it a placard with a writing which states in the quaintest of English:

“I, Chief Taakwettie, is great fish of chiefs? I gived away 5000 blankets in one potlatch.”

“A big potlatch among the Sooke Indians”²⁶⁰ (March, 1912)

Yesterday was the date of a big potlatch among the Sooke Indians, and many of the Saanich and Songhees Indians drove down to assist. In former years this feast was attended by many of the tribes along the west coast, and a fleet of some fifty canoes under sail and paddle made a fine sight, coming up Sooke harbor with their intervals as carefully kept as in any evolutions of a modern navy at maneuvers.

²⁵⁸ From SHOT THROUGH HEART AT INDIAN POTLATCH. (1910, January 21). *Victoria Times*, p. 8.

²⁵⁹ From WHERE HISTORY IS WRITTEN WITH THE CHISEL. (1910, June 6). *The Province*, p. 15.

²⁶⁰ From NEWS OF THE CITY. (1912, March 5). *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

“Held at Bella Coola”²⁶¹ (November, 1912)

One of the biggest potlatches of [recent] years has just been held at Bella Coola, Peter Eliot, the newly elected chief, and sub-chief Judas being the hosts, and the Kimsquit Siwashes the guests of the occasion. More than \$2,000 in cash, besides articles of wearing apparel, guns, phonographs, etc., worth double that amount, was given away.

“An important potlatch”²⁶² (November, 1912)

An imposing potlatch is to be given at Kitkatla this week in celebration of the marriage of the chief's daughter. Among the wedding presents ordered from Prince Rupert recently was an immense silver soup tureen, which is to be the gift of the tribe to the bride.

“Habits and customs of Pacific Coast Indians”²⁶³ (May, 1914)

The Indian of the Pacific Coast has often been described as being very brutal and extremely low in the scale of morality. Still, they have many good points as a set-off to these serious charges, and hospitality is one. Should the fishing season be a good one, they will, so to speak, spend their last dollar in entertaining the members of any tribe which may be friendly, and who may be their guests.

It often happens in this way: A party of Indians is traveling along the coast in their canoe. They have no provisions with them, as it is not customary to take them with them, for they depend absolutely on receiving hospitality by whatever route they take. On landing on any beach in front of any friendly settlement they are met on landing by a deputation, which invites them to partake of the hospitality of the resident tribe. Food in plenty is placed before them, and when they have satisfied their appetites they are very careful in gathering up what is not consumed, which they take with them to be distributed among their friends when they arrive home.

Sometimes, when any settlement has been very successful in a hunting or fishing excursion, they will send out a party of young men, sons of the most influential chiefs, to invite their friends and neighbors to come and partake of the proceeds of the excursion. They will be seated opposite one another according to their tribal rank, and the eatables are placed before them. Sometimes this is followed by the mask dance, but more frequently the principal chief of the visitors will make a speech in which he will express the thanks of those who have been invited for the hospitality shown.

This is the secret of all an Indian's actions: to be called a good fellow. Vanity! To be spoken of as a prince of good fellows. The greater the display, more especially

²⁶¹ From One of the biggest. (1912, November 20). *Daily Colonist*, p. 7.

²⁶² From An important potlatch. (1912, November 30). *Daily Colonist*, p. 17.

²⁶³ From Walkem, W. W. (1914, May 2). Habits and Customs of Pacific Coast Indians. *The Province*, p. 14. Written by W. W. Walkem (1850 – 1919).

if accompanied by valuable gifts, the more it is spoken about. This is the real stimulus of all potlatches.

In 1875 the chief of the Musqueam Indians at the mouth of the Fraser River dissipated a small fortune at a potlatch which he gave to a large gathering of Indians from all over the coast. His name as a veritable “hyas tyee” was in every Indian’s mouth. A few days after his potlatch he was in a starving condition, having parted with everything. At last he was driven to apply to the local government for relief, but instead of granting him relief he was arrested on a charge of vagrancy, and given three months in jail at hard labor.

To the surprise of his fellow Indians in New Westminster who had lately partaken of his hospitality, and who had been enviously looking upon him as a “delate hyas tyee,” they saw him one day with a chain upon his leg, working in the chain gang. It was a terrible blow, but the next time he amassed a fortune he took good care to keep it, and he afterwards died worth considerable money.

This reminds me of a story. In 1882 the Nanaimo Indians issued an invitation to all the tribes living up and down the coast to attend a potlatch which was to be given by four of the most wealthy members of the tribe. About that time I received a circular from the Indian Department in Ottawa directing me to warn any tribe I might visit professionally that potlatches were, for the future, “taboo”. The same day as I received this circular, Sammie Eaton, the Nanaimo war chief, paid me a visit in my office. I told him that the government had put the “taboo” on potlatches. He enquired why.

“Because,” I said, “the Indian gives everything away in entertaining his friends, and afterwards was very poor.”

“Well,” replied Sammie, “you just write back and tell the chief of the Indian Department that I know many white people in Victoria, who give dances and entertainments who can not afford it, and never pay for what they give away, and they had better make a law to stop these people first, and when they have done that, the Indians will stop their potlatches.”

I had nothing more to say on the subject of potlatches.

“The biggest potlatch in years”²⁶⁴ (October, 1917)

Prince Rupert, Oct. 9 – The biggest potlatch in years took place early this week at Kincolith, on the Naas River. The Indians have had a prosperous fishing season, and now that their labors for the year have concluded, they indulged in lavish festivities. Nearly a thousand [Indians] assembled, and native families from far and near fore-gathered to exchange compliments and gifts. There was dancing, and feasting and speaking, and the installation of a new chief. The distribution of gifts was on a most liberal scale.

²⁶⁴ From “HIYU” POTLATCH HELD. (1917, October 9). *The Province*, p. 8.

Potlatch at Hazelton²⁶⁵ (February, 1918)

Last week the Indians of Hazelton participated in a rousing old-time potlatch, given by the big chiefs, who wished to rid themselves of the burden of wealth. The custom is for the chief with the burden to distribute it amongst his guests in the shape of gifts; in other words, he potlatches his wealth.

During the week's festivities at Hazelton, goods to the value of several thousand dollars were potlatched in this way.

Potlatch at Campbell River²⁶⁶ (February, 1918)

A big potlatch is now in progress at Campbell River, and eight hundred of the coast tribesmen are there engaged in their old ceremonials, their dancing, feasting and gift-making. In a sense they have returned to the simpler and more peaceful rites, for prohibition has removed from them the temptation to hold wild orgies which followed the intrusion of the white man with his strong liquors.

Potlatches in recent years have required the attendance of a squad of provincial policemen, but this year a single provincial constable only was necessary to watch the preservation of the peace, and he could leave them to their own devices, without fear of evil consequences, while he brought down to Vancouver yesterday a poor lunatic.

WOULD LIKE SOME REDEYE

Some of the Indians, though, expressed a longing for their old rums and whiskies, and as high as \$8 a bottle is reported to have been offered, but the watch for bootleggers has been so keen and the penalties for selling so severe that what liquors may have been secured did not begin to cause a ripple among the crowd. But of things edible there was an abundance and of the highest quality.

In the old days the generosity of some Indians would so far run away with them during the excitement of the potlatch that they would give away possessions to their own complete impoverishment. Gift-making is on a generous scale this year on the part of many who had a highly prosperous fishing season and were able to tuck away for these tribal occasions considerable amounts. A good many Indians last summer and fall made as high as \$2,000 on their fishing season, and as they have hopes of good employment this year, they were generous with their gifts to those they considered less highly favored.

Interrupting a Port Simpson potlatch²⁶⁷ (1924)

Mrs. Davis Jennings, who is relating this series of stories, is an attractive woman still, though past three score and ten. She is tall, with a quiet dignity of

²⁶⁵ From Local and District. (1918, February 9). *Interior News* (Smithers, B.C.), p. 1.

²⁶⁶ From INDIANS HOLDING A BIG POTLATCH. (1918, February 22). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 5.

²⁶⁷ From De Bertrand Lugin, N. (1924, February 10). Death Threat Faced By Missionary Girl Among the Indians. *Daily Colonist*, p. 35. Written by Anne "N." de Bertrand Lugin (1874 - 1962).

bearing, a gentle voice and a happy laugh. When she first came to this country, nearly fifty years ago, she must have been a beautiful woman. One can appreciate that the tall, slender girl, with the soft fair hair, and blue eyes, and the white and rose complexion must have stood out like the one star in a dark night among the dusky men and women of the Indian tribes of the West Coast of British Columbia, with their squat figures and stolid, heavy features. But, she assures us, we cannot judge the Indians of yesterday from those we see today.

“Many of them were tall,” [she said,] “with a splendid bearing, and some of the women were really beautiful, while all of the children were lovable, bonny little things. It is not the poor Indians’ fault that, of the handful that are left, so many are deformed and diseased. It is the white man who has brought this curse upon them. It is the King’s evil which has decimated their ranks.”

Mrs. Jennings spoke passionately. She had seen the terrible transformation, seen the little babies die under the blight, the young children cut down, witnessed the pitiable suffering and death of youths and maidens.

“In those days,” she went on with a sigh, “when I first came among them they were in the heyday of prosperity, living happy lives, not devoid of excitement and variety. For the hunting season meant change of scene and thrilling adventure by land and sea; and the return of the men were joyous occasions, festivals of feasting and dancing and merry-making. The women in those old times were industrious and skillful at weaving and basket-making. The men did all sorts of carving. They could make exquisite ornaments from silver, which they flattened out and engraved in intricate designs. Their totems, their lodges, their war canoes – all showed wonderful artistry and the patience which is akin to genius. I wish those native arts might be revived.”

Mrs. Jennings spoke with what must be something of her young enthusiasm.

“If I were able to get about, I should like to visit the reservations and talk to them,” [she continued.] “Perhaps I might persuade them to go back to the basket-making, the weaving and the carving. It might restore something of their old dignity, their pride of race.”

LIFE WAS IN DANGER

It was when Mr. and Mrs. Jennings were stationed at Port Simpson that the following incident took place, during which Mrs. Jennings’ life was in danger as a result of her interference with a potlatch.

The missionaries had absolutely forbidden potlatches, realizing what a demoralizing influence they had, and what suffering they entailed. But potlatches were the most difficult of all native institutions to uproot, and very often those who attempted to put a stop to them were summarily dealt with. However, so well were the Port Simpson Indians under the missionaries’ control that it was hoped the time-honored celebration would never even be the subject of argument again.

It was a morning in early Spring. The night before there had been a [Christian] revival meeting in the chapel. Just after the meeting Mr. Jennings had left the village to visit another Indian settlement twenty or thirty miles away. Mrs. Jennings was not in the least nervous; though she was the only white person among hundreds of

natives, she had been so deeply impressed by the success of the revival that she felt she was among Christians like herself.

EVIL-DOERS DETECTED

What was her amazement upon walking in the morning to learn that there was a potlatch going on in the village. Betsy, her little Indian maid, stood by her bedside, and with wide, affrighted eyes fixed on her face, made the startling announcement.

“They are all down in the fire-hall,” said Betsy, for Port Simpson was quite a civilized village, with a church, a school, a mission house, a fire department and a band. “And the doors are locked, and the Three Brothers are on guard outside.”

Thee Three Brothers were famous Indians, tall and powerful. They always fished and hunted together, and to fight one was to fight all. They had only recently been converted to Christianity, and had been baptized at the same time.

Mrs. Jennings dressed herself hurriedly and left the house, although her maid whimpered and tried to dissuade her, telling her that if she interfered, they might kill her.

On the way to the scene of the pagan festival, Mrs. Jennings met an Indian whom she knew very well, and felt that she could depend upon. She stopped him and questioned him.

“Yes,” he told her, “they are having a potlatch, but they are calling it a Christmas tree. No good for you to go down there. You will get into trouble.”

“You come with me, Henry,” she asked him. “You come and help me.”

But Henry could not be persuaded. He told her to go home and let the Indians alone until her husband returned, and then, muttering something about fishing, he hurried away.

Mrs. Jennings did not hesitate. She felt that it was her duty to go down and stop the potlatch, [even] if she died in the attempt. It would be a sign of weakness if, having learned of it, she did not interfere. She must act as her husband would have acted, had he been there.

BROTHERS STAND ASIDE

Pale, but holding herself very erect, one can picture her standing before the Three Brothers and demanding admittance. Perhaps because they felt that the affair could have but one ending, they stood aside and, smiling grimly, let her pass.

All around the fire hall tiers of benches and chairs had been arranged, and the place was full of savage figures. Every seat was occupied and many sat upon the floor. But there were few men there. It was evidently a klotchman's potlatch, and the native women presented a horrible appearance. They had discarded all of their clothing, the civilized costume that Christianity demanded, and wore only their blankets draped over their naked forms. Their hair was unbound and hung about their shoulders. Their faces were painted in grotesque designs. They were chanting and muttering their own heathen songs. But they desisted when the white woman slipped in and took her brave stand in the midst of them. Blankets and bowls and other dishes were stacked up in the center of the hall. But to make the potlatch something of the nature of a Christian festival, they had gone to the trouble of setting up an evergreen tree at one end of the room.

One particularly ferocious-looking woman seemed to be in charge of the affair, and came toward her. It was only with difficulty that Mrs. Jennings recognized Anna, one of her oldest friends, whose husband was at that very moment on his way to spread the gospel with Mr. Jennings.

“Anna,” she entreated, “come away with me. Wash that paint off your face and put on your clothes. What would John say?”

“You must go out,” Anna told her angrily. “You do not belong here. Go away now, quick. You tell Mr. Jennings when he comes home that we have had a Christmas tree like the white men.”

There were mutterings all about her. Eyes blazed from under lowered brows. Mrs. Jennings drew herself to her full height. She was so frightened that she wanted to run away, but she would not, and she tried to hide her fear. Again she spoke to the women, [and] pleaded with them. [She] reminded them of what they had promised at the revival meeting only last night. They merely muttered the louder, and made threatening gestures toward her.

NATIVE APOSTATES

Then came stalking toward her the Three Brothers. Though they were such big men, at least they wore civilized clothing, and their faces were not painted. She held her hands to them imploringly.

“Help me to stop this wicked potlatch,” she begged them. “You are Christians.”

“No, we are not,” said they, all together.

“But you were, last night,” she pleaded; “only last night.”

“You go away,” said one of them, leaning down to her. “You go away quickly and we will not harm you. If you don’t—”

“No.” Mrs. Jennings summoned all of her strength and her voice rang out firmly. “No; I will not go. My place is here. This potlatch must not continue.”

They were all speaking in the native dialect. One of the Three Brothers whispered to her again: “It would be very easy to kill you.”

It would be easy, very easy. Mrs. Jennings turned a little faint, and began to tremble. The chanting of the women began again. It had a horrible, menacing sound. Those who had been sitting on the floor stood up and drew closer about her. The Three Brothers came nearer.

RESORTS TO PRAYER

“I expected to die,” said Mrs. Jennings. “Often I expected to die in those unsettled times. But I wanted to meet death bravely. I wanted to prove to the Indians that a Christian has no fear of suffering or death, and that either will be faced courageously if one is trying to do one’s duty. I closed my eyes for a moment to shut those horrible faces away, and to regain my strength. And just then it seemed to me I heard one word spoken: ‘Pray.’”

“I only knew their language well enough to make myself understood. I had in no sense become master of it. But I took no thought of that. I dropped on my knees in the midst of them, closed my eyes and raised my voice to God. Words came to me. I do not know what I said, nor how long I prayed, but I did not falter nor hesitate.

“When I opened my eyes the first thing I saw was a woman in a little heap on the floor. It was Anna, and she was weeping bitterly. I looked around me. The Three Brothers had gone. Other women were weeping, too. Many of them had slipped out silently while I was praying. The rest were twisting up their hair or plaiting it, and that done began to gather up the piles of blankets, the dishes and other things.

“I did not stay. I knew there would be no potlatch. I took Anna by the hand and we went home together.”

“Indian chief takes over new name”²⁶⁸ (1925)

Fanny Spauk is the name of the new chief of the Kit-ex-chen tribe of Indians to which belong the Hazeltons, Kispiox, and other local tribes. Johnson Alexander, the new chief, has adopted this official name after the first chieftess of the tribe. The ceremony of selecting the new chief took place during the holiday season, which was attended by Indians from far and near. The new chief is a nephew of the late Chief Johnny Patsie of the same tribe.

“Indian marriage is declared valid”²⁶⁹ (1926)

Sustaining the validity of an Indian marriage, Magistrate H. O. Alexander in the district police court here [Vancouver] found Dan Cranmer guilty of a charge of failing to support his wife, Emma.

They were married twenty years ago according to Indian custom. Dan Cranmer, pride of the Nimpkish band, took as his wife Emma, belle of the village island tribe. He virtually purchased the girl from her parents, after negotiations, and the ceremony was completed by public announcement when male elders counseled the man and old klotchmen instructed the bride. Some years later Emma practically redeemed herself by repaying to Dan the purchase price, and with the money the couple staged a great potlatch near Alert Bay, where goods to the value of \$10,000 were given away in celebration. Many Indians were arrested and prosecuted for participating in the festivities.

Latterly, according to Emma, the husband has neglected her.

DEFENSE ARGUMENT

In his defense, he pleaded he was not legally her husband, for the reason that Indian marriages were not valid and should not be recognized by the law of the province.

Magistrate Alexander decided against this contention and found Dan Cranmer guilty. He consented to state a case for appeal to the Supreme Court and, in the meantime, remanded the Indian two weeks for sentence.

²⁶⁸ From INDIAN CHIEF TAKES OVER NEW NAME. (1925, January 24). *The Province*, p. 14.

²⁶⁹ From INDIAN MARRIAGE IS DECLARED VALID. (1926, October 14). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 1.

Potlatch at Okanagan Lake²⁷⁰ (October, 1929)

A potlatch has been celebrated this week by the Indians at the head of Okanagan lake. They have not been communicative as to the reason for the affair, which has attracted Siwashes from very many points in British Columbia.

“Indians mourn Chief Chilahichi”²⁷¹ (November, 1930)

MERRIT, Nov. 15 – The native population of Nicola Valley is arranging a big potlatch, the occasion being the death of Johnny Chilahichi, 72-year-old chief of the Douglas Lake tribe, who was ill for some time.

Chief Chilahichi was proud of the fact that he represented his band at the big pow-wow in London, when a delegation of Indian Chiefs laid their grievances before the British Government and were received by the King.

In his younger days he was reported to be wealthy, owning several thoroughbred horses and employing a jockey once known on the English race courses. He was also the first Indian to use an auto in the valley.

“Revamp long prohibited potlatch”²⁷² (May, 1943)

PORT ALBERNI – The Ohiat tribe of Indians who live on the Numukumus Reserve on the west coast of Vancouver Island have streamlined the potlatch, for many years prohibited by the laws of Canada.

The potlatch (which is a misnomer) was a popular institution before the coming of the white men. It controlled finances, marriages, divorces and was practiced during funerals.

Some of the potlatch practices, including the mutilation of the body as an exhibition of stamina and courage, brought the ceremonial into disrepute, and it was abolished by law.

The potlatch is dead, but the native urge to express conserved energies through songs and dances still exists.

MODERN VERSION

Recently we witnessed a modern version of the potlatch as practiced by the Ohiat Indians, who live on their weather-beaten reserve at the very confluence of the Alberni Canal and Barclay Sound, with Chief Louis as our host.

In days gone by Indian dances were blood-curdling to watch to the tune of savage songs and the rhythmic beating of tom-toms, but the dances witnessed at Sarita Bay could well have been put on by a church congregation.

²⁷⁰ From Town and District. (1929, October 24). *Vernon News*, p. 5.

²⁷¹ From Indians Mourn Chief Chilahichi. (1930, November 15). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 25.

²⁷² From Paull, A. (1943, May 31). West Coast Indians Revamp Long Prohibited Potlatch. *The Province*, p. 22. Written by Squamish leader Andy Paull (1892 - 1959).

The Ohiats came into the hall in single file, smiling and nodding to their friends. Jimmy Rush, an Indian comedian, danced a Charlie Chaplin cake walk to the amusement of 200 spectators

SEE FLOOR SHOW

Between the Indian dances a floor show was put on, including Hula-Hula dancing girls. Another act included a doctor who introduced himself as Dr. U. B. Well of Port Alberni.

After midnight we were told there was going to be a wolf dance, but it wasn't the old-time wolf dance. It was a lively artistic number with the dancers wearing wooden masks carved to the image of the wolf.

Even the smoking of the pipe of peace, so long a feature of Indian festivities, was conspicuous by its absence. But the Indians have not given up smoking. About the time the pipe of peace should have been smoked, cigarettes were passed round, and even the old chiefs discarded their pipes for the modern smokes.

Perhaps the only ritual the Indians have retained from the old days is the saying of "grace" before meals in the manner of their ancestors. Before eating, the chief would say a few words, some of the older men would chant a prayer to the "Great Spirit," thanking him for the food and, with the clapping of hands and the beating of sticks on the floor, the feasting would start.

After the festivities the Indians resort to Lahall, the native dice game. The participants face each other, each side being given ten sticks, and to the beating of the drums and the chanting of weird songs each side tries to guess in which hand the participants hold a white bone. Failing to guess correctly, they must surrender one stick. This is carried on until one of the teams has won all the sticks.

INDIANS ENTHUSIASTIC

The Indians put a lot of enthusiasm into the singing that goes with a game of Lahall, and when we left Sarita Bay at 7:30 a.m. the game was still in progress. The swishing of the ocean waves, in front of the wigwam which housed the Lahall game, formed a natural accompaniment for the songs and the beating of the drums.

The Ohiat Indians have said farewell to the past, but they still enjoy themselves.

COWICHAN



Cowichan located on a map of British Columbia from 1888.

“Grand potlatch”²⁷³ (April, 1869)

The grand Potlatch came off the other day at the above place [Cowichan], and about 2,000 Indians assembled to receive the gifts. It was observed they all had money, some of them considerable sums. They made every effort to obtain liquor from the licensed dealer, knowing, doubtless, that they run less risk of being poisoned, and offered large sums for bottles of good liquor which, of course, could not be sold to them. Is it not a little droll that these people are forced to destroy themselves with the vile compounds sold to them *ad libitum* by illicit vendors (most probably from the other side), and our licensed dealers here are prohibited from selling a wholesome article to them which would keep the money in the Colony. *O Tempore! O mores!*

“Gathering of the clans”²⁷⁴ (April, 1875)

A grand potlatch will be given by the Cowichan Indians at Cowichan on Sunday week to their “tillicums”. There will be a “gathering of the clans” from Fraser River, Nanaimo, East Coast and Barclay Sound. Blankets are in demand.

²⁷³ From COWICHAN. (1869, April 6). *British Colonist*, p. 2.

²⁷⁴ From POTLATCH. (1875, April 17). *Nanaimo Daily News*, p. 3.

“My first visit to an Indian potlatch”²⁷⁵ (September, 1875)

In the month of September, 1875, I was living in a comfortably furnished house on Gonzales Farm, Victoria, the property of Mr. J. Despard Pemberton, who at that time was traveling in Europe with his wife and family. [...]

Sergeant Bloomfield, [a constable,] [...] said they were expecting trouble at the Indian camp, as they were holding a potlatch and the Nitinat Indians from Cape Flattery were about to meet the Cowichan Indians for the first time in peace after a state of warfare which had existed from time immemorial. Bloomfield, I learned, was really a city constable, but had been borrowed by the provincial authorities on account of his intimate knowledge of the Indian character and ways, as well as to prevent the introduction of spiritous liquors among the Indians by unscrupulous white men. [...]

Next morning Bloomfield walked down to the Indian camp, but came back in a short time to tell me that the Cowichans were expected about noon. What was of more importance, he said, [was] that the Nitinats were now going through an ancient war dance, which was a very rare thing for them to do – that the dance was most weird and uncanny, and that probably I would never have such a chance again as the present one of seeing a dance they very seldom performed. He advised me to return with him.

[AN INDIAN RANCHERIE]

I readily accepted and, stick in hand, accompanied the officer to the rancherie. I was not sorry I did so, for I will never forget that dance.²⁷⁶ This was the first rancherie I had ever seen and, I might truthfully add, ever smelt. It was not unlike a large flat-roofed barn, slightly higher in front than behind. The roof consisted of long, wide split cedar boards, laid over one another, supported by crosspieces, which were held up in turn by cedar posts. The sides of this building were also composed of split cedar boards, but they were bound to the uprights and many crosspieces by withes. There was not a single nail in the building, but I afterwards learned that this building was an old one and erected before a white man had come to the country. In front of the building were three upright posts, on the top of which and connecting them, or holding them together, was a long stick of timber, flattened top and bottom.

When I entered the building it was packed all round the sides with Indians of the Nitinat tribe. Some of them were sitting, while others were standing. A long board extended down in front of these Indians, so that both those sitting and those standing could strike it with a stick. Others had drums of native manufacture.

The dance was in active operation as we entered, and these boards and drums were beaten by the onlookers to make up a rhythm in keeping with the steps of the dancers. [...] ²⁷⁷ While the dancing was in progress one old wizened klootchman (woman) rose on the side benches, shouted that she was the daughter of the ancient

²⁷⁵ From Walkem, W. W. (1913, February 15). MY FIRST VISIT TO AN INDIAN POTLATCH. *The Province*, p. 21. Written by W. Wymond Walkem (1850 – 1919).

²⁷⁶ The rest of this paragraph is taken from an earlier passage in the original account.

²⁷⁷ I've omitted details of the dance which may only have been intended to be witnessed under specific conditions.

arrow maker of the tribe, and made the knives which were so sharp to kill their enemies. [...]

After watching these Indians in what the interpreter, an old Indian constable of the Nitinat tribe, said was an ancient war dance, our attention was suddenly called to the door, through which many of the natives were passing to the open air, shouting excitedly as they went. Almost at the same moment a well-formed square-shouldered Indian, with an otter skin bound around and over his head, and a magnificent one hanging down his back, rushed in between the dancers and said something to them in a loud voice. Then the dancers dispersed in a few moments.

Following the constable we gained the open air, and then saw what was causing the commotion. The Cowichan Indians were coming over the water in twelve canoes, arranged in the shape of a fan, and about 100 yards apart. Every few minutes one could see a puff of smoke from one of the canoes. What these Cowichans meant, I cannot say, but the puff of smoke preceded the skipping of a bullet along the surface of the water until it sank a few feet from shore. As the canoes came nearer, the bullets sank closer to the shore line.

In course of time it became dangerous to stand upon the beach, as the bullets fell upon the shingle, while others would strike the front of the rancherie. Then "puff," "puff," and the report loud and sharp from the bushes on our left hand indicated that the Nitinats were firing from the shore, and we could see where their bullets struck the water, some of them close to the advancing canoes. At last a thud told that one of these was struck.

The cracking of the rifles was now continuous, and Bloomfield, calling my attention to one of the canoes, in which some commotion existed, said this shooting must be stopped, as serious consequences might follow. The Nitinats noticed this also, for immediately a drum was struck in quick time, accompanied by boisterous whoopings and singing to the cadence of the drum. Bloomfield left me and I saw him disappear within the rancherie, accompanied by the Nitinat constable.

The firing still continued from the Cowichan canoes, and I could hear the lead passing through the atmosphere. I then laid down behind a large log on the upper part of the beach. While lying here waiting for Bloomfield to reappear, the beating on the drum suddenly ceased with a kind of rattle. Then I heard his voice raised in angry dispute with some Indian, who was also speaking rapidly and in a high key.

I sprang to my feet, ran across the beach and entered the rancherie. Bloomfield was standing in front of the chief, whom I recognized by the otter skin hanging down his back. His face was now covered with a mask like a frog, and two side pieces hanging down in front to represent the front legs. The Indian doctors, or shamans, held Bloomfield by the shoulders, while the Nitinat constable was standing a few feet away, apparently cowed. I pushed aside one of the doctors, and was about to strike the other, when Bloomfield asked me not to make another move, as these Indians were a wild lot and any violence might provoke a row in which we might fare badly.

While hesitating as to what I should do, I was surprised and delighted to see Superintendent Todd [of the provincial police] come through the entrance. He came

over to where we stood and Bloomfield explained what the trouble was. He came over to where we stood and Bloomfield explained what the trouble was.

The superintendent was immediately recognized by the chief, who took off his mask, as well as by the two shamans, who let go of their hold of the constable's arms. Todd expressed surprise at seeing me there and after he had repeated Bloomfield's orders through the interpreter about calling his men in from the timber, we all went out.

The Cowichans were now stepping out of their canoes, and were being welcomed by the Saanich chief whose potlatch they had come to attend. One of the visitors had the half of one finger cut off, which had caused commotion among the rest of his tribe when advancing earlier in the day. After a short conversation with the chief of the Cowichans, we all walked up to the tent, and found two more constables putting up two tents, the furnishings for which had been brought down on a wagon.

DISTRIBUTING FLOUR

We all had lunch and then returned to the rancherie, as it was understood that the Saanich chief was to present some of his visitors with blankets and flour. When we arrived at the rancherie the Saanich chief was addressing his visitors from the elevated platform, and his words must have been pleasing to those who understood them, for they were punctuated by grunts of approval by some of the audience. Our Nitinat interpreter and constable was standing on the end of the platform, translating into the Nitinat tongue what the chief said to them. After his speech of welcome, the chief descended and bags of flour were carried out, and one sack given to the head of each family.

It was a matter of wonder and astonishment to me, how this untidy, half-clothed native chief managed to buy the large quantity of flour he gave away on this occasion. The quantity of flour distributed was 250 sacks and, as this was not sufficient to go round, he announced that those who had not received one would be supplied next day, as he expected to receive them from the Hudson's Bay Co. that night. The blankets had not arrived, but were likewise expected to arrive towards evening, and a grand scramble and distribution would follow the gifts of flour next morning.

The natives were then much more numerous than they are today, and a potlatch where the members were so great was often given by some of the more wealthy members of the tribe, who pooled their money to make the celebration a success and a credit to those who boasted of their wealth.

It must not be imagined that the rancherie accommodated one-third of those who were present on this occasion. The Saanich Indians at that date took up early all of the sleeping places which were arranged around the inside of the building like berths in a fore-castle. The Cowichans and Nitinats erected structures for themselves, much like ordinary tepees, but covered with mats woven from bullrushes. The Saanich chief had provided some beef, pieces of which were distributed among the Indians, which they boiled in kettles over the numberless camp fires extended along the beach. Nothing more was to be seen that afternoon, so we returned to our tents.

About 7 o'clock we walked down to the rancherie, where seats had been set apart for three of us, Superintendent Todd, Sgt. Bloomfield and myself. We were to be given an entertainment by some Nitinats, which the Saanich chief told the superintendent was really wonderful. [...] ²⁷⁸ [Before long] the entertainment is at an end. [...] I may say that I saw this same performance by Nitinats many years after at Duncan, Vancouver Island, to which the Indian Agent, Mr. Lomas, and a few others were admitted. The agent offered the performers quite a sum of money as an inducement to tour the world and give the same performance, but they refused. What we saw on this occasion was the subject of much discussion when we returned to the tent that night.

We had breakfast at 7 o'clock next morning, and Bloomfield strolled down to the Indian camp to ascertain what the program for the day might be. On returning, he said that 250 more bags of flour had arrived and had been distributed, to the great satisfaction of all the Indian guests, who were now convinced that the Saanich chief was a "delate hyas tyee". A grand distribution of blankets – both Hudson's Bay and native – would take place at 10 a.m., to which he carried an invitation from the chief to us to attend. We arrived on the potlatch ground a short time before the appointed hour, and were given chairs in a good position to see everything that took place. I have mentioned native blankets. These were made from the hair of the Rocky Mountain goat, king of all mountain climbers. In 1875 a goat's head and entire skin could be purchased for \$2 (they are, of course, much more expensive now [in 1913]), for Rocky Mountain goats were then to be found on all of the mountains of the coastline.

USING GOAT'S HAIR

All of the mountains of Burrard Inlet, and more especially of the North Arm, were the home of the Rocky Mountain goat long before the ancestors of the Coast Indians came over from Japan. [sic.] They were frequently chased and killed for the purpose of obtaining the long hair which protected them from the cold on their natural haunts, the peaks of the mountains. When killed the skin was removed at once, [and] taken to the Indian's home, where it was well washed. Then the hair was removed from the skin and the longest hairs strung in one long string and rolled over the bare knee of the Indian. Having obtained a long string of this goat hair, it was woven like their mats into large squares, which served the purpose of a blanket.

Of late years the weaving of the goats' hair for blankets has become obsolete, and at potlatches held during the past ten years small squares of six inches each way are cut and distributed. Then one person sets out to obtain the balance of the pieces, for which he pays quite a price. All these small pieces are woven together and are considered very valuable.

During the first fifty years of the last century goat skins were a large element in the trade between the island and the mainland Indians, as also were the goat hair blankets. At the potlatch which I attended in 1875, and of which I am now writing, goat hair blankets could be obtained at moderate figures.

²⁷⁸ As before, I've omitted details of the dance, since it may only have been intended to be witnessed under specific conditions.

Precisely at 10 o'clock the chief, attended by a number of his tribe, climbed up to the elevated platform. His assistant received from the ground three or four Hudson's Bay blankets and handed them one at a time to the chief, who in turn threw them into the large crowd of visitors below, who scrambled and struggled for them in a desperate endeavor to obtain all. Two hundred blankets were tossed down that afternoon, and the bidding for them would have made a modern auctioneer, if there had been any commission attached to it, ill with envy.

It was 1 p.m. before the last of the 200 Hudson's Bay blankets were tossed down among the struggling mass beneath the platform. Many of the blankets had been torn in shreds, each one obtaining a small piece. It was now the turn of the goat hair blankets. These were only eight in number, but before they were thrown out each one was divided into halves, sixteen pieces in all. I saw one Indian exchange one half for three blankets.

WEALTHY INDIAN SOON POOR

As the last blanket was thrown from the platform, the Indians gathered below gave a mighty shout, but the chief was looking to the house where he and his family lived, for they did not dwell with the others in the large rancherie upon the reserve. At last the door of his dwelling opened, and two little boys dressed in deer-skin pants and jacket jumped nimbly out and ran quickly down until they reached the foot of the posts where their father waited them. They were passed up and their father, standing up with all the dignity a coast Indian can assume, which to tell the truth is never very much, lifted them up and placed them in perfect poise upon his shoulders. If one might translate the father's feelings then, they might have been written down as the proudest moment of his life, as he felt a few minutes' happiness in fatherhood. He was now the greatest chief on the coast, and the presence of his two boys on his shoulders completed his happiness.

If he was the greatest chief, he was now also one of the poorest Indians to be found from Cape Flattery to the northern end of Queen Charlotte Island [Haida Gwaii]. In that great potlatch he had given all he possessed away except his name for generosity and wealth. Let his future be what it might, his name would be handed down as the great Saanich chief who had given more away in one day than all collectively had ever owned.

He gently lowered his little sons from his shoulders and passed them to the ground. Then the Nitinat chief with the gorgeous otter skin hanging down his back, took up a position at one end of the platform, and the Cowichan chief at the other. Both addressed their own people in different tongues. [...]

Before I left we all went to the rancherie, where a great dance, in due and ancient form, was being enacted.

I had had enough and I may say, although I have been present at many potlatches since, I never was at one where so much merchandise was given away, or where a man transformed himself so rapidly from plenty into a state of poverty.

I returned to Victoria that afternoon.

“The first Chief to break away”²⁷⁹ (1886)

Lohar was the first Chief to break away from the old fashioned system of “ye potlatch”. Mr. Lomas proposes to establish an annual industrial and agricultural exhibition for Indian products, with suitable prizes. The Indian Department are in accord with this plan of Mr. Lomas in establishing a substitute for the debasing potlatch, and have donated \$200 to assist in this praiseworthy exhibition. The first meeting will be held at Lohar’s village, in honor of his being the first convert from the potlatch. In subsequent years it will be held at such points as the Indians themselves may determine. This is a practical step in the right direction, and we hope it may prove a success.

“Cowichan Indian Industrial Show”²⁸⁰ (November, 1886)

The first of the Agricultural and Industrial shows exclusively for Indians was held at Cowichan on Wednesday and Thursday last. During the two days the rain came down in torrents, but the number of exhibits – over 300 – surprised everyone. Thirty of the exhibits were for grain, and these would have done credit to any Provincial Show – in fact, the specimens of wheat and oats could not be beat. [...]

During the afternoon Mr. W. H. Lomas, Indian Agent for the Cowichan Agency, called the Indians together, and on behalf of the Superintendent, presented Chief Lohar with a beautiful silver medal, bearing the inscription: “For Merit / Lohar, / Chief of Cowichan / October, 1886”. The Chief was highly pleased with his medal, and as he is the best known Indian on the coast, and has always been a friend to the white men and Indians, he was heartily congratulated by all. [...]

In spite of the weather the show was a marked success, and augurs well for future exhibitions of the same class. Great credit is due to Mr. Lomas and the Indian Committee for their excellent management. May it not be long before these annual shows will entirely do away with the pernicious “potlatch”.

“On their way to Cowichan”²⁸¹ (May, 1890)

A large number of Indians arrived from the west coast last night on their way to Cowichan, where a big potlatch is to be given next week by the chief. It has not been customary in times past to invite the west coasters to these shindigs on this side of the country, but the Indian populations have thinned out so fast that probably the old chief found it necessary to invite the people of another set in order to insure a good house.

²⁷⁹ From COWICHAN ITEMS. (1886, March 10). *Nanaimo Daily News*, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ From Cowichan Indian Industrial Show. (1886, November 3). *Nanaimo Daily News*, p. 3.

²⁸¹ From Indian Potlatch. (1890, May 30). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 8.

A teenager's account of a potlatch²⁸² (c. 1893)

The original account does not specify the location or exact year of the potlatch. I've tentatively placed it in this section, as it mentions W. H. Lomas, Indian Agent for the Cowichan District from 1881 on.

We were seated round the fire one winter evening with a few friends who had lately come from England. Suddenly there came a ring at the doorbell, and in came one of the neighbor lads. He told us that the great dance of the potlatch came off that night, and asked us if we would care to go. Our guests had never been to a potlatch, and did not know what it meant, so my brother explained it to them as follows:-

It is a custom amongst Indians that when one of them becomes at all wealthy he wishes to become a chief, and the easiest way to do so is to give away gifts of blankets and other things to the tribe to which he belongs. The word "potlatch," in the language of the Chinooks, means a gift, and one of those gatherings to give away gifts is called a potlatch. It usually lasts for about four days, and the third night is the grand event of the occasion, as it is set apart almost entirely for dancing – not the stately dance of our forefathers, nor the mad whirl of the modern ballroom, but genuine Indian dances, danced in their own way, and to their own music.

We all decided to go, but the first difficulty that presented itself was the method of going. We had only one sleigh at home and that would only seat six and there were in all twelve of us; but we did not mind a little squeezing, and as it was only three miles we all managed to get in some way, and off we went. My big brother, or the professor, as we commonly called him, had a mouth organ with him, and, in spite of the uncomfortable position in which he was placed, managed to enliven us with various selections all the way to the ranch, as the Indian village is called. Arriving there we were conducted by one of the chiefs to the house in which the potlatch was held.

Let me pause for a moment and try to describe the house. Imagine to yourself a building about forty by eighty feet, with walls about sixteen feet high and a very flat roof. The frame is made by sinking posts into the ground and laying logs across the building for ceiling beams. Then, on top of these, are laid pieces almost like a wall plate, to which the sides are nailed. There are no rafters used at all, but short posts are set on end on the beams, and a kind of purlin plate put on, and the boards of the roof run lengthways. In the construction neither square nor level is used, so you can have a slight idea of one of the structures. The fire is built in the middle of the floor and smoke escapes through the cracks in the roof and walls as well as through the hole left in the center of the roof just over the fire. The ground is leveled down and

²⁸² Halliday, R. J. M. (as Merle Halliday). (1893). THE POTLATCH. In *Sea, Forest and Prairie: Being Stories of Life and Adventure in Canada Past and Present, by Boys and Girls in Canada's Schools*. Montreal: John Dougall and Son, "Witness" Office. Written by Robert Jameson Merle Halliday (1876 – 1944), who was 17 and living in Victoria at the time of publication. Given the mention of agent Lomas, this potlatch probably took place in the Cowichan district or at Nanaimo.

packed solid, only one portion, which is set apart for sleeping purposes, having any floor.

When we arrived there were about two hundred Indians present, and about twenty whites, who had come to witness the performance. Amongst them was the Indian agent for the district, Mr. Lomas. As we were acquainted with him he secured us seats in the most favorable position and from time to time interpreted to us the meaning of the different dances.

They commenced the performance by giving away about fifty pairs of blankets and a few shawls and other similar articles. Just as they had finished this we heard a loud noise of yelling outside, and we knew the fun was about to commence. Presently the door opened and in came about a dozen [Indians] dressed in costumes representing different animals. As each came inside he would spin round on one foot and make a bow towards the new chief, and then would commence racing and capering round and round the fire. They came in one by one and the last had gone round the fire a couple of times, when, at a signal, they made a rush towards the spectators. The one that came towards us was dressed as a pig, but carried a knife in one hand and a tomahawk or hatchet in the other, which he brandished round and round his head. I am only a small boy and was in the second row of seats, but I felt my blood run cold, and, if there had been any possible way of escape, I would have run for my life, but as the rest did not seem very much terrified I thought it best to remain where I was. Each of the dancers came round in turn and exhibited himself to us and looked very inquisitively into our faces. When each had fully satisfied himself about the audience they all retired and a number of girls took up the dance. Mr. Lomas explained to us that this dance was intended as a prayer for success in hunting during the next year.

I had almost forgotten to describe the music. About a dozen Indians were seated tailor-fashion beside a small log, each having a couple of sticks about a foot long and an inch or so in diameter. They beat on the log with these sticks and all kept time while they sang. As nearly as I can remember the words were "Hi, ya, ha, ha, ha; hi, ya, ha, ha, ha, ha," pronounced in a guttural monotone, and as loud as they could yell it.

The girls all had their hair hanging loose about their shoulders and wore bright-colored petticoats and jackets, but were barefooted. I cannot describe the step used in the dance, but it was not unlike the polka step. each danced alone, and as she swayed back and forth she waved her hand round her head and twirled her fingers. Some of them looked very graceful. Our interpreter told us this dance was called "The Maiden's Prayer," as none but maidens were allowed to take part in it, and that each one prayed for a husband.

The next dance was what we called the feather dance, and while they were preparing for it some of the Indians passed round refreshments in the shape of pilot bread and smoked salmon. Mr. Lomas told us they would be affronted if we did not eat something, so we each took a couple of biscuits and a portion of the fish. I suppose the Indian small boy is like his white brother, or at least he must have that reputation, as they insisted on my having a double portion. I tried a piece of the

salmon, but as it had not been cooked I did not care for it, and put it in my pocket. They must have thought I ate it and enjoyed it immensely, for one of them came along and forced another piece on me, which must have weighed at least a pound. I kept it in my hand until after the dance had begun again and then put it into my pocket. Fish makes a good bait for a mousetrap, so I was provided with bait for another month.

When the music began again a large washtub was brought into the middle of the ring near the fire. About a dozen Indians in full war paint and dressed in buckskin came in, each with an ordinary eagle's feather in his hand. They began dancing round and round the tub – suddenly each threw his feather into the air, when to our intense surprise they remained floating in mid-air, each feather keeping above the chief who had thrown it. In a few minutes the feathers went off in a kind of independent dance, sailing here and there through the room. When beckoned to, each would turn to its station above the head of the chief who threw it, Presently the chiefs stood in a ring round the tub and walked backwards, when the feathers all fell into the tub. The Indians standing round dashed buckets of water on the feathers, and thoroughly soaked them. Suddenly the feathers rose from the water and commenced sailing all round the room, shooting hither and thither. As each chief retired a feather would come sailing from the opposite end of the room and go out with him. We could not discover the means by which it was done, but we were all satisfied there was some trickery about it. The Indians appeared intensely excited about the matter, and gave forth various vocal sounds, which can only be pronounced by an Indian. There was no particular meaning to this dance, it being done to show the whites how clever they were.

Next followed the mourning for the dead, or the sob dance. All the old [women] on the ranch took part in this. They marched round the room once, with disheveled hair and ragged clothing, before the music commenced. Then, with one accord, they began to wail and sob, each one hugging herself and swaying back and forth. Occasionally, one would become frenzied with grief and tear her hair, giving vent to the most doleful wails possible to imagine.

By this time we had become somewhat wearied with the performance and wished to go; but the Indians would not allow us to go before the war dance was over as it would bring bad luck on them, so to please them the rest decided to stay, much to my disappointment, as I was so sleepy and tired that I hardly knew what to do with myself. There were only two more dances, and I assure you I was not sleepy when once they started. The first was a regular war dance, in which an imaginary battle was fought, and ended with a hand-to-hand fight. It was frightful to witness it, even though it was only sham. They yelled with the real war-whoop, and occasionally a man would fall as though he were dead and the process of scalping was gone through. Those who fell groaned most dismally. The new chief led one side, while an old warrior led the attacking party. They both showed considerable military talent. Finally, the attacking party was repulsed with great loss. We all cheered most heartily, which pleased the Indians very much.

The last dance was a general one, in which everybody (except the whites) joined. Each seemed to vie with the other in making a noise, and the racket was terrific. As soon as we possibly could we got away, and arrived at home about two o'clock in the morning.

Boas, F. (1894). *Chinook Texts*. Washington: Government Printing Office. Written by Franz Boas (1858 – 1942).

“Biggest Indian in province buried”²⁸³ (June, 1910)

One of the biggest potlatches held on Vancouver Island in many years is now in progress at Cowichan. The widow of former Chief Bayne, of the Quamichan tribe, and three male members of the tribe are giving the entertainment, which is being attended by nearly five hundred Indians from various Island tribes, and by some from points across the line in Washington.

The potlatch is in memory of Chief Bayne and will last until Tuesday next. It has been in progress now for several days and has been marked by Indian dances and other festivities, which are to be abandoned for the future.

²⁸³ From BIGGEST INDIAN IN PROVINCE BURIED. (1910, June 11). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 5.

FORT RUPERT



Fort Rupert's approximate location on an 1888 map of British Columbia.

“One of the largest”²⁸⁴ (October, 1889)

One of the largest and most valuable Indian Potlatches, or “Give away for 100 per cent return,” will take place at Fort Rupert, near the northern end of this Island, about Christmas Day. The potlatch will be given by Captain Jim²⁸⁵, an aged Indian, who is known from one end of the province to the other. The articles to be lent will comprise 6,600 blankets, 300 pairs silver bracelets (Indian make), 40 large canoes, and muck-a-muck galore in all valued at \$10,000. For this \$10,000 Capt. Jim, according to native custom, will receive within two years \$20,000. Our modern Shylocks will be green with envy to see an Indian beating them out of sight at their own game. The potlatch will embrace nineteen tribes, residing between Qualicum and Fort Rupert. This will make the hundredth potlatch Captain Jim has given, and he intends it to eclipse all former efforts in that line, and judging from the value and quantity of the articles to be “donated,” we should say it was the biggest thing on record. The centurion hero of the potlatch is about 65 years of age, of fine physique and speaks English with remarkable fluency. In the early days of the settlement of this Island, the authorities deemed it necessary to bombard the Fort Rupert Indian Village (the cause has escaped the memory of the writer) and Captain Jim, who was then a noted and valorous War Chief, was taken as hostage.

Several thousand Indians will no doubt take part in this Indian Feast. A law has been passed by the Dominion Parliament putting a stop to these “potlatches,” but

²⁸⁴ From “Hyas Tyhee Potlatch”. (1889, October 8). *Nanaimo Daily News*, p. 5.

²⁸⁵ “Comox, Sept. 27, 1889. Now I, Captain Jim, am going to give a six thousand, 5 hundred dollar potlatch; sometime after Christmas, this winter, to forty-six tribes of Indians. The reason is that the old men that ain’t able to work, it is to keep them from starvation; which is a good deal better than gambling and drink. [Signed] CAPTAIN JIM. P.S. – You can put this in your valuable paper.” PROVINCIAL POINTS. (1889, October 16). *Weekly News-Advertiser* (Vancouver), p. 5.

the Old Indians do not understand this infringement on what they justly consider their hereditary rights. The practice, we admit, is pernicious in the extreme, but its suppression should be gradual, so that with the present elder generation of Indians the feast should die out. It is well to prevent the young Indians from continuing the practice, but those who have looked upon it as a life-long duty should be allowed to continue it, until they at least are gathered to the happy hunting grounds. The greatest curse is the liquor that is taken to these potlatches by depraved and hardened white men, but this the authorities by a little energy could readily prevent.

“One grand round of merriment”²⁸⁶ (February, 1899)

The Indians of Fort Rupert are going to spend the coming spring and summer in one grand round of merriment. So says a resident of the historical Indian settlement in a letter to the Colonist. Last year their potlatch was disturbed by the fishing season, the agents of the canners inducing the Indians to abandon their festivities for the more civilized method of earning a living. This year the natives say they will allow nothing to interfere with them, for their experience of last year showed them that they can do better by potlatching than by fishing.

The fun will commence with the biggest potlatch that has been held on the Coast. Chief Wannuck will be the big tye²⁸⁷ of the event and he has invited all the Northern tribes to be present and partake of his hospitality, which will be of a princely character. He will distribute among the members of his tribe and his guests 12,600 “blankets’ worth” of goods, as follows: 8,000 blankets, 2,000 blankets’ worth of buttons and bracelets, 1,200 blankets’ worth of food, 200 blankets’ worth of food [sic.], 700 blankets’ worth of basins and pails and 500 blankets’ worth of head dresses. If this does not raise the enthusiasm of the most stoic siwash, then nothing will. It is safe to say that there will be a hiyu²⁸⁸ time in old Fort Rupert for many a night, for although the distribution of goods only takes place during the day time there will be dances to while away the evenings.

“A potlatch of potlatches”²⁸⁹ (March, 1899)

News was brought by the steamer Willapa of a “delate hiyu” potlatch now being held at Fort Rupert. The erstwhile quiet and sparsely occupied Indian village, when the steamer left, was crowded with the swarthy tribesmen, nearly twelve hundred having gathered there, and more were coming in daily. It seems that the midwinter dances had been started but two weeks when the chief of the Fort Rupert Indians sent his messengers forth to call the tribes from the island rancheries and the hamlets of the adjacent mainland to a monstrous potlatch – a potlatch of potlatches.

²⁸⁶ From INDIANS TO CELEBRATE. (1899, February 15). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 3

²⁸⁷ Chinook for ‘chief’.

²⁸⁸ In this context, Chinook for ‘grand’.

²⁸⁹ From A Siwash Festival. (1899, March 14). *Victoria Times*, p. 3.

The object of the gathering in the first place was to cement a friendship with the various tribes, and that this might be successfully accomplished, the chief of the Fort Ruperts decided to establish a society, *a la* Free Masons, among the northern natives. All who come into the organization were to have their brows decked with turbans of red cedar bark, for, according to the superstitions of the legend-loving aborigines, the red cedar is supposed to possess a charm which worked into the mind and caused the wearer to have a more peaceable nature.

Accordingly the klotchmen were sent into the woods to gather the red cedar bark, and basketful after basketful was brought to the peace-loving chief of the Fort Ruperts. Every Indian who came to the potlatch was to be turbaned with the bark, as the Odd Fellow is with regalia, as an insignia of membership in the new society.

The primary cause of the chief's movement was that the tongue of the scandal-monger was making ill-feeling and wider-growing breaches between the tribes, for like the people who live within the city wall, the Indians have also among them those who delight to spread calumny and back-bite their fellows. If there was to be peace among the tribes, the chief argued, all this must be stopped, and to bring about friendliness the new order was to be established.

When the klotchmen returned from the woods carrying the big packs of the peace-producing bark, the Fort Rupert tribesmen forsook their dances, and gathered around the group of totems in front of the chief's hut, where, with due pomp and circumstance, the chief initiated them into the new order and bound the bark around their dusky foreheads.

Thus decorated they awaited the coming of the visiting siwashess. The first contingent arrived some ten hours after the invitation, when seven long war canoes swung into the bay from the northward and poured some hundred or more natives onto the beach. When the strange bark turbans were explained, they consented to obey the adjuncts of the peace order, and, like the Fort Ruperts, they were initiated and had the cedar bandages bound around their heads. Tribe after tribe came, until at length the beach was crowded with the big war canoes for hundreds of yards, and all acknowledged that the chief's object was a very laudable one, and consented to wear the bark headdress.

On Thursday last, however, there arrived one tribe who refused to join the peace society. A sturdy young chieftain from the mainland arrived with nine long canoes and between sixty and seventy [Indians]. As he swung into the canoe-littered cove in front of the village, he, like the previous arrivals, was astonished to see the strange headgear of those on shore, and, standing up in his foremost canoe, he enquired from the crowd who awaited his landing as to what it was, and what it meant.

The tribes, who were stationed in separate groups, tribe by tribe, along the beach to welcome Chief Jim, told him that it was because a society had been formed to stop all quarreling.

Chief Jim at once refused to join the new order, and with his fellow tribesmen said he would not wear the cedar bark. He stood erect in the foremost canoe, hurling

his refusal to the assembled tribes, waving a big sword frantically all the while, and making a big show of defiance.

One by one the tribes began to argue with him, each tribe, beginning with the Fort Ruperts, who were stationed at the upper end of the battalion of tribesmen, telling him of the benefits which they hoped would accrue from the new institution.

Chief Jim, though, was fast in his resolution not to agree to wear the bark.

Then, finding he would not yield to cajoling, the tribes one after the other began to abuse him, calling him and his followers all the vile epithets the siwash vernacular possesses. They were angered, and the bark seemed to have lost all its peace-producing power. Some were for going into the canoes and bringing the malcontents in by force. What might have been is not known, for, seeing that if it came to a question of force he and his men would be overpowered, Chief Jim submitted.

Standing at the bow of his foremost canoe, he ordered his followers to rise, and all made sweeping bows to the assembled tribes, saying, as they did:

“We are dogs; we submit; we are dogs.”

Then, springing to his feet and waving his sword, the belligerent chief shouted: “Why do you talk so much? Do you not see that we have come across big waters? Do you not know we are hungry, and my men suffer from the cold? Give us something to eat, and not so many words.”

“Come ashore,” replied the chief of the Fort Ruperts, “come ashore. We have an empty house for you, and fires and food. Come ashore.”

Then the little flotilla of war canoes swept in and the Indians landed. Led by Chief Jim they walked proudly, with heads thrown back, through the lines of the assembled tribes. They walked in silence, for the others all held aloof, and none spoke. They went into a big barn in which a huge log fire was burning, and all took off their shoes and foot coverings, and with their feet to the fire laid themselves full length on their backs in a ring around the fire. Men, women and children all lay, none deigning to lift their heads for four hours.

The chief of the Fort Ruperts came in and offered food, but none would accept. Chief Jim’s only reply to his offer was, “We are dogs. We are slaves.” Then, with the chiefs of the other assembled tribes around him, the chief explained fully the objects of his society, and asked if they would not join and be friends.

Chief Jim, however, was still belligerent.

“What can we do?” he said. “You have us in a hole like dogs. We have to wear your marks. We are dogs.”

“Yes,” replied the assembled chiefs. “We’ve got you here, and you’ve got to wear it.”

“Well, we submit,” said Chief Jim, “for we are made, like dogs.”

In response to a signal from the Fort Rupert chief a number of klotchmen then stepped into the barn and bound the heads of the prostate men with the bark. At the same time a terrible-looking apparition sprang into the building from the roof, and with demoniacal howls he rushed to and fro among the prostate siwashes. This was supposed to be the evil spirit which had come to scare the mainland Indians into submission. It was one of the Fort Ruperts, who, with masks and wolf skins, looked

like a strange devil. He had been hiding in the woods and came to frighten the tribe who lay around the fire in answer to a signal.

After they had lain in silence, not daring to raise their heads, and not moving despite the heat, the stoical Jim and his tribe sprang up at 9 o'clock and, as they had submitted, were received as friends by the other tribes. Eagle feathers were placed in their bark turbans, and they were hailed as "hiyu tillicums" by all.

Peace was restored, and for having submitted, the chiefs presented Chief Jim with a big canoe. According to siwash custom, however, he must not keep this craft. He must give it away or break it up, and just to show them that he is "big medicine," Chief Jim is going to break it up.

With the restoration of peace each chief sent out his favorite dancers and they began to dance with the object of seeing which tribe would have the honor of the longest-winded dancer.

Then came another protest from Chief Jim. He had not come to fight for supremacy with dancers, he said, but with blankets, and he brought out a big copper box, engraved with a strange collection of characters, in which were 6,000 blankets. This it was determined to break, and the tribesmen were then to scramble for the 6,000 blankets.

Blankets galore would then be distributed, for, according to siwash etiquette, the other tribes must also break boxes of blankets, and the tribe which distributes in this fashion the most blankets is to be declared victor.

When the Willapa left, the boxes of blankets were still intact, but it was expected that the scramble for them would not long be deferred. After the scrimmage for them the assemblage will hold a series of dances of all sorts and kinds, and then come the feasts.

The breaking of the blanket boxes is postponed until the arrival of the other tribes bidden to join the feast, all of which are expected to join the new order. Should they not do so of their own free will, they will be initiated by force, as were Chief Jim and his [Indians].

A strange sight witnessed by a passenger of the Willapa who was present at the scene above described, was that of an old klootchman who was distributing 500 blankets among the Fort Rupert tribesmen. An interesting story hangs on this little occurrence. The old [woman] was distributing the blankets to pay up a debt she owed the tribe. Her son had lately returned to Fort Rupert after serving a term of five years in the New Westminster penitentiary for having killed a fellow tribesman. When her son's case came up for trial she engaged a lawyer, and being too poor to pay for his assistance, she asked the tribe for assistance, which they gave. During the five years her son spent in jail the old klootchman was gathering her blankets together, and after her lengthy struggle had at last obtained a sufficient number to liquidate her debt. There, with the visiting tribes looking on, she was throwing the blankets around among the Fort Ruperts to pay for her struggle for her son's liberty.

While engaged in the distribution the old klootchman from time to time raised her shrill voice, and with her arm outstretched towards one of the Fort Rupert

Indians present, she again and again charged him with having been the murderer, for whose crime her son has spent five years in prison.

The accused man hung down his head in silence and never spoke – in fact, there was a strange stillness until the last of the 500 blankets was given out, and the old, withered siwash woman had passed through the lines of tribesmen out into the mysterious dimness of the night.

The potlatch is likely to continue for some time yet.

Those who have witnessed potlatches have often commented upon the way the Indians stab each other and draw much blood. A passenger by the Willapa who saw this one, investigated how this was done while at Fort Rupert, and made the discovery that the stabbed man was not cut, and the blood which followed the jabbing of a knife into him did not come from his body. The dancers, it was found, bound kelp around their bodies containing blood, and when they were stabbed the blood oozed out of the kelp, though to those standing around it seemed to come from their bodies.

“Chief Wannuck’s potlatch”²⁹⁰ (April, 1899)

Fort Rupert, April 14 – The dancing of Chief Wannuck is ended after he has distributed good things amongst his guests, as follows: 1,500 blankets’ worth of silver bracelets, 400 blankets’ worth of blue pearls, 200 blankets’ worth of wood embellished with sea otter’s teeth, 830 blankets’ worth of provisions, 421 blankets’ worth of brass rings, 536 blankets’ worth of beads, 1,180 blankets’ worth of basins, pails, kettles, tea-cups and spoons, [and] 1,294 blankets to Knight’s Inlet and Kingcome Inlet Indians, as they are going into their oolachan fishing. Five of the other tribes remain, and will also partake of the potlatch in a few days.

Chief Wannuck’s potlatch is the greatest in Indian history. Everybody is well satisfied. The Kingcome Inlet Indians stayed here only a few days to receive their gifts, and they went away rejoicing. Some of the Fort Ruperts are showing jealousy that Wannuck is looked upon as a hyas-tyee. They are said to have written to the authorities at Alert Bay, reporting to [them] that Chief Wannuck’s son has been eating a “dead body”; and W. Brotchie, ex-schoolteacher, is said to have seen the particular dead body before it was eaten.

The writer of this message hopes that the authorities will take no note of what some “kultus” Indians may say, as it would cost the government a good deal of trouble, as well as money. The writer knows what the “dead body” was, and there was no evil in Chief Wannuck’s dance. The Indians were really happy from the very first to the very last. Those who know Chief Wannuck’s character will find this to be true.

²⁹⁰ From AN OBSERVER. (1899, April 24). VERY SWELL POTLATCH. *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 1.

“A great reunion of the natives”²⁹¹ (March, 1904)

There has been a great reunion of the natives at Fort Rupert, the gathering being the largest seen at that point for years. It looks like the old Hudson’s Bay [Company] days. Nine tribes are to be represented – the Fla-wa-tsish, Turner Island; Ach-wa-mess, Westman Sound; Gua-wa-he-no, Wells Pass; Mam-a-lil-a-kwa, Village Island; Tsar-wa-te-no, Kingcombe Inlet; Ma-tal-puy, Turner Island; Nim-kish, Alert Bay; [and the] Clat-la-se-qua, Hope Island. The Noc-wa-tas, Cape Mudge, and Kos-ke-moes have yet to arrive.

The wild orgies of the Ha-matse ceremony were in progress during my stay at Fort Rupert. Three different Ha-matsi were racing about the ranch at night. Ha-matse is a naked slave from the woods, with four or five others partially dressed to hold him in check. They race at full speed about the place and in and out of the homes. They carry native whistles and make an unearthly noise as they go about. There was no actual biting done owing possibly to my [police] presence, but it was evident the old-time spirit was moving as strongly as ever. The poor missionary at Fort Rupert is a back number for the time being.

The absurdity of the contention that there is no harm in the potlatch is well demonstrated. It has brought all these natives together, and among them are a number of ambitious young chiefs who borrow at 100 per cent. all the money and blankets they can get. The return of two for one is the Indian “uncle”-rate. It means the very essence of favoritism. Instead of giving to the poor, the spoils are handed over in large amounts to other chiefs. The wealth accumulated is converted into coppers called “kla-qua”. These range in size, some as large as four feet in length, 18 inches wide, and a quarter of an inch thick. They are beat into a peculiar shape with an odd figure carved upon the face. Each has a name. The “kla-qua” has its value, from \$100 to \$10,000 each. There are about five of ancient origin that are probably \$40,000, according to Indian valuation.

The potlatch is the real cause of the slow advancement of these tribes. People, including missionaries, knowing them, fully realize this, but the general public and the government do not.

The young Indian wants to become a chief. He saves all his earnings, and gets along with his old shack; appearance and comforts do not appeal to him, and good clothes and a nice home don’t make him a chief in the eyes of his tribe. He finally gets enough to give a potlatch or becomes possessed of one of those copper gods. His friends then gather around, sing a great song, Ha-matse appears for his benefit, and he is recognized a tyee. Perhaps he is given the name of some ancient warrior; possibly he may have one pair of pants, but such apparel is a small consideration.

It is a pity the Canadian government, through the Indian Department, cannot take a hand with the people that are endeavoring to better the condition of the

²⁹¹ From Leeson, B.W. et al. (1904, March 15). TRIBES GATHERING AT BIG POTLATCH. *Victoria Times*, p. 8. Written by Benjamin William Leeson (1866 – 1948), who was at the time a provincial constable.

natives. The simplest way would be to buy at the Indians' value the few largest "kla-qua" left. Deprived of these, and with a strict enforcement of the law, there need be no potlatch. This would accomplish more in one year than the missions and industrial schools do in twenty-five, and at less expense in the end. The buying of the few large "kla-qua" would put the leaders of the tribes out of business, and render the task of stopping a future potlatch easy, as there would be no large interests involved. The gathering of many in one house and the camping of others on the beach as at present at Fort Rupert tends to demoralize them.

[ADDENDUM BY AN ANONYMOUS REPORTER]

Mr. Leeson was shown specimens of composition, drawing, etc., done at the Industrial School, Alert Bay, that would do credit to any white child. The teacher, Mr. Corker, stated there was no question of the children's ability to acquire an education. The only trouble is to get their attendance, the potlatch being the primary cause.

The teacher mentioned a case in point. He has at present three young men learning trades; one in particular is becoming an engineer. They have all gone to the potlatch at Fort Rupert, where the engineer will undoubtedly come under old influences. Through envy of others, etc., he may borrow all he can to give a potlatch to gain a certain standing in his tribe, and put in the remainder of his life striving to hold that position and paying his debts, according to Indian custom. The education he has acquired, and the engineering, will be gradually given up under this pressure, and he will return to the level of his older tribesmen.

Mr. Leeson says the local Indian agent, Mr. De Beck, understands the conditions thoroughly, and is fully aware of the baneful results of these large gatherings. He would disperse them and send them back to their own ranches if the authorities would sustain him in doing so.

One old resident in the district has studied the natives for years, and claims the conditions have reached such a crisis now that if four or five chiefs were taken out of the gathering and given six months [in prison] each, the celebration would cease to exist. The same man says that many of the younger generation would welcome this step.

"Will last from three to five months"²⁹² (December, 1907)

Three thousand Siwashes will gather at Fort Rupert early in January to participate in one of the greatest potlatches ever held on this coast since the white man arrived on the scene.

It is expected that the festivities will last from three to five months, and that during that time thousands of dollars' worth of blankets and other articles will be distributed as gifts by several hundred Indians who wish to make good fellows of themselves.

News of the coming potlatch was brought to the city by Provincial Constable Wollacott of Alert Bay.

²⁹² From GREAT POTLACH ON NORTHERN COAST. (1905, December 27). *The Province*, p. 1.

“I expect that the Indians will gather at Fort Rupert soon after the beginning of the new year,” said Constable Wollacott to-day, “and it would not surprise me a bit if trouble, possibly murder, was done along the northern coast as a result of the potlatch. The members of fourteen tribes are expected to take part in the affair, which may last anywhere from three to five months. The tribes should average about two hundred men and women in strength.

“It is estimated that the gifts disposed of by an Indian at these large potlatches keep him poor and in debt for about ten years. Oh, no, all the Indians do not break even on a potlatch, for the reason that not every man attending the gathering gives away his stuff. Comparatively few are donors at a potlatch.”

The last potlatch at Fort Rupert was productive of one murder. The victim was a woman, who was killed for about \$100 in money, which she had on her person. The murderer was hanged at New Westminster last summer.

“A big potlatch”²⁹³ (January, 1908)

The biggest potlatch ever held on Vancouver Island within recent years will commence on Friday at Fort Rupert. It is estimated in all two thousand Indians will take part.

The first announcement of the potlatch was made by Sun How, chief of the Quathiaski Indians, to Captain C. D. Nerontsos, of the Queen City, which arrived in port last night from Hardy Bay. The old chief came aboard the Queen City at Cape Mudge, where a potlatch is now in progress, and asked the captain if he could carry the seven hundred Indians at Cape Mudge up to Fort Rupert by Friday. Arrangements were made for towing the Indians in a scow which will be taken up from Victoria when the vessel starts out on her trip north on Wednesday. Five hundred will be taken in the scow, and the boat will then return for the remainder.

Already a large number of Campbell River Indians, and Alert Bay Indians are on the spot, and several hundred will arrive at about the same time as the inmates of the scow drawn by the Queen City. For the most part, they are coming from Malaspina Inlet and Cortes Island.

²⁹³ From A BIG POTLATCH. (1908, January 24). *Victoria Times*, p. 9.

“Eagle Dance is feature of potlatch”²⁹⁴ (March, 1909)

Steamer Amur, which arrived from the west coast yesterday, brought news that a big potlatch was in progress at Fort Rupert. The main feature of this potlatch was the Eagle dance. This was performed by a girl, the belle of the tribe, who was attired in feathers and with the mask of an eagle on her head. In this guise she danced around the fire, making the eagle mask blink its eyes and leer in the most approved fashion of eagles. Now and then she made a peck at one of the young men, and if he was struck it was an omen of ill-luck.

Another interesting dance seen by a number of white people was the Amatas, or dance of the medicine man. This man makes his appearance in a very sudden and violent manner. With a most unearthly yell he bursts into the great potlatch house with four or five men hanging on to him. He frees himself and bounds around the great fire making a plunge first at one and then at another. His agility is said to be marvelous. His aim is to bite a piece out of one of them, and the lucky man who receives a bite is immune from disease and trouble. The man is supposed to do his best to get out of the way. In the olden days the medicine man became so savage that blood flowed freely.

The wild man is attired in paint with a wreath of cedar bark around his arms and legs. His principal qualifications are a ferocious expression and the ability to utter unearthly yells. Now and then one of the men would slip out and fetch a half-pailful of whale oil, which was dashed on the fire, making a great blaze. This always set the medicine man off again with greater vigor than ever.

²⁹⁴ From EAGLE DANCE IS FEATURE OF POTLATCH. (1909, March 20). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 8.

NANAIMO



Nanaimo located on an 1888 map of British Columbia

“Great potlatch”²⁹⁵ (June, 1867)

This account was written by W. H. Lomas years before he was appointed Indian Agent to the Cowichan district.

GREAT INDIAN FESTIVAL

Wishing to make myself acquainted with as many of the native customs as possible, I succeeded, with some difficulty, in inducing some of the Quamichan tribe to let me accompany them to Nanaimo; their only objection to my going was, that the chief of the entertaining tribe might not be pleased to see me. The following are extracts from my journal.

QUAMICHAN VILLAGE, AND THE START

June 10 – Breakfast at 3 a.m. After some little delay, and several false starts, we got off, four large canoes starting at once. Had a pleasant run down the river, though not without some danger to the canoes, owing to their size, and the many sharp turns in the stream. The four canoes are owned by one man, and loaded with blankets, mats, flour, biscuits and potatoes – the edible part of the cargo was taken as a present to the entertaining chief. After rounding the point in the Cowichan Bay, we got the wind and tide with us up the Narrows (Sansum); but here we had more delay, as most of the tribe were camped on either side drying clams and gathering roots. We made several calls, taking up fresh passengers, until we had sixteen persons in each canoe. Several of the canoes went into the store at Maple Bay,

²⁹⁵ Lomas, W. H. (1868). *Ninth annual report of the Columbia Mission for the year 1867*. London: R. Clay, Sons, and Taylor. W. H. Lomas died in 1899. At the time this account was written, in June, 1867, he was described as a “Catechist”. He would later become an Indian Agent for the Canadian government.

amongst them the owner of the canoe I was in; so when we arrived near the Pee-nahlahhuts village, above the Chemainus River, we went ashore to camp and wait for the rest of our party, who did not arrive until after sundown, when I was sorry to find most of the men in a most helpless state of intoxication, the women having worked the canoe up from the store.

While in camp, about twenty-three canoes passed, all bound for the potlatch. The Pee-nahlahhuts seem to be rather a large tribe, I should think. There were about 300 in the village; but the island on which they live has no good land, so they plant potatoes near the Chemainus River. In the evening I was taken to see a man with a bad carbuncle on his back. I did what little I could for him, for which they seemed very thankful. I spread my blankets at the foot of a large cedar, where the Indians would not sleep, for they said some of their tribe had died there three years ago of smallpox.

PREPARATION

June 11 – A hurried breakfast, then all hands at work painting their faces. Every woman seems to have brought a looking-glass; and great pains are taken to cover the face completely with a bright vermillion; the men being distinguished by strips of black over the red. A fair wind would have been very agreeable this morning, as, before leaving the Pee-nahlahhuts village, we shipped a quantity of fish in an advanced state of decomposition, the smell of which does not improve that of the oil which was used this morning.

THE CEREMONY OF RECEPTION

On our arrival at the Lyacsun village, we were received with much ceremony by the chief Ce-ō-wholar-tsa, who seemed very pleased to see me, especially when he knew for what reason I had come. Fresh parties arrived every few minutes until about six o'clock, when all were shown into the houses, which presented a very clean appearance, being hung round with new mats, &c. A bowl of water was then brought round for each guest to wash his hands in, and this was quickly followed by the supper, consisting of boiled sturgeon and biscuit. The chief came to me, and offered very kindly to find an Indian who could cook for white men; but, as I had brought plenty of provisions with me, I did not trouble him. Half the night was spent in singing, &c.; but, besides this, there was a good deal of drunkenness. Fortunately, the good feeling of the rest prevented any harm being done.

DISTRIBUTION OF GIFTS

June 12 – The Chemainus tribe – the last of the visitors – arrived to-day. Before coming to the shore, they lashed eight large canoes together, across which they laid boards, and on the stage they danced and sang until a canoe was sent out to them with a present of blankets and muskets. Then they began their *potlatch* by throwing some hundred blankets in the water a short distance from the shore, for which the young men swam and fought. Goat skins and muskets were disposed of in a like manner, the latter often striking the heads of the swimmers.

I counted 120 canoes drawn up on the beach, and I think there are at least 1,100 Indians here, belonging to 14 different tribes; but, though their languages seem very much alike, a great many of them cannot understand each other, and speak in

Chinook. Those tribes, coming from the towns, appear very much inferior in looks, &c., to those from the country districts, while the latter, as a rule, abstain from strong drink. At this *potlatch* there was enough whisky to make the whole number present intoxicated, and I was very pleased to find that only a very small proportion of the whole took any of it.

At night I got a long talk with the chief and I was very pleased to find that I could understand a good deal that they said, although I could not answer them correctly in their own tongue. When I explained to them the reason I was learning their language, they seemed all very pleased, and were very anxious that I should visit all their houses. They seemed very much ashamed when any of their young men got drunk; and certainly they set a good example by not tasting liquor themselves. The Cowichan chiefs said that my being there kept many of their tribes from the drink, as they would be very much ashamed to see me afterwards if they had “*chacö-piltons*” (become foolish).

June 13 – The day spent in small *potlatches*, interspersed with dancing, &c. The heat to-day was very great, as there is no shade round the village, which is backed by steep cliffs. This, together with the glare of the sun on the white beach, and red faces, is very unpleasant; and, to make it worse, the smell of rotten fish in the houses makes them not at all a desirable retreat.

To-morrow is to be the last and great *potlatch*, and I am not very sorry, for I am getting tired of so many painted faces – mine being the only one amongst the 1,100 that is devoid of vermillion. If I perfectly understood their language, and brought a tent for myself, it would be different.

SELF-INFLICTED FINES

One man, who was drunk yesterday, has to-day been made ashamed of himself by his friends; and so, to pacify them, he got into his canoe, and threw several blankets into the water, and then a great number swam for the canoe (value about \$30). This was repeated several times during the day by others; so drunkenness is rather an expensive habit.

THE GRAND DISTRIBUTION

June 14 – All commenced packing up at daybreak, and when all things are placed in the canoes, the grand *potlatch* begins. It consists of some 2,000 blankets, 100 muskets, a number of brass kettles, and many other smaller article – all of which are given by the chief, who, with his wife and family, are stationed on a stage erected for the purpose high above the heads of all.

These blankets, &c., are really only lent, as, at the end of a certain time, the same chief receives them back; but, out of the 2,000, about 400 were thrown down at intervals amongst the young men, who have long poles in their hands, with which they struggle for them; and, in case of several getting their poles fast in the blanket, they are cut or torn up and divided. These blankets they are not expected to return, and this serves to keep up an excitement during the whole day. About six o'clock it was all over, and all the canoes pushed off, and made a very pretty sight, half of them having their sails set. The whole affair passed off very well; and I question whether the same number of white men, with the same amount of intoxicating liquor, would

have behaved so peaceably. I do not regret having gone with them, as, although I may not have done much good, I have learned a good deal, and satisfied the Cowichan tribes that I take an interest in all their doings.

I hope before long we may be able to turn these large gatherings to some good account, giving the natives a higher ambition than the lending of blankets.

“Kloshe Potlatch”²⁹⁶ (June, 1874)

The Potlatch is divided into two classes – “Cultus Potlatch” and “Kloshe Potlatch” – the main feature of the former is to take blankets, cut them up into strips and pass them from hand to hand, and from wigwam to wigwam, and he that gets the most, is the “tyee.” The kloshe potlatch is on a different scale, and partakes a good deal of the principle, - “give a sprat to catch a herring.” The Nanaimo tribe, who have invited their friends from far and wide, giving to each according to some scale of their own, blankets, &c., which are carefully kept and have to be returned at a certain time with more than legal interest. This custom we think must have originated with the early traders, so as to create a demand for blankets.

“Wiping out the disgrace”²⁹⁷ (March, 1876)

Last week the “Doctor” of the Nanaimo Indians was sentenced to 7 days’ imprisonment for getting drunk. To wipe out the professional disgrace he has had to “potlatch hyu” blankets and grub. It seems that Constable Stewart set the “Doctor” to a menial but necessary piece of work, and he thereby soiled his hands. To wash the stain of disgrace off those hands, he had to “potlatch” ten blankets, valued at about \$30. Verily this practice is good for storekeepers.

“Generous”²⁹⁸ (June, 1876)

Dick (the fisherman), Nanaimo Indian, will “potlatch” 1000 blankets to about 500 New Westminster, Cowichan, Penelicut and Chemainus Indians, on Monday next commencing at 10 o’clock. Yesterday Comox Tom “potlatched” 45 sacks of flour.

“Cowichan Jim”²⁹⁹ (January, 1879)

“Cowichan Jim” will shortly hold a great potlatch at Nanaimo camp. Two thousand [Indians] and others will congregate.

²⁹⁶ From Ye Grand Potlatch. (1874, June 17). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3.

²⁹⁷ From Wiping out the Disgrace. (1876, March 8). *Nanaimo Daily News*, p. 3.

²⁹⁸ From Generous. (1876, June 10). *Nanaimo Daily News*, p. 3.

²⁹⁹ From Nanaimo. (1879, January 5). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

“Recently married”³⁰⁰ (July, 1885)

On Thursday about 60 canoes of Alberni Indians arrived in this harbor. The Alberni Chief will give a grand potlatch to the Nanaimo Chief, Quenam, whose daughter he has recently married. Yesterday morning they carried out the reception custom of driving a whale into the Nanaimo camp. In this instance, the monster of the deep was an imitation, made from a canoe covered with cloth. As it crossed the harbor the pursuing canoes fired several broadsides at the imitation whale, keeping it in the right course for the camp, where it grounded. Last evening a great feast was in progress at the Nanaimo camp.

“The annual potlatch”³⁰¹ (June, 1889)

The Indians of the Coast are preparing for their annual potlatch, which takes place in the near future. In view of the approaching event, a large number of natives have arrived from Fort Rupert and other places. About three hundred and fifty in all, forty canoes, have cast their tents close to the City Foundry and about 300 more are expected daily. A great many citizens have made a point of visiting those already here and posting themselves on the manners and customs of the aborigines, unpolluted by the debasing influences of white civilization.

“A large attendance of pale faces”³⁰² (1895)

A “Bear” dance by four Cowichan Indians, and the christening of two Cowichan Indian girls, and giving them the names of the wives of noted war chiefs of the Cowichan tribe, were additions to the usual routine at the Indian Potlatch this afternoon. There was a large attendance of pale faces this afternoon, including members of the Pauline Hall Opera Company. The dance will be continued this evening and tomorrow.

“The loss of the historic dance house”³⁰³ (1900)

A fire destroyed two dwellings and Senia’s big dance house on the Nanaimo Indian Reservation, this morning at 3:30 o’clock. The origin of the fire is not known, and the Indians have sent for Agent Robertson, also to some of the tribe on the Fraser, to come and hold an inquest.

The fire started in old Bob’s house, and soon spread to Senia’s dwelling, and from there to his immense dance house. All the buildings were completely consumed, with their contents. Senia’s loss was very heavy, as he had hundreds of dollars’ worth of blankets, the accumulations of years, destroyed with his dwelling. It was Senia’s

³⁰⁰ From NANAIMO NOTES. (1885, July 6). *Victoria Daily Standard*, p. 3.

³⁰¹ From The Annual Potlatch. (1889, June 14). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 2.

³⁰² From Brief Mention. (1895, October 30). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 4.

³⁰³ From Fire at the Reservation. (1900, July 20). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 1.

intention soon to give a grand potlatch, and thereby ennoble himself in the tribe's history; now the poor fellow sees the means by which his future greatness was to be attained, a heap of ill-smelling ashes.

Indian Instructor Wellwood rang the church bell, thinking that the city fire brigade might respond, but the alarm was not heard.

This morning there was much lamentation at the Reservation among Indians generally, as they look upon the loss of the historic dance house as in a sense a personal one, and those blankets – well, they had an interest in them, too; for was it not by those very blankets that Senia, one of their tribe, was about to become a great man, and thereby shed his glory (not mentioning blankets) upon all of them?

“Jimmie Fraser is the dancer”³⁰⁴ (January, 1902)

One of the largest Indian potlatches ever held on the coast is now going on at Nanaimo, or, at least, on the Indian reserve near the city. Last night a big dance was held, and to-night another weird festival will be the principal attraction for the visitors to the peculiar celebration.

Jimmie Fraser, the most expert dancer among all the Indians of the coast, will be in attendance this evening, to appear in all the fantastic dresses of his forefathers, with which he has for years delighted the native hearts.

Passengers from Nanaimo this morning say that many of the townspeople of Nanaimo had been out to see the preliminary ceremonies, and say that the dances are very well carried out and in the native costume the Indians look very picturesque. All objectionable features, which have been from time to time interfered with by the authorities, have been eliminated from the program.

Jimmie Fraser is said to be the only direct descendant of the ancient dancers, who now appears in public in the councils of the chiefs, and is consequently a very important personage.

“Fell into a big fire”³⁰⁵ (January, 1906)

While the Indians were making preparations for the potlatch for last Wednesday, a young Indian girl about 15 years of age fell into a big fire and was severely burned. The potlatch was postponed for that night, and the injuries of the girl attended to.

The next night amid all the weird proceedings of the relics of paganism the potlatch was proceeded with, the young girl lying in a nearby tent, where she was visited by many white ladies who were spectators at the potlatch.

Friday and Saturday the girl grew rapidly worse, and Monday morning succumbed to her injuries. She was a daughter of the well-known character Indian

³⁰⁴ From JIMMIE FRASER IS THE DANCER. (1902, January 8). *The Province*, p. 6.

³⁰⁵ From CITY NEWS IN BRIEF. (1906, January 19). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 5. Originally published in the *Nanaimo Free Press*.

Johnnie, but had been adopted and was living with Albert Westley and his wife on the reserve.

“Hundreds of Indians gather for potlatch”³⁰⁶ (June, 1911)

NANAIMO, June 13 – An event of unusual interest to some 300 adult Indians was brought to a close on the reservation here by the singing of a song, hundreds of years old, followed by a full dress dance, in which eight husky lads played the prominent part.

For some three weeks past the natives have been gathering here. Indians from Cape Mudge, Comox, Victoria, Cowichan, Kok-si-lah, Quamichan, Clam-clem-e-lets, Musqueam, Kuper Island and Duncan, with the Nanaimos, have had the privilege of straightening up matters and paying debts of twenty years’ standing, as well as those of more recent date.

As the old people can neither read nor write they must perforce have witnesses to their business transactions.

OLD DEBTS ARE PAID

While the Chinook word for “potlatching” means “giving,” it also carries the meaning of “taking”. While in some cases “cultus potlatches,” or free gifts are distributed, in the main, the money handed out or the blankets given are simply loans for the future or the payments of debts of longer or more recent standing. An Indian’s debts are never outlawed. If on account of unfortunate circumstances, a man dies without paying his honest debts, his wife or sons and daughters or more distant relatives feel that a moral obligation rests upon them, which at such gatherings they duly discharge. The amount is paid in full with interest. This (the interest) is usually given as a “cultus potlatch,” in which all who can get it take a share. As there is more or less mixing up in marriages amongst the different tribes, the bonds given and presents received on such occasions have their peculiar place in such gatherings. Enlarged photos of dead relatives are at such times unveiled with ancient form and ceremony, while kind acts performed and brave deeds done are held in everlasting remembrance by those who are their lineal descendants.

GENERAL CONDUCT GOOD

Other features of the potlatch are not quite so commendable, but it is due to the Indians that this fact be placed on record, that while they have been together their conduct has been very becoming, and would compare very favorably with a similar gathering of white persons. There has been very little whiskey in evidence and no arrests have been made. During Monday afternoon the chiefs of the various tribes in attendance made speeches complimenting the members of their respective tribes on their good conduct during their stay in Nanaimo, the speakers being listened to attentively and heartily applauded. Today they separate and return to their homes, happy for having the privilege of performing what is considered a sacred duty.

³⁰⁶ From HUNDREDS OF INDIANS GATHER FOR POTLATCH. (1911, June 14). *Vancouver Sun*, p. 4.

“Day-long potlatch is held at Nanaimo”³⁰⁷ (February, 1938)

Indians of Vancouver Island and a number of mainland centers revived an established tradition here recently, when they assembled at No. 1 Indian Reserve for a dawn-to-dark potlatch.

With 800 natives as participants, Nanaimo again lived up to its Indian name, which means “meeting place of the tribe,” and a program that included dancing to the drumming [of] native tom-toms and a banquet of native foods showed that the Indians had not lost the spirit of the old days.

The potlatch, which was given to celebrate the wedding of a young couple on the Nanaimo reserve, may be one of the last of its kind to be held in British Columbia, according to tribal leaders. It is the first to be held for many years at Nanaimo.

Potlatches are banned under British Columbia law, owing to the fact that many natives impoverished themselves by over-lavish gifts, but special sanction was obtained for the Nanaimo celebration. The couple being married were Daniel Brown and Ethel Joe, both of whom carry the blood of early Nanaimo chiefs.

“Potlatch dance period ending”³⁰⁸ (February, 1947)

Indians from practically every reserve in British Columbia are represented in the crowds which have been frequenting the Nanaimo Reserve longhouse for a few nights past. It is the period of what was formerly the potlatch season, but while much of the ill-placed “bankruptcy” generosity of the Indians had been eliminated from these annual tribal visitations, they still gather for their nightly dances and weird ritual ceremonies. If [the] usual schedule is maintained, the Nanaimo dances will end on Thursday night, and the Indian delegates from many reserves will move down to Saanich for the next series.

It is an eerie sight greeting the visitor’s gaze as the longhouse is entered while the dances are in progress. Two fires burn brightly within the building. The tom-toms thrum out their rhythm and the various be-feathered and blanketed dancers with elaborate headpieces “go into their act”. Symbolic of the former giving-away of their possessions in friendship, the Indian audiences pass among themselves beads and other small objects to keep up the tradition upon which the giving-away was originally based. The dancers take their terpsichore very seriously. Many stand outside the circle for some time, muttering, stomping in one spot, and generally working themselves up to the proper frenzy pitch before they enter the lighted circle. To the uninitiated, the dance means little or nothing, but the Indian audiences are critical of the performances, and most of the dancers are led away, exhausted and shaking like aspen leaves, before they will quit their act.

White neighbors adjacent to the reservation are always thankful when the potlatch dance period is ended.

³⁰⁷ From DAY-LONG POTLATCH IS HELD AT NANAIMO. (1938, February 24). *The Province*, p. 6.

³⁰⁸ From NANAIMO INDIAN POTLATCH DANCE PERIOD ENDING. (1946, February 27). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 6.

NOOTKA



Nootka Island located on an 1888 map of British Columbia

A potlatch upon the capture of the *Boston*³⁰⁹ (1803)

In March, 1803, the European ship *Boston* was captured at Nootka by Maquinna, chief of the Nuu-chah-nulth. John R. Jewitt was taken prisoner and enslaved for two years. He would prove the sole survivor of the *Boston*. *The incidents described below took place in late March and early April, 1803. Though not called by the Chinook name "potlatch," the gathering described may be the earliest settler account of one.*

A few days after hearing of the capture of the [European] ship [of which I was part of the crew,] there arrived at Nootka a great number of canoes filled with savages from no less than twenty tribes to the north and south. Among those from the north were Ai-tiz-zarts, Schoo-mad-its, Neu-wit-ties, Savin-nars, Ah-owz-arts, Mo-waatch-its, Suth-setts, Neu-chat-lits, Mich-la-its and Cay-u-quets; the most of whom were considered as tributary to Nootka. From the south, the Aytch-arts and Esqui-ates, also tributary, with the Kla-oo-uates, and the Wickannish, a large and powerful tribe about two hundred miles distant. These last were better clad than most of the others, and their canoes wrought with much greater skill; they are furnished with sails as well as paddles, and with the advantage of a fair breeze, are usually but twenty-four hours on their passage.

³⁰⁹ From Jewitt, J. (1816). *A narrative of the adventures and sufferings of John R. Jewitt: only survivor of the ship Boston during a captivity of nearly three years among the Indians of Nootka Sound : with an account of the manners, mode of living and religious opinions of the natives.* Middletown: Loomis and Richards. Written by John Rodgers Jewitt (1783 – 1821).

Maquinna, who was very proud of his new acquisition, was desirous of welcoming these visitors in the European manner. He accordingly ordered his men, as the canoes approached, to assemble on the beach with loaded muskets and blunderbusses, placing Thompson³¹⁰ at the cannon which had been brought from the ship and laid upon two long sticks of timber in front of the village, then taking a speaking trumpet in his hand, he ascended with me, [to] the roof of his house, and began drumming or beating upon the boards with a stick most violently.

Nothing could be more ludicrous than the appearance of this motley group of savages collected on the shore, dressed as they were, with their ill-gotten finery, in the most fantastic manner, some in women's smocks, taken from our cargo, others in *Kotsacks* (or cloaks) of blue, red or yellow broadcloth, with stockings drawn over their heads, and their necks hung round with numbers of powder horns, shot bags and cartouche boxes, some of them having no less than ten muskets apiece on their shoulders, and five or six daggers in their girdles. Diverting indeed was it to see them all squatted upon the beach, holding their muskets perpendicularly, with the butt pressed upon the sand, instead of against their shoulders, and in this position awaiting the order to fire. Maquinna, at last, called to them with his trumpet to fire, which they did in the most awkward and timid manner, with their muskets hard pressed upon the ground as above-mentioned. At the same moment the cannon was fired by Thompson, immediately on which they threw themselves back and began to roll and tumble over the sand as if they had been shot, when suddenly springing up, they began a song of triumph and running backward and forward upon the shore, with the wildest gesticulations, boasted of their exploits, and exhibited as trophies what they had taken from us. Notwithstanding the unpleasantness of my situation, and the feelings that this display of our spoils excited, I could not avoid laughing at the strange appearance of these savages, their awkward movements, and the singular contrast of their dress and arms.

When the ceremony was concluded, Maquinna invited the strangers to a feast at his house, consisting of whale blubber, smoked herring spawn, dried fish and train oil, of which they eat most plentifully. The feast being over, the trays, out of which they eat, and other things were immediately removed to make room for the dance, which was to close the entertainment. This was performed by Maquinna's son, the young prince Sat-sat-sok-sis, [...] in the following manner:-

Three of the principal chiefs, dressed in their otter-skin mantles, which they wear only on extraordinary occasions and at festivals, having their heads covered over with white down, and their faces highly painted, came forward into the middle of the room, each furnished with a bag filled with white down, which they scattered around in such a manner as to represent a fall of snow. These were followed by the young prince, who was dressed in a long piece of yellow cloth, wrapped loosely about him, and decorated with small bells, with a cap on his head, to which was fastened a curious mask in imitation of a wolf's head, while the rear was brought up by the king himself, in his robe of sea-otter skin, with a small whistle in his mouth and a rattle in his hand, with which he kept time to a sort of tune on his whistle. After passing

³¹⁰ The captured ship's sail-maker.

very rapidly in this order around the house, each of them seated [themselves,] except the prince, who immediately began his dance, which principally consisted in springing up into the air in a squat posture, and constantly turning around on his heels with great swiftness, in a very narrow circle.

This dance, with a few intervals of rest, was continued for about two hours, during which the chiefs kept up a constant drumming with sticks of about a foot in length on a long hollow plank, which was, though a very noisy, a most doleful kind of music. This they accompanied with songs, the king himself acting as chorister, while the women applauded each feat of activity in the dancer, by repeating the words, *Wocash! Wocash Tyee!* – “That is good! Very good prince!”

As soon as the dance was finished, Maquinna began to give presents to the strangers, in the name of his son Sat-sat-sok-sis. These were pieces of European cloth, generally of a fathom in length, muskets, powder, shot, &c. Whenever he gave them anything, they had a peculiar manner of snatching it from him with a very stern and surly look, repeating each time the words, *Wocash Tyee*. This I understood to be their custom, and was considered as a compliment, which if omitted, would be supposed a mark of disregard for the present. On this occasion, Maquinna gave away no less than one hundred muskets, the same number of looking glasses, four hundred yards of cloth, and twenty casks of powder, beside other things.

After receiving these presents, the strangers retired on board their canoes, for so numerous were they, that Maquinna would not suffer any but the chiefs to sleep in the houses; and in order to prevent the property from being pillaged by them, he ordered Thompson and myself to keep guard, during the night, armed with cutlasses and pistols.

In this manner tribes of savages from various parts of the coast, continued coming for several days, bringing with them blubber, oil, herring-spawn, dried fish and clams, for which they received in return presents of cloth &c. after which they in general immediately returned home. I observed that very few, if any of them, except the chiefs, had arms, which I afterwards learned is the custom with these people, whenever they come upon a friendly visit or to trade, in order to show, on their approach, that their intentions are pacific.

“The Potlatch is Our Bank”³¹¹ (1896)

We are fortunate that this explanation of the potlatch by a renowned Indigenous leader has survived. It is presented in its entirety.

My name is Maquinna! I am the chief of the Nootkas and other tribes. My great grandfather was also called Maquinna³¹². He was the first chief in the country who saw white men. That is more than one hundred years ago. He was kind to the white men and gave them land to build and live on³¹³. By and bye more white men came and ill treated our people and kidnapped them and carried them away on their vessels, and then the Nootkas became bad and retaliated and killed some white people. But that is a long time ago. I have always been kind to white men. Dr. Powell knows it and Mr. Vowell and all the white men who come to my country. And now I hear that the white chiefs want to persecute us and put us in jail and we do not know why.

They say it is because we give feasts which the Chinook people call “Potlatch.” That is not bad! That which we give away is our own! Dr. Powell, the Indian agent, one day also made a potlatch to all the Indian chiefs, and gave them a coat, and tobacco, and other things, and thereby we all knew that he was a chief; and so when I give a potlatch, they all learn that I am a chief. To put in prison people who steal and sell whiskey and cards to our young men; that is right. But do not put us in jail as long as we have not stolen the things which we give away to our Indian friends. Once I was in Victoria, and I saw a very large house; they told me it was a bank and that the white men place their money there to take care of, and that by—and—by they get it back, with interest. We are Indians, and we have no such bank; but when we have plenty of money or blankets, we give them away to other chiefs and people, and by—and—by they return them, with interest, and our heart feels good. Our potlatch is our bank.

I have given many times a potlatch, and I have more than two thousand dollars in the hands of Indian friends. They all will return it some time, and I will thus have the means to live when I cannot work any more. My uncle is blind and cannot work, and that is the way he now lives, and he buys food for his family when the Indians make a potlatch. I feel alarmed! I must give up the potlatch or else be put in jail. Is the Indian agent going to take care of me when I can no longer work? No, I know he will not. He does not support the old and poor now. He gets plenty of money to support his own family, but, although it is all our money, he gives nothing to our old people,

³¹¹ Originally published as Maquinna. (1896, April 1). THE NOOTKA CHIEF SPEAKS. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 6. Written by Maquinna (d. 1901), who inherited the name of the Maquinna who captured John Jewitt.

³¹² “The name continued for two centuries at Nootka, the Maquinna who died in 1901 being the last to hold authority among the Indians of the locality.” NAMED AFTER COAST PRINCESS. (1912, September 4). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 15.

³¹³ “It was from Maquinna that capt. John Meares, of the Felice, purchased in 1788 the little lot of land in Friendly Cove, Nootka Sound, on which the British claim to a portion of the North Pacific against the Spanish claim to the whole coast of Northwest America was founded.” *Ibid*.

and so it will be with me when I get old and infirm. They say it is the will of the Queen. That is not true. The Queen knows nothing about our potlatch feasts. She must have been put up to make a law by people who know us. Why do they not kill me? I would rather be killed now than starve to death when I am an old man. Very well, Indian agents, collect the two thousand dollars I am out and I will save them till I am old and give no more potlatch!

They say that sometimes we cover our hair with feathers and wear masks when we dance. Yes, but a white man told me one day that the white people have also sometimes masquerade balls and white women have feathers on their bonnets and the white chiefs give prizes for those who imitate best, birds or animals. And this is all good when white men do it but very bad when Indians do the same thing. The white chiefs should leave us alone as long as we leave the white men alone, they have their games and we have ours.

I am sorry to hear the news about the potlatch and that my friends of the North were put in jail. I sympathize with them; and I asked a white man to write this in order to ask all white men not to interfere with our customs as long as there is no sin or crime in them. The potlatch is not a pagan rite; the first Christians used to have their goods in common and as a consequence must have given "potlatches" and now I am astonished that Christians persecute us and put us in jail for doing as the first Christians.

MAQUINNA, X (his mark)

"Put more trust in each other"³¹⁴ (1896)

By what Maquinna, the Indian chief, says in the *Colonist* of April 1, they seem to put more trust in each other than the white people do, by giving to the potlatches what they expect to keep them in old age. I think if our legislators would turn their minds to trying to have the Sabbath kept a little more holy, they would be doing more good to humanity and Christianity than by trying to stop what seems to be a time-honored custom of the Indians.

"A whale has been towed in"³¹⁵ (March, 1905)

There is a hiyu time in progress at Nootka, where a whale has been towed in to shore by a fleet of canoes. The whale had been found dead at sea, and, after quarreling over a division of spoils, which, according to Siwash custom, must be distributed in the tribe, according to tribal rank, the carcass was cut up and a potlatch was in progress.

³¹⁴ From I.G.H. (1896, April 3). "OUR POTLATCH IS OUR BANK." *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

³¹⁵ From LOCAL NEWS. (1905, March 30). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

“Sacrifices to grief”³¹⁶ (August, 1907)

Two or three years since, the son of Chief Macquinna died. The chief destroyed all his furniture, bedding, utensils, and stores, killed his bull, and was with difficulty restrained from killing his cow, and still had “sick tum-tums”. In sympathy, his people gathered \$100 in money and \$200 worth in sewing machines, utensils, tools, blankets and clothing, all of which were destroyed. Still, finding that his grief had inadequate expression, he destroyed the tribal house, a building 60 by 130 feet, and from the cedar ridge-pole, a stick 80 feet in length and four feet at the butt, proceeded to carve a magnificent totem pole, which was the pride of the village for some time.

In June of the present year the chief was bereaved of another son, and the destruction of all the effects that he had accumulated since his first loss being insufficient, he has cut down and burned the totem pole, sacrificing to his grief a monument that had cost enormous labor and which was by far the most valuable thing in the possession of the tribe.

No one who passes along the coast fails to notice the multitude of monuments erected as expressions of grief for the dead. It is scarcely proper to say that these are meant as in memory of the dead, for the theory of destruction of effects is explained as a desire to destroy all that would remind the survivors of the departed.

These “mamalooses” consist of structures with or without form or design. Sometimes the midship section of a steamboat appear; again a gable, a pilot house, a companion-way, a fence, an effigy. These occupy prominent headlands in the neighborhood of the villages.

Exposed at these spots to the slow destruction of time and the weather, are boats, canoes, nets, furniture, clothing, sewing machines, guns, tools, blankets and boxes of food. On a long fence fronting the village at Friendly Cove there is a sign with the name of “Fawn”. On this fence are hanging 50 pairs of white blankets. The widow of another man lost on the Fawn³¹⁷ burned with all its contents, her house, which stood within 40 feet of the store.

DESCRIBES A POTLATCH

The writer, in the company of Mr. Irwin, attended on an evening in February last, a potlatch given by George, one of the chiefs. George had been, a few days before, at a potlatch at Hesquoit and had returned in a sailboat worth \$100, with which he had been presented, and with a cargo of general merchandise. When we entered the house of the fourth chief we found a quiet and dignified assembly of some forty men and women, mostly sitting on the floor. George is married to a daughter of a Muchalat chief, and George’s daughter, a girl of eleven, was hereditary chieftainess (“delate tyee”) of the Muchalats. Her name was No-nem-sux-on-ope-she, “the giver of gifts”.

³¹⁶ Buchanan, G. O. (1907, August 31). West Coast of Vancouver Island. *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 13. Written by Gladys May Oran Buchanan (1899 – 1931).

³¹⁷ “Three members of the sealing schooner Fawn, of this city [Victoria], which was wrecked on the West Coast a few days ago, arrived here this morning from Port Townsend, where they were landed by a sailing ship. The schooner is a total wreck. The Fawn belonged to the Victoria Sealing Company”. *Victoria News*. (1902, February 23). *Daily News-Advertiser* (Vancouver), p. 1.

Officially, the potlatch was that of this young princess. At a table at the head of the room, the father, mother and daughter sat, and from it the gifts were distributed. On the floor, within easy reach of the guests, were standing open, boxes of pilot bread and pails of sugar, and the guests refreshed themselves as they felt inclined by dipping up sugar with "clock faces" and eating the two together. Music, at least the marking of time, went on almost continually. The only variation in measure was that it changed occasionally from a two-step to a three-step beat. One or two had drums of parchment stretched upon a hoop; one or two had rattles, but all who were not dancing were members of the band.

A lady, who sat beside us, kept time with a teaspoon upon a china cup until she broke the cup. Madame George, after a few minutes, noticed the accident and sent No-nem-sux with another cup. The [woman], somewhat wantonly as we thought, hammered the second cup until it broke, and held up to use the handle with an expression of satisfaction.

The dance consisted of a monotonous movement from the body, the feet not being lifted from the floor, and the hands held palms forward and a little higher than the shoulders. It lasted in each case until the individual performer was tired, the labor of keeping it up devolving almost entirely upon the women, some of whom honored the occasion until all records were broken. A lady who sat near us demonstrated familiarity with the social ethics of white ladies, by remarking to us upon the collapse of some of those who had greatly distinguished themselves, that they had triumphed through the stimulus of "heap whiskey".

We, however, were offered no whiskey, nor did we see any, and my friend, who had desired, in self-protection, to keep his pipe alight, was transfixed by the steady gaze of George from the farther corner, who, when he caught Mr. Irwin's eye, significantly placed his finger upon his lip, in token, probably, that tobacco was offensive to the ladies.

From time to time we observed the distribution of gifts. Madame George crossed the room with a valuable water-proof coat and placed it on the shoulders of one of the elder women. From time to time, crockery, cases of canned fruits and household utensils were distributed.

These proceedings throughout were quiet and dignified, the manner of the host and hostess perfect, and the dance itself not ungraceful.

After we had looked on an hour or two I was informed by Mr. Irwin that the princess desired to honor me with a present. Having signified my willingness to accept, two orators in succession occupied the floor and with somewhat unnecessary vehemence made presentation addresses.

I was a stranger and a Tyee. I had honored them by attending their potlatch, and they wished me to accept the most costly article in the possession of the tribe, the official head-dress intended to be worn only by the princess, No-nem-sux-on-ope-she, and then only when in discharge of her beneficent function as the "giver of gifts". The honor was acknowledged as well as circumstances would permit. This is, I fancy, the only earthly crown that I will ever be asked to accept.

In the month of May I was again at Friendly Cove and I have in my diary the following entry: “No-nem-sux-on-ope-she, ‘the giver of gifts,’ is dead.” Since we saw her in February she developed rapid consumption, was taken to Muchalat and to Clayoquot to Indian doctors without avail. She is buried on the headland where once were mounted the Spanish guns. The boat presented to her father is hauled up beside the grave and left with sails set, to destruction. Another of the big houses of the village has been destroyed. All the belongings of the family have been broken up or piled on the beach and burned. Around the grave are spread hundreds of yards of fabric newly bought at the store, and scores of pans and basins and utensils.

George and his wife went away just after I arrived, in a dilapidated canoe, carrying nothing but the clothes they wore.

“A big potlatch”³¹⁸ (January, 1909)

News was brought by passengers on the steamer of a big potlatch which was being held at Nootka, nearly all of the West Coast Indians being present. One Indian, who has been preparing for this event for years, gave away \$1,000 in gold, one of the biggest potlatches that has yet been reported from Vancouver Island. The festivities were being kept up for a number of days.

“A girl’s puberty ceremony among the Nootka”³¹⁹ (October, 1910)

Puberty ceremonies, both for boys and girls, are widespread and characteristic features of the life of primitive peoples. Among the Nootka Indians of the west coast of Vancouver Island, as among so many Indian tribes of western America, it is the arriving at maturity of girls rather than of boys that is signalized by a definite ceremony and by the observance, on the part of the girl, of various chiefly restrictive measures or taboos. The point of time that determines the maturity of a girl is naturally considered to be the first appearance of menses. Soon after this, generally about two months later, the father or guardian of the girl gives a feast or potlatch, the essential part of which is a religious ceremony, but which is also meant to give the girl a new status in the tribe, that of one entering womanhood. This first ceremony is termed *‘aitst!oġa*, which may be translated as “menstrual potlatch,” from *‘aitscil*, “to have a menstrual flow”. Though the Nootka Indians, particularly those about Alberni, B.C., are in many respects losing hold upon the traditions of their past, they still cling tenaciously to the observance of girls’ puberty ceremonies, although the rigor of the taboos formerly enforced for a length of time upon the matured girl seems to have been allowed to fall away.

During a stay of about two and a half months in the fall and early winter of 1910 among the two tribes of Nootka Indians (*Ts!icā’atH* and *Hōpatc!as’atH*) now living on reserves near Alberni, I was fortunate enough to witness three girls’ puberty

³¹⁸ From SS. TEES STORMBOUND FOR SIXTY HOURS. (1909, January 22). *Victoria D. Times*, p. 8.

³¹⁹ From Sapir, E. (1913). A GIRL’S PUBERTY CEREMONY AMONG THE NOOTKA INDIANS. Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada. Written by Edward Sapir (1884 – 1939).

potlatches. In order to give some idea of the actual conduct of such a ceremony, I shall here content myself with describing the one witnessed on the forenoon of October 16, 1910. [...]

The present ceremony took place in the “potlatch house” of the Hōpatc!as’at̄n tribe, to which the people of both tribes had been invited by the father of the girl, Jimmie George; it was he, her paternal uncle (Big George), and another Indian related to her on her mother’s side (Big Frank) that took charge of the potlatch, acting as hosts. In earlier days, when large communal houses were in use, the father or other older male relative conducting the ceremony invited the people to the house in which he lived.

The people began to assemble fairly early in the morning, the men, as usual, seating themselves on the board platform along the rear wall of the house and along the left wall (as you enter), while the women disposed themselves along the right wall. Properly speaking, the seats along the rear wall are seats of honor, and in earlier days the nobility among the guests were disposed here, each being entitled to a definite seat according to his rank. Nowadays these matters are not taken so seriously, though even to-day one never sees a woman occupying one of the rear seats in the house.

Back of the center of the room, not very far from the rear wall, was burning a wood fire; a space was left on the bare ground for a fire-place, while the rest of the floor, according to up-to-date fashion, was planked. The floor of the Ts!icā’at̄n potlatch house is more conservative in this respect, being bare throughout. In front of the fire, that is, on the side towards the door, was later placed a big cauldron in which tea was boiled, to be used at the end of the potlatch to feast the people.

Up against the rear wall were placed, side by side, two large rectangular boards painted in white, black and red. The paintings of each of these boards, disposed in a reciprocally symmetrical arrangement, represented a thunderbird holding a whale in his talons, a wolf at the upper outer corner, and a *he’ilīk* (the mythological serpent-belt of the thunderbird, who, as he zigzags through the air or coils about a tree, causes the lightning) at the upper inner corner; beneath the whale there was a conventional representation of billows. The thunderbird, who lives on the summit of a mountain difficult of approach, is believed, when in need of game, to fly off to the sea and catch a whale, which he then carries off to his home; the heavy flapping of his wings is what we call thunder. The thunderbird, his serpent-belt, and the wolf are three of the most important supernatural beings of the Nootka, and figure largely in myth, design, and masked ceremonial.

Such boards as have just been described are termed *qetsāl*, literally “marked thereon,” a word that is also used to apply to house boards painted on the outside. They are not restricted in use to puberty ceremonies, but may also be employed at other types of potlatch. The boards are the property of definite individuals, but, as there are only a very few sets left among the Nootka of Alberni, they have come to be considered as, in a sense, belonging to the tribe as a whole. The designs differ in different sets, but the thunderbird and whale are nearly always the central subject.

When I entered the potlatch house, Mrs. Frank, related through her husband to the pubescent girl, was seated last on the woman's side of the house, nearest the door, and was engaged in singing, in a loud and high-pitched voice, a *ts!îqa* song, or stock of *ts!îqa* songs, no outsider being permitted to make use of them, unless deputed to do so by the owner. [...] The purpose of a *ts!îqa* song seems to be primarily that of indicating that an important or noteworthy event is about to take place; thus they are frequently heard in potlatches preliminary to the performance of a masked dance or other ceremonial activity the right to which the host has gained as a hereditary privilege (*topāti*). Very frequently several distinct *ts!îqa* songs can be heard sung at the same time. Any woman may be hired to sing her *ts!îqa* song at a menstrual potlatch, being paid for her services by the giver of the ceremony. Mrs. Frank repeated her song at intervals, while the house gradually filled up. Her husband was twice heard to beat the drum accompaniment for her, but towards the end he handed her the drum and she thenceforth accompanied herself.

As soon as most of the people had come, ten bundles of long sticks were laid on the ground, each bundle tied together, and one end of each was lit by being placed on fire. These lighted faggots are known as *hitcma*, or "torches," a word that is also used to refer to torches proper, fir branches gummed and lit at one end, that were in earlier days employed to light one's way. The number of ceremonial torches lit at the puberty ceremony is symbolic of the number of months after the ceremony that the pubescent girl is to spend in seclusion and be subject to the menstrual taboos. The number varies between four, six, eight and ten, according to the tradition of her family; it is rarely less than four, for with two torches the minimum number of four months of seclusion have to be observed, nor is an odd number of torches permissible. Four seems to have been the normal number in earlier days. Each of the ten "torches" were then given to a man apiece, [and a ceremony took place, partly outside of the potlatch house.] [...]

When all had again seated themselves in the house, Charlie Tlutisi, who acted as the ceremonial speaker (*tsiqsaql*) for the hosts (the girls' father and uncle) distributed the "torches" to ten of the guests. He called out various names, after each of which a young man, ([...] "one who walks about in the house," any young fellow that is asked to serve as an attendant for the guests or to carry out the speaker's directions) took a "torch" and carried it to the one thus designated, laying it in front of him on the ground. In former times a gift, such as one or more blankets, was tied on one end of the "torch". This time the gift, which should always go with the assignment of a "torch," was given a little later on, during the potlatch proper, in the shape of a coin, the names of the recipients being called out as before and the coins distributed by the same young man. The speaker explained that the money given with the "torches" was what fell off of the thunderbird while it caused the thunder by flapping its wings. [...] The recipients of the "torches" are supposed to take them home, put them away in a corner at the back of the house, and preserve them for some time for "good luck".

The right to receive a "torch" inheres as a privilege in certain definite lines of descent and was formerly jealously guarded; in other words, it forms what the Nootka Indians call a *topāti*. The "torches" should be distributed in order, according to the

rank of the persons receiving them. Among the Nootka Indians of Alberni it is customary for the holder of a "torch" topāti to return the value of the gift with 100 per cent. interest to the donor at a second and more elaborate potlatch given by the latter for the girl some time after the puberty ceremony. This is in accord with the general practice of the West Coast Indians to return potlatch gifts, generally with 100 percent interest, at some future time. It is anomalous, however, insofar as it nullifies, from a purely economic point of view, the value of the inherited privilege or topāti. There are several other such ceremonial privileges among these Indians that bring with them not emolument, but net loss. However, the Indians say that they are proud in this way to make public their claims on the topāti and that they count the trifling loss of no moment in comparison with the upholding in this way of their prestige. The paying back of gifts obtained by virtue of one's right to a topāti is quite likely, however, to turn out to be a comparatively recent development among the Nootka of Alberni, for other Nootka tribes, such as the Ucluelet of Barkley Sound, do not practice the custom. These last, as I was informed, laugh at the Alberni Indians on this account; they do not see the use of having a privilege that nets one a loss.

When the "torches" had been distributed, the girl's uncle and others of the family got together in a small group near the door of the house, ready to arrange a performance that was intended to be a feature of the puberty potlatch. Among them was the young chief Louis of the Ho• ai'atn tribe of Numakamis Bay, who was related to the family of the girl and who had recently come up to Alberni on a visit; he placed himself on a low improvised platform on the left side of the house above the rest of the group and, like the others, stood facing the guests in the rear of the house.

Mrs. Frank and another woman, who formed part of the group, each sang a ts!iqa song, thus giving all to understand that a topāti performance of the hosts was to take place immediately. Then the girl's uncle started a song without drum accompaniment, which was [...] the property of the girl's father's family and none outside of the small group joined in the singing. Often a family song of this type, sung at a girl's puberty ceremony, was composed for that special purpose and kept secret until it was sprung as a surprise on the guests at the ceremony itself. [...]

After the song was completed, the speaker proceeded to explain that a game was to be played, the right to which was held by the host as a topāti. A bunch of short sticks was taken and bound together around the middle; they were all white at one end, but two among them were declared to be red at the other. The sticks were handed over to Louis, who, standing on his platform in plain sight of all, held the bunch with the white ends pointed towards the people. Whoever among the guests succeeded in picking out one of the marked sticks was to receive a dollar from the girl's father, while the other red, which was specially marked in some way, would win the guesser two dollars. As soon as this had been explained by the speaker, the same song was sung as before. Meanwhile, while the singing was actually going on, but not during the pauses between the songs, various people walked up, almost always in twos, to try their luck. [...] When a sufficient number had been guessed, the money was paid out as announced, two who had come near to guessing a red being also given something. It is a general practice among these Indians for the host always to do a

little better in the way of distributing gifts than he announces, whereby his liberality is made more manifest. At other puberty ceremonies that I have witnessed other such topāti games were played. These differ quite considerably in detail, but all have in common the giving of rewards to such as make successful trials. [...]

After the game was disposed of, the women started in to sing t!amā songs, which are generally sung at puberty ceremonies, though songs of the same style are also in use elsewhere. These have a rather bright and rapid movement to them and are accompanied by briskly executed drum beats. To drum well and precisely for a t!amā song, indeed, is considered quite an art. Differing in this respect from so many types of Nootka songs, they are not, as a general rule, the exclusive property of particular families, but are popular tunes that may be used by all. One of the women who were seated on the floor beat an accompaniment on the hand drum, while other women beat sticks or calped hands in the same rhythm. Several women danced. [...]

The texts of t!amā songs are in part burdens, in part connected words that are often sung out loud while the drum stops beating, so that all may hear clearly. The reason of this is that, while the tunes and burdens are well-known and preserved intact, the texts proper (or “choruses,” as they were sometimes termed by my interpreters) are very frequently changed to suit the occasion. A t!amā singer or singers will often get up surprises in this way.

The content of the texts is of a satirically sexual character, very often a jibe aimed at some man who was known to have done something of a sexual character to make him seem ridiculous. Some women are said to be particularly expert at making up such t!amā texts and are called t!a'mik. After the women had sung and danced a number of these songs, the drum was handed over to the men. It was now the men's turn to sing t!amā songs, which they now proceeded to do to the accompaniment of drum and beating of planks, leveling good-humored shafts of ridicule at the opposite sex. In this way the men and women relieved each other from time to time, singing one t!amā song after another. A spirit of high good-humor prevailed, with plenty of laughter. The men's and women's t!amā songs are quite distinct; sometimes the former will join in with the women in their songs, very rarely, if at all, the women in the men's songs.

Meanwhile, a small potlatch or distribution of gifts by the girl's family was in progress. This potlatch was not so much in honor of the pubescent girl herself as of the infant daughter of her brother Hamilton George; she was thereby “made high” and they thus indicated how much they thought of the little member of their family. The potlatch for the pubescent girl, according to the speaker's announcement, was to be given later on in the season, after all the Indians had dried their salmon for the winter; the exact time to be fixed for this event, however, was still left open and was to be announced, according to a rather pleasing fiction, whenever the girl's infant niece should make up her mind to have it.

At a puberty potlatch, such as was now going on, anyone has the right to ask for whatever he wants of the one who conducts it, and it must be given to him; this is known as 'o'yûil, “to ask for a gift in a t!amā song”. The proper way to do this is to sing out one's request to the tune of a t!amā song, improvising the words as a “chorus”

so as to fit the melody. Sometimes requests for gifts have been made quite some time before, and are then granted at the puberty ceremony. In such cases the speaker announces that such and such a person had asked for a certain thing and that it was going to be granted to him now, after which the article is displayed and handed over to him or her.

It is said that some people used to be rather unreasonable in their t!amā requests. Thus, according to one informant, a man once asked beforehand for a sheep. As there was none to be had thereabouts, the man that intended to give the puberty potlatch had to go down to Victoria, B.C., for the express purpose of purchasing the animal desired. He came back with two sheep, which he presented at his potlatch to the man that had made the request, for, as has already been noted, in fulfilling a request or promise, the host always aims to act more liberally than strictly called for.

In the present case, one of the gifts that had been asked for was a gill-net. This was accordingly now produced, a pair of paddles and oar-locks being added as an extra, for, as the speaker remarked, in assigning the gift, its receiver might find an extra outfit of paddles and oar-locks come in handy when going out fishing in his canoe with his new net. So also in other cases, the aim was always evident to make the extra gift appropriate, even if only theoretically so, and to make some remark in explanation of its appropriateness.

Another man had asked for a dog. When this was given to him, a long new rope was added, ostensibly for the purpose of tying the dog. The man, as he received the dog and rope, jocosely remarked that he would use them to keep the women at a distance when they followed him in the bush. This was in keeping with the spirit of raillery that now obtained between the men and women.

A woman had asked for a sideboard. This was brought in and chairs added as the extra. Still another woman asked for some chewing-gum, for, as she explained, in passing basket splints through her mouth in order to wet them for basket-making, she was apt to get dry, and she therefore wanted something that would provide a steady flow of saliva. Accordingly, she was given a dollar and a half with which to buy the gum. In accepting the money, she said that she did not want it for herself, but a friend of hers; this was a fiction intended to show that she had no hard feelings and was not covetous.

Another old woman wanted an iron root-digger; she was given this, with an extra of several yards of calico. Still another woman received some pillows. In some cases, the women who were engaged in singing t!amā songs improvised words of thanks for some of the gifts to fit the t!amā tunes.

After the requests had been granted, smaller monetary gifts were distributed to various people in the house; Big Frank also distributed some fishing tackle to each of the men. All were now in high good-humor.

Douglas, one of the Ts!icā'atn men, expressed the wish that "the white man" (as I was the only white man present, he referred to myself) give him a bottle of gin. Entering into the spirit of substitutory gifts, I thereupon sent over a dollar to him, to do with as he saw best. As reciprocating the friendly spirit was thus shown, several return gifts were made to me on the spot. Big Frank presented me with a salmon-

spear point, while one of the Hōpatc!as'atḥ women gave me a twilled cedar-bark mat and a basketry-covered ink-well, such as are nowadays made for sale by the Nootka women. Douglas' return gift was accompanied by thanks expressed in two t!amā songs sung by some of the men; Douglas, it may be remarked, is considered one of the most expert of the t!amā singers among the Indians.

While these two songs were being sung, Mr. Bill, another Ts!icā'atḥ Indian, danced while holding out a stick at arm's length between his palms. The dance consisted of a series of short steps within the range of about a quarter circle, now pivoted about one foot, now about the other, while the dancer sometimes held the stick high above his head, sometimes straight ahead, and then again vertically on a side. These rather briskly careening solo dances in which the gift, or its representative, is held or displayed, are characteristic accompaniments of such t!amā songs as are sung with the presentation of a gift.

When he had finished dancing, Mr. Bill announced that the stick stood for an old whaling harpoon and lanyard that Douglas was giving me. I was then requested to go up and accept the stick in token of the gift itself. Later in the day Douglas himself brought me the harpoon and lanyard. This method of delivering a token, where the gift itself is either not at hand or, as in the case of a canoe, is too cumbersome an object to be easily handled at the potlatch, is well established among the West Coast Indians.

Some time in the course of the potlatch, Tom, a blind and conservative old Ts!icā'atḥ Indian, delivered a rather long speech, in a loud hoarse voice, thanking the hosts and explaining how they had the right to the performance of the topāti game that all had witnessed. As his speech threatened to be too long, one of the women shouted out to him that his daughter-in-law wanted to sing a t!amā song, whereupon Tom submissively took the hint and rapidly brought his words to a close. Thereupon old David, a small and rather decrepit Ts!icā'atḥ, also began to make a speech of thanks, but nobody listened to him and his voice was soon drowned in the noise of singing and talking.

These speeches of thanks, it may be noted, are set affairs, the contents of which are more or less rigidly prescribed by custom and varying somewhat according to the family that the host addressed is a member of. Hence, as all the Indians have generally heard these speeches any number of times, their repetition is almost entirely a matter of form, and but little attention is paid to them.

Towards the end of the potlatch, tea and biscuits were served to all on planks which had been put down on the ground before each. The speaker announced that the names of the pubescent girl and of two of her female relatives, her brother Hamilton George's infant daughter and another brother's wife, had been changed. Her former name had been Tēnisô (apparently one of the stock of Coast Salish names that are current among the Hōpatc!as'atḥ, who, according to reliable evidence, once spoke a now extinct Salish language); the new name given to her was Łūtismāyul, "makes the whirring noise (of the thunderbird) wherever she goes," a name which was said to have originally belonged to the Makah Indians of Cape Flattery, Washington, the southernmost Nootka tribe. The change of name of a pubescent girl at the puberty

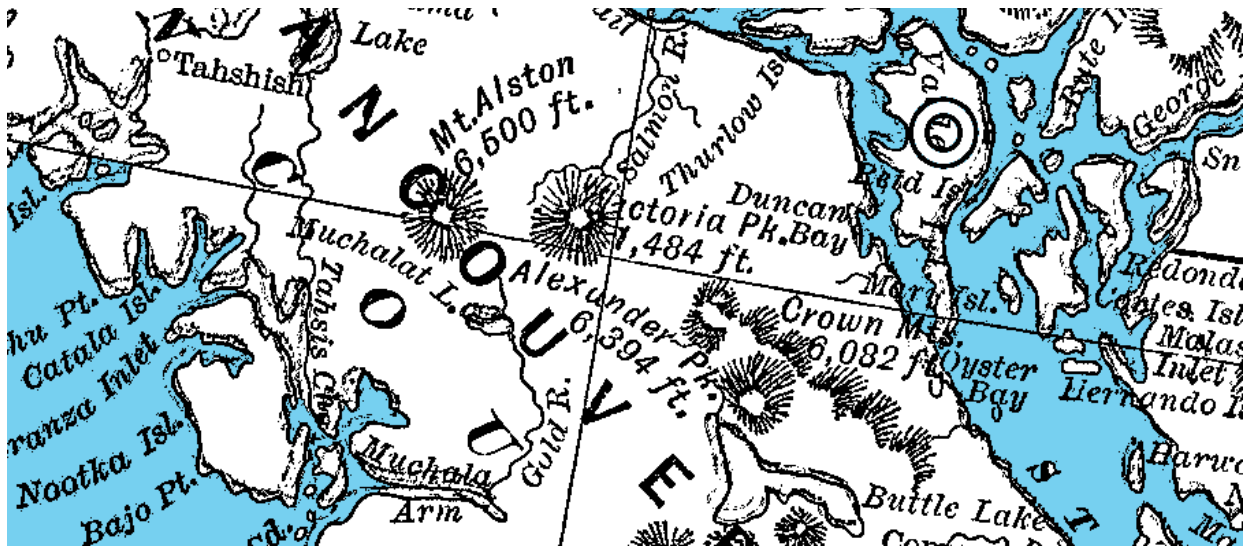
ceremony is obligatory. Change of name, whether for reasons of taboo or otherwise, are regularly made public at the end of some feast or potlatch in progress at the time.

After the feast, the Indians disbanded. [...]

At the end of [a] [...] period of taboo, all the people may be invited by the father or guardian of the girl to a potlatch known as the '.aits'ato, which may be literally translated as "menstrual (period) falls off (i.e. has come to an end)". The guests are informed that she has finished her period of taboo and are feasted and presented with gifts. Potlach and t!amā songs are sung, and topāti dances and games are performed.

There are thus three potlatches or ceremonials normally given in connection with the arriving at maturity of a girl: the puberty ceremonial proper or hīlcapas, which begins her period of taboo; the potlatch given in her honor or main '.aitst!ōla, which may or (more normally) may not correspond with the potlatch given at the time of the puberty ceremonial (in the case of the ceremonial we have just described this second potlatch was promised but not definitely announced; it took place about a month later in conjunction with a "wolf ritual" or lokwāna given by the girl's father), at which the "torches" are returned with return gifts at 100 per cent. interest; and the '.aits'.ato, which ends her period of taboo.

QUADRA ISLAND



Quadra Island (mislabelled as Valdez Island) on an 1888 map of British Columbia

“Immense potlatch”³²⁰ (June, 1892)

At Cape Mudge, near Seymour Narrows, near the East Coast of Vancouver Island, a Grand Potlatch has just taken place among the Indians. There is a large attendance of the “original owners” of the soil, and the greatest Indian enthusiasm prevailed. The potlatch comprises the donating, or perhaps more correctly speaking, “loaning” with interest that would make some of the paleface Shylocks green with envy, for they not only take the pound of flesh but the blood as well. The potlatch still goes merrily on and in the language of our informant, will keep merrily on for several days yet. Among the largest Indian potlatchers are Tom Coleman, who takes the cake, by giving blankets, biscuits, and other “iktas” to the value of \$5,400. The next in the roll of honor is Captain John, with \$2,300, other chiefs giving from the thousands down to a few hundreds.

“Gave away 5,300 blankets”³²¹ (August, 1892)

The greatest potlatch ever known to have taken place at Cape Mudge occurred on the 9th inst., when Chief Bell Quathiaska of the Salmon River Indians gave away 5,300 blankets, 350 boxes of biscuits, 280 silver bracelets, 150 trunks, and \$300 in cash, the total value being estimated at \$8,000.

³²⁰ From IMMENSE POTLATCH. (1892, June 18). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 2.

³²¹ From Grand Potlatch. (1892, August 19). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 1.

“The Yuculta Indians were holding a potlatch”³²² (September, 1892)

Sunday was spent at anchor in Guolhiaski Cove, and as the Yuculta Indians were holding a potlatch on their reservation, a couple of miles further up, the party determined to take it in. From all that could be learned it would appear that there has been a continuous series of potlatches going on at this reservation for many months past, and that several of the neighboring tribes participated. At some of these as many as ten thousand blankets were given away, and many thousand dollars spent on flour, biscuits, trinkets, canoes, rifles, etc. It is estimated that not less than three thousand Indians were in the settlement when the railway advance guard visited it, and yet it was but a poor sample – *cultus*, as the natives put it – of the immense liberality of the chiefs whose hospitality the tribes have partaken of, of recent date.

Sunday’s potlatch was being given by Captain John, to whom all hands were introduced. He seemed to be a man of about 50 summers, and if his general appearance be any indication of the extent of his wardrobe, it must be limited, indeed. He wore an old straw hat, and a dirty blanket drawn clumsily around his shoulders. Among the articles which he did not wear were boots and stockings, pants, or any semblance to underclothing. And yet, this man was the hero of the potlatch, having given some couple of thousand blankets to his Indian brethren, many of the younger ones of whom were positively well dressed, even according to the white man’s ideas of dressing.

Many of the old [Indians] were repulsive looking creatures as they squatted around, smoking the pipe of peace, in all the filth and squalor of their surroundings. “New blankets” was the order of the day, and it was suggested that possibly some of the natives had divested themselves of their ordinary habiliments in order to make a swell appearance in the folds of their newly acquired and more simple outfit.

The Council was in session as the Victorians entered the camp, and from the loud and angry jabbering of those who composed it, one who was not accustomed to such a scene would not be surprised to hear the war whoop raised and the clubs and rifles which lay around brought into requisition.

An angry debate was evidently raging as to the disposal of some couple of thousand blankets which were piled on mats, around which the councillors were seated. These men, it was learned, are wise in their generation, and to a brother who has the means of giving a return potlatch they will vote from 100 to 500 blankets, while the poorer members of the tribe have to content themselves with perhaps a single pair.

The general aspect of the camp showed that the Yucultas are far outside the pale of civilization as compared with other tribes. Nearly all the old [Indians] still paint their faces, and cannot be induced to part with the, to them, indispensable blanket. Several missionaries have tried to bring these poor people under Christian influences, but in every case they have met with stern opposition.

³²² From THE CANADIAN WESTERN. (1892, September 28). *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

These Indians are as lazy as they look, and few of them can be induced to do an honest day's work. The large sums of money squandered on their potlatches is made principally at the cost of their kloodchmen's morality, the unfortunate women being taken wherever vice offers a reward. Their rancheries are the filthiest dens conceivable, and were it not for the thorough ventilation which the defective roofs and parted timbers afford, they must have been long since swept away by pestilence.

Among other features of the potlatch among these peculiar people, is the destruction of valuable property. As the Constance's party entered the house of Capt. John, all were obliged to stoop under a porch formed by the bow of an immense canoe, which the previous night had been burned, and around whose lurid flames these poor creatures enjoyed their feast dance. The value of the canoe thus destroyed was \$200. The potlatch was left with feelings of relief, and the party wended their way over the beaten trail, through the woods, which brought them back to their boat.

“For nearly a year”³²³ (September, 1892)

Five miles inside of Cape Mudge is the Yuculta reserve, where a big potlatch is at present in progress. The potlatches have been going on there for nearly a year. On Sunday there were 3,000 Indians there, eight tribes being represented. Sunday was a quiet day, as the potlatch was only a small one of 500 blankets. They have been having a “high old time”. In the last week Captain John, of the Yucultas, has given away 9,000 blankets.

“Drawing to a close”³²⁴ (November, 1892)

The twelve-month Indian potlatch at Cape Mudge is drawing to a close – in fact, it may be said that all is over. The blankets, which are a leading feature in the proceedings, cannot stand the wear and tear of a further transference, being now almost threadbare. When Chief Bill set the potlatch going, he may possibly have counted on the benefits of reciprocation, but he scarcely dreamed of such a prolongation of the feast. He gave away 5,000 blankets, 2,000 boxes of biscuit and a couple of thousand dollars' worth of trinkets.

Since this display of liberality, a reciprocity treaty came into operation at the Cape Mudge settlement, and any respectable Indian to whom Bill gave a few hundred blankets, gave a return potlatch, and transferred at least a fair percentage of the original gift. The same set of blankets and trinkets which initiated the “hyu potlatch” have been since undergoing the process of transference, until now they are nearly worn out, having passed through a few hundred hands and the coloring process of exposure to Cape Mudge weather.

Only a few of the original boxes of biscuit are said to be still available for potlatch purposes, but the trinkets remain intact – or nearly so. At the last potlatch, held a week ago, it is said that only 500 of the original blankets withstood the test of

³²³ From CANADA WESTERN RAILWAY. (1892, September 30). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 3.

³²⁴ From Siwash Blankets. (1892, November 26). *Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

time. There is no comfort in a Siwash blanket, if the history of these Cape Mudge comforters be a fair criterion.

“The copper”³²⁵ (November, 1892)

Rev. A. E. Green, Methodist Minister of Wellington, has recently returned from an official visit to the Cape Mudge Indians, near Seymour Narrows. He gave a Free Press representative the following description of the revival of the old “copper” custom for the payment of antiquated debts, for the Indians have not yet adopted the white man’s principle of a six year outlawry like their pale-faced brethren.

On Sunday morning about 1,000 Indians assembled in separate sections, each section being about 60 feet apart. For about two hours a most excitable and spirited “wawa” took place among the Indians in regard to a number of potlatch debts of from 40 to 50 years outstanding which had not been yet finally adjusted.

Among the [Indians in the] early days, the article of most power and value to the Indians is what is called by them “a copper”. It is held to be equal in value to \$800 in money or merchandise, and was, and apparently still is, used in the payment of old debts. This “Copper” is in fact a flat piece of soft copper, about $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch thick, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length, 12 inches in width at the bottom and tapering to 18 inches at the upper end. On the surface of this sheet of copper the Indians execute some most elaborate carving and a straight and prominent line is drawn across the centre.

The result of the palaver was that honor and justice prevailed, a six-year outlawing of debts was spurned with contempt, and “a copper” was brought out and placed in the open space between the sections. Then a great silence fell upon the multitude and all eyes were turned towards the door of an adjacent house. After a few minutes of this stoical silence the door opened and out rushed a large grizzly bear, and made straight for the “copper,” which he picked up in his fore-paws, and then, bear-like, gave it a long strong hug, until the flat sheet of copper was nearly bent double.

As the ends of the copper came together, the chiefs of the tribes rose to their feet and at once took the “bended copper” from the bear, while several of the strong men took hold of bruin and marched him back from whence he came. Then the silence was broken and the hum of many voices could be heard, while the Chief proceeded to cut the copper into strips of about an inch in width by four inches in length. These were handed around, and thus the old debts were paid, the financial and social crisis was averted and peace and contentment again predominated. The memory of the dead had been respected, and the ceremony closed.

The “make up” of the grizzly bear would have made Barnum green with envy, for many of those present, who did not know what the ceremony meant, took it to be a real wild grizzly, which had stalked into their midst uninvited and unsolicited. That some were scared, is to put it mild[ly]. [...]

³²⁵ From “THE COPPER?”. (1892, November 29). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 1.

The Indians have arranged for Mr. Galloway, the Methodist Missionary, to take up his residence near the village. [...] Assa, the Chief, and his friends have deposited “a copper” with Mr. Galloway, as a security or bail that they will appear before the Courts when called upon, in regard to the recent liquor troubles.

“The devil’s high carnival”³²⁶ (1893)

WHAT IS AN INDIAN POTLATCH?

The word itself, “potlatch,” means simply “to give”; but when applied to the demoralizing custom which the Indians keep up, in some parts of British Columbia, it means the devil’s high carnival.

A few weeks ago it was announced in the daily papers that the Cape Mudge Indians were about to give a great potlatch, when so many thousands of blankets would be distributed, so many tons of flour, sugar, pilot-bread, and other things to be given to feast upon, and a general good time anticipated. When the affair had got into full swing we visited them with the mission boat, *Glad Tidings*.

On landing at the village we found some 1,200 Indians congregated, from a radius of one hundred miles or more. [...] A great drumming was going on in one of the large houses, upon entering which we found a number of Indians beating on boxes on boxes and boards. [...] Piled on top of that very house were hundreds of blankets, which the owner was throwing to the ground one by one, at the same time calling out the names of the persons to whom they were given. These blankets are carried away to other villages, when potlatches are called, and the blankets returned to their owners; and thus it goes on from month to month, and from year to year. [...]

A few years ago a law was passed prohibiting the potlatch. This was as good as winked at by some of the officials; and when a certain tribe asked for permission to hold “just one more potlatch,” and that permission was granted, the Indians said, “If one tribe can break the law by permission, we will try breaking it without permission,” and they have done so ever since. The law remains on the Dominion statutes, but is practically a dead letter.

“It will be held all the same”³²⁷ (December, 1895)

Mr. R. H. Pidcock, the Indian Agent, has notified the Siwashes not to hold their annual big potlatch at Cape Mudge, which is in preparation. The private opinion of your correspondent is that it will be held all the same.

³²⁶ From Tate, C. M. (1893). THE INDIAN WORK. *The Missionary Outlook*, XIII(2), pp. 21-22. Written by Methodist Missionary C. M. Tate (1852 – 1933).

³²⁷ From NEWS OF THE PROVINCE. (1895, December 25). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 4.

“Peaceable and hospitable”³²⁸ (1897)

W. M. Dickinson, who went up as a special provincial constable to the scene of the Cape Mudge Indian potlatch trouble, returned after an absence of some ten days. Mr. Dickinson reports that the Indians are in a peaceable and hospitable state of mind, and treated him very courteously, the chief inviting him to an orderly potlatch where there was no whiskey or disorderly conduct. The Indians say they don't want whiskey, and think a policeman ought to be stationed in their vicinity to guard against white peddlers of the stuff. There seems little reason why a modified form of potlatch should not be allowed, under police supervision.

“Congratulatory celebrations”³²⁹ (November, 1900)

The Comox [steamer] brings little news out of the ordinary from the logging camps, but her officers tell of the big potlatch at Cape Mudge. Chief Johnnie was married, and to celebrate the occasion his father, Old Chief Johnnie, gave the largest potlatch held in British Columbia for years. Indians came from everywhere, and the rancherie was lined with the canoes of those attending the celebration. From as far south as Alert Bay friends of the celebrants went north, and in spite of the bad weather prevailing up the coast, got to the big ceremony on time. Canoes came from farther up north as well, and echoes of the congratulatory celebrations to the young chief and his bride were heard far out to sea by the passing steamers.

“Big potlatch at Cape Mudge”³³⁰ (January, 1908)

Between 1,500 and 2,000 Indians are now assembled at Cape Mudge, a small Indian settlement a few hundred miles up the coast, and to-day will mark the opening of a monster potlatch that will continue for three weeks.

Passengers arriving from the North by the steamer Queen City yesterday, state that elaborate preparations had been made for the annual flocking to Cape Mudge from every point along the northern coast. Over 150 came down from Alert Bay on the Queen City and debarked at the scene of the potlatch. They were all equipped with supplies enough to subsist for at least three weeks. Many of the chiefs carried valuable robes and other relics which will be auctioned off at the potlatch.

It is expected that every tribe on the coast will be represented. It is not very often that whites are present at a potlatch, but according to those who have been in touch with the Indians, the ceremonies are of a decidedly unique and interesting character.

³²⁸ From British Columbia. (1897, January 26). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 7.

³²⁹ From ALL THE SPACE TAKEN. (1900, November 5). *The Province*, p. 7.

³³⁰ From BIG POTLATCH AT CAPE MUDGE. (1908, January 7). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 9.

DUNCAN, QUAMICHAN AND SOMENOS



Somenos on an 1888 map of British Columbia. Duncan and Quamichan are nearby.

“Hyu muck-a-muck potlatch”³³¹ (August, 1871)

Great times the Indians are going to have at Somenos to-morrow. Crowds of canoes loaded with a goodly number of aborigines set sail from Nanaimo this morning, the dusky passengers’ faces being lit up with the glow or pleasant anticipation. The bakery of Adderton & Irving was besieged by the festive children of the woods, and no less than 380 loaves were bought by those going to the potlatch.

“A large gathering of Indians”³³² (June, 1886)

A large gathering of Indians was held at the Quamichan village in June [1886] to return blankets and other property received at former potlatches. Considerably over 3,000 Indians were present, from all parts of the coast, and they seemed to enjoy themselves thoroughly. The feasting lasted two weeks, and was of a very orderly description, not a single case of drunkenness or quarrelling [having] occurred. This was, of course, owing to the vigilance of the Cowichan Indian police, who were ably assisted by the constables from other agencies. Many disputes as to property lent at former potlatches were amicably settled, or promises to pay at a future time were given. The West Coast women found a ready market for the large quantity of fancy baskets and mats, which they had brought to sell, and the whole meeting passed off far better than was expected. Indeed it would be difficult to get together as large a gathering of white people for over two weeks, without more serious trouble.

³³¹ From Hyin Muckamuck Potlatch. (1888, December 27). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3.

³³² From Lomas, W. H. (1887, April 30). Indian Report. *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3. W. H. Lomas died in 1899.

Klen-a-wult's long-planned potlatch³³³ (1889)

STATEMENT OF INDIAN KLEN-A-WULT OF QUAMICHAN – NOV 14 1889

The time is now near when I must return what I owe.

I have been getting ready for this for about 30 years. All my friends expect to come to me in the spring. I shall be shamed by all Indians if I do not pay what I owe in the old manner, that is in the presence of all others. I and my friends have been entertained by other Chiefs for years, and we must entertain them while we pay back what we owe.

My sons own a threshing machine, ploughs, horses and oxen; they are not going to give these things away and make themselves poor. We want to pay what we owe only – I want you, the Indian Council, to ask the Superintendent to allow me to do this as other chiefs have been allowed. This is why I have come to your meeting to-day.

[RESPONSE OF THE COWICHAN INDIAN COUNCIL]

At a meeting of the Cowichan Indian Council held Nov. 14, 1889, the following was passed unanimously:

“That this Council believes that what Indian Klen-a-wult has said is true, and that if he be not allowed to entertain his friends, and to pay his debts in a public manner, he will be held to shame for the rest of this life. The Council therefore beg to ask the Superintendent of Indian Affairs to allow Indian Klen-a-wult to hold a “no-nuts” (i.e. paying back) gathering at Quamichan next spring. [...]

[APPEAL TO THE INDIAN DEPARTMENT BY AGENT W. H. LOMAS]

For the information of the Department, I would say that these potlatches are gradually dying out in all villages, many bands have already completely stopped, and in a very short time they will be a thing of the past, at the same time I ought to inform you that the Indians in these gatherings are not only encouraged by the store-keepers who are interested parties; but have also the moral support of the white population, who see no harm in them, but look upon them as a kind of fair at which they can be amused and buy baskets and other Indian curios; there is no drinking or disorderly conduct, but Indians meet friends & relatives married into distant tribes who at no other time would they have an opportunity of seeing. Debts are paid, articles are bartered, deceased friends are cried over! and in fact there is little except the waste of time to be complained of.

With regard to the proposed gathering to be held by Indian Klenawult, I would say that about one thousand Indians in addition to those of the District have for years been invited to attend, the exact date only, not having been fixed: Should no opposition be made to the holding of the same, I feel sure that my Indian Constables will be perfectly competent to maintain order, but if it is proposed to prevent this gathering, I must ask for further instructions. I may also call your attention to the

³³³ From Klen-a-wult, Lomas, W.H & Vankoughnet, L.. (1889, November 14). Statement of Indian Klen-a-wult of Quamichan. Library and Archives Canada: RG10, Volume number: 3831, Microfilm reel number: C-10146, File number: 63210. Item ID 2060818. I have been unable to find any additional biographical information on Klen-a-wult, but by his own account he was born before 1859. William H. Lomas died in 1899. Lawrence Vankoughnet died in 1898.

fact that in a late case of “potlatch” the Chief Justice decided that the [Indian] Act was defective and under these circumstances to attempt what the law will not support, can only create a feeling amongst the Indians antagonistic not only to their Agent, but to the Indian Department generally.

I have delayed calling your attention to this matter until I could see the Indian Klenawult and his friends. I have now done so, and they assure me that they have no idea of holding a “potlatch” as formerly understood, but that they merely intend to pay their debts in public, and that they have no intention of lending any goods or money to be returned at some future “potlatch”.

Having placed these facts before you, I shall be glad if you would as soon as convenient inform me what steps to take.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obdt. Servant,

(Signed) W. H. Lomas, Indian Agent

MEMORANDUM [IN RESPONSE, BY L. VANKOUGHNET]

The undersigned [...] begs to state that the enforcement of the law for the prevention of these potlatch feasts rests with the authorities of the local Government, and not with the Indian Agent, before whom, however, any parties accused of engaging or assisting in the celebration of these festivals may be prosecuted.

It would not appear, therefore, to be absolutely incumbent upon the Indian Agent to take any measures to prevent the celebration of potlatch festivities; and the undersigned would therefore recommend that the Indian Sup't at Victoria be informed that, unless complaint is made in a formal manner before the Indian Agent in regard to some Indian or person for celebrating the potlatch, he need not take steps in the matter.

(Signed) L. Vankoughnet

D'y. Supt. Gen'l. of Ind. Affairs.

“About five thousand Indians”³³⁴ (June, 1902)

There are about five thousand Indians congregated at present on the Quamichan reserve, about two miles from Duncan. The various American coast tribes are represented, together with the Valdez, Comox, Kuper, Cowichan, Victoria, Saanich and other east coast tribes. This is the largest potlatch gathering that has ever been held for years, and is a sight well worth traveling miles to witness. The usual annual dances in full war paint and feathers, canoe and pony racing and blanket-tearing contests will be indulged in, the latter being a most thrilling and novel sight. As it is only a short distance from Duncan on a good bicycle road, a number of tourists and local people go out each day to see the varied and interesting program.

³³⁴ From City New in Brief. (1902, June 12). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 5.

Collecting Debts for the Potlatch³³⁵ (1902)

At the village of the Quamichans on the grass-covered banks of the Cowichan river a great potlatch is in progress. Over a thousand Indians of various tribes from the Euclataws of Fort Rupert to the Songhees of Victoria are gathered in the great lodges, some of which hold from 40 to 50 families, domiciled on the double row of beaches which run along each wall. In front are the flotillas of canoes moored behind a breakwater made of a derelict log. Now and again the village front is crowded with the different tribes, while the dancers, masked and fantastically garbed, go through the ceremonial dances, or an Indian with a "klosh tum-tum" is making a "cultus potlatch" of a hundred or so blankets which he throws from a platform built at the lodge-front into the waiting crowd. The sight attendant to the throwing of those blankets is an unique one, for if the blanket be one of the native woven kind, a number of hands are laid upon it, and each man cuts off as much of the blanket as his hands or arms can cover. The Hudson's Bay blankets are never cut. The dances, now being carried on, are both weird and fantastical, and the clanging of the skin-drums and skirl of the rattles adds to the weirdness.

This potlatch and accompanying feast, which is causing so much excitement among the gathered Indians, is the gift of old Bill Whulatesailok – a hyas tyee, although no chief – of the Quamichans. He is the head man of the potlatch. Associated with him are Metalatza, Johnny Seeahpult, John Seeamertun and Newall. It began two months ago, when Whulatesailok started to collect this outstanding debts. He wrote the Euclataws, sent messages to the Tsartlip, and notified all debtors that it was time to cash in. When the festive siwash wandered the Cowichan banks before the King George Man came there were no banks, and the man who amassed much goods stood in danger of being killed by an envious one. The potlatch began then for safety's sake. When a man had more than he needed he called his poorer neighbor and gave him a canoe, or a horse, or other article. No time is set for the repayment. The debtor pays when he can.

Bill Whulatesailok is collecting his debts. Men have brought him canoes, Columbia river boats, shot guns, rifles, blankets in bales of hundreds, skins, and other articles which to the Indians are as money. Bill's debtors are coming up well, and the harvest is good. Therefore he has a "klosh tum-tum," and will give a big potlatch. His friends are gathered in his big lodge, and nightly they feast from pilot bread, from salt fish, or other viands supplied by the feast-giver.

On Friday last he felt good and because of this klosh tum-tum he mounted the platform fronting the lodge, and said he would give \$20 to those assembled, whereupon those gathered shouted, "Haiya, Good." His speaker told in eloquent manner of the stories of bill, and then from the platform a long stick came hurtling into the crowd. This was to represent the scrambled money. Many grasped it, and they surged up and down clamoring the while. Suddenly one chanted that he would give ten cents to each man to let go. Another bid 15, and all let go. The bidder was a

³³⁵ From The Potlatch at Quamichan. (1902, June 17). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

little ahead, and by this means the 20 was more or less equally distributed. And so it will be with the canoes when they are potlatched. Bill will say, "I give to all my canoe," and there will be a rush to the beach, and the bidding will take place, and each man who has taken a place in the canoe will get something to get out, and sacrifice his right. And so with horses, guns, etc. – thus does the Indian make sure his gifts do not go only to the strong.

Arrangements are being made for dances of many kinds, masked dances and time-honored festivals – each tribe dancing accordingly to their specialty. On Saturday blankets, money, etc. was collected and sports were held – canoe races, foot races, poling races, tug-of-war, etc., and to both victorious and vanquished went the prizes. The great event was the ball game. On Saturday and Sunday games were held, and here on the diamond – a mile from the village – the vernacular is dropped. When the umpire says "play ball," the Indian forgets his native tongue and shows a familiarity with ball teams which is surprising.

On Sunday morning Bishop Orth and party were at the village and the annual Corpus Christi procession was held, which was attended by over six hundred Indians. The procession, which was a most picturesque one, was headed by two Indian bands, [those] of Saanich and Kuper Island, marched to the church, which the Indians are completing near the reserve, and thence went to St. Anne's convent, where some ceremonies were performed, and the processionists returned to the church. Solemn high mass was sung by Father Vullingsh, assisted by Rev. Fathers Van Neville and Dorval, and with Bishop Orth in the sanctuary. The Bishop afterwards preached a sermon in English, followed by another sermon to the Indians, which was translated to the congregation. The ceremonies were all carried out with great devotion.

Yesterday several minor dances were held and today Bill is finishing up the collection of his debts, and by Wednesday or Thursday it is expected that all his accounts will be straight, and then the great potlatch will begin. Nightly big feasts are held, and the lodges are filled with the dancers, but the great event is yet to come, and this is the giving away of the store of Bill Whulates-ailok, who will gain merit by his distribution, and the accompanying dances and ceremonials.

Among the tribes gathered at the big potlatch at Quamichan are the home tribe, the Quamichans, and other tribes of the Cowichan valley, the Songhees of Victoria, Saanich, with their four sub-tribes of Tsartlip, Panquechin, Tseyhum, Tsowont; the Penelaquet of Kuper Island, with their sub tribes; Lyacksumf of Valdes Island; Chemainus Indians, or Chemainus; Nanaimos, Hellelt from Chemeainus river; Comox and Euclataws, all with their sub-tribes and families. The Nitinat of the West Coast were invited by telegraph, but they have not arrived.

“The potlatch at Quamichan”³³⁶ (June, 1902)

Bill Whulatesailok, of the Quamichans, is honored among the tribesmen from the whitewashed houses of the Songhees, close to Victoria, to the ramshackle cedar-planked illahees of the Euclataw at Campbell River. He has given a great potlatch at the big village on the banks of the swift-running Cowichan to over a thousand assembled Indians – the men of over a score of the Coast tribes, that they might know that he had a “klosh tum-tum” – that is, “a good heart”.

The potlatch is an institution peculiar to the Pacific Coast Indians, and more particularly, the British Columbian and Alaskan Indian, and like many other primitive institutions, it was borne of necessity. The potlatch was founded long before the King George men came with guns that spat fire, and waters which burned the throat; long before the days when Sir James Douglas and his men came to this same village where the great gathering was held, with guns spitting lead from the bows of the boats they poled up the swift river, until the villagers gave up a murderer of a Hudson’s Bay [Company] man to the hangman’s rope. There were no banks, no bankers, and the man who amassed a large store of blankets – blankets were money then – was in danger of being slaughtered by the covetous. To avoid the envious, he gave away of his surplus store – and thus the potlatch began.

Imagine J. P. Morgan, or John D. Rockefeller inviting a thousand of their friends to a banquet at their homes, and when the guests are all present, scrambling half a million dollars amongst them. That but scantily illustrates the potlatch. Whulatesailok has given far more in comparison than a gift of half a million dollars would mean to either of the two millionaires aforesaid. His potlatch has brought him from affluence to scant sufficiency. He had been collecting in his debts for some months prior to the feast and accompanying potlatch. In days by-gone he had given a horse to one, a canoe to another, blankets to others, and he had creditors in all the villages about the Southern Coast, when he sent messengers to call in his debts in preparation for the potlatch. At the same time the messengers called the tribes to the potlatch and the feasts.

Early in June the canoes began to arrive. The Tsartlip and Pauquechen came in their big war canoes with their kloodchmen and their “tanassas,” their belongings, all piled in between the thwarts; the Songhees came by train and big wagon, [the] Tsowouts and Tseychums drove through the fertile valleys from their Saanich villages; Lyscksums sailed across from Kuper Island and Penelaquets from Valdez Island; Euclataws came for hundreds of miles through stormy seas in their frail canoes, and Nitinats from the faraway West Coast of Vancouver Island; Chemainus from the river of that name; Hellelt, Nanaimos, Comox, and other tribes – all gathered in the lodges of the Quamichan village on the grass-covered banks of the Cowichan.

With the incoming tribes – over a thousand strong – were the creditors of the feast-giver, old Whulatesailok – and they brought blankets, guns, canoes – all manner of articles to repay his loans. If an Indian has two horses, and he has only use for one,

³³⁶ From Smith, J. G. (1902, June 22). THE POTLATCH AT QUAMICHAN. *Daily Colonist*, p. 6. Written by L. Gordon Smith (c. 1874 – 1951).

he is not like the average white man. He does not let the horse that is unused run wild in pasture. Perhaps a friend arrives, and says he is “delate klahowyah,” which means in effect that he is very poor, and has no horse; well, he is given the spare horse and told to pay back when he can. And so with canoes, blankets, and other things. Whulatesailok had been well supplied, and he had loaned his “ictas” to many. Now it was time for repayment – and because of his fulness of heart – his “klosh tum-tum” – Whulatesailok decided to give a cultus potlatch, a scramble to the assembled Indians.

His creditors had paid him well. For the first few days the pathway along the village front presented a strange scene. There outside the great lodges in which over a hundred families lived on the two beaches side by side, with not even a partition to hide their domestic arrangements from each other, were piles of blankets, and other articles, masks, rifles, etc. At the back of the pile stood the debtor about to repay his debts, and beside him was his speaker – his lawyer, who was skilled in “wawa” – which means “talk”. Across the pathway sat the speaker of the creditor, and nearby another lawyer, who acted as referee. First the speaker of the debtor told of how his client had been poor, his horse had died and he had been in a bad way when Whulatesailok, the generous, had given him a horse. He had done well with the horse, and now he wished to pay back twice the value of the horse in blankets. Together the lawyers “mashed their waw” – one saying that the store offered was too much, the other taking a contra view. Finally they were of one mind, and with all the ceremony that could be thrown in, the debtor and his speaker carried the store of blankets across the matting of the creditor – thus the debt was paid.

One who had received a rifle five years before brought back a large sailboat, another who had received a big canoe had not prospered, and had only a few blankets which his klotchman had woven from the hair of the mountain sheep to offer in return; another who had received blankets returned a cow – all manner of “ictas” [were] brought in, from broken shotguns to children’s cradles and berry baskets, until when night fell on the first day of [the] festivities and the klotchmen carried the driftwood to the lodges for the big fires built on the hardpan floor of the lodges for the evening dances, the store carried to the lodge of Whulatesailok was a goodly one. When his debts were all in, he had received such good returns that his heart was full – he had a “delate klosh tum-tum” towards all, and therefore he would give a great potlatch.

In his lodge were pyramids of boxes of pilot bread, and from the rafters smoking in the soot of the driftwood fires were the rows of dried salmon, in the carved boxes was the meat of the slaughtered cows, and he had even the blubber of seals for the feasting. Therefore he called the assembled tribesmen, and while the speakers handed around the good things, the klotchmen off in their corner, sang the glad songs – the chants made by the medicine men for the potlatch of Whulatesailok. These songs told of his greatness, of his generosity, and of what dances and potlatches were to follow. Then came others to assist in the potlatches. Metaltza decided to make a potlatch, and hold a masked dance in memory of his two children, who had died 14 years before. Johnnie Seamertun decided to scramble his goods because the son of the

Euclataw chief had been betrothed to his daughter. Seeahpult also decided to join the festivities, likewise Newall – and the speakers sang the praises of all, while the program was being prepared for the feasting, the scrambling and the dancing.

All night they sang, while klotchmen beat time with short sticks on cedar boards, and the musicians beat the skin drums, and soon after sunrise the crowd gathered in the roadway waiting for the scrambles – the potlatch proper to commence. The heart of Whulatesailok felt even better than before, and with his klotchmen, his lawyers and friends he mounted the platform built high in the air fronting his lodge, and as the crowd waited in hushed expectancy, his speaker told in eloquent manner – and the village speakers are most eloquent – of the glories of Bill, whose wrinkled and bronzed face shone with pleasure, as he took up a long stick, and handed it to the speaker. This stick, the speaker announced was a horse. Not that the stick was a horse, however, but solely to represent the equine which was to be given away.

“Haiya” – good – shouted the assembled Indians as they struggled nearer the stand reaching up their hands, as with a shout, the speaker let fall the long stick, which came hurling into the center of the crowd, who surged like the scrimmage of a football team, struggling each with the other for a hand’s grasp on the stick – the horse. A hundred held the stick in hand, and swung to and fro, struggling and clamoring, while Whulatesailok and his group of friends watched silently from the platform. Suddenly one shouted that he would give ten cents to all who would let go. Others were endeavoring to count the number who held the stick, that they might be able to bid, too. Finally one cried that he would give “two-bits” to all who would let go – and he paid to those who held the stick \$10 more than the value of the potlatched cayuse.

Then came the blankets. From the platform Bill’s klotchman hurled a Hudson’s Bay [Company] blanket with its heavy stripe of black, and hundreds jumped at it while it was yet in the air, and snatched it down, struggling for possession, and the mightiest won. Then came the native-made blanket – the “Squakus” blanket of mountain goat’s wool. As the blanket left the platform’s edge, hundreds of hands shot up, endeavoring to grasp it, and when it was in the center of the struggling group, knives were quickly brought into play, and each man cut off that portion which his hands or arms covered. These fragments are woven together when sufficient are obtained, and the blanket of pieces is worth far more than that of one piece – it shows that the owner has been at many potlatches. The Hudson’s Bay [Company] blankets are never cut; they go to the stronger arm.

Sticks were thrown from the platform, and these sticks represented cows, money, canoes, and various ictas – and the struggle was intense. Football scrimmages looked small when compared to that struggling mass of Indians who fought for possession of the stick, or clutched at the blanket. Meanwhile other givers began shouting their calls and chanting their songs, from platforms fronting their lodges, or from points of vantage on the grassy hillocks. The village front was soon the scene of many wild scrambles for the much-desired blanket, and goods of the givers. Some of the most interesting scenes were seen when the givers announced that a canoe which swung in the river 50 yards away was potlatched. With a quick shout, the crowds

dashed down the bank into the river, and scrambled into the canoe, fighting, pushing, scrimmaging, until one bought out the others, and won the canoe – and at the same time distributed its value among many, for this is the idea of the potlatch.

The scene changed fast. From the potlatch fronting the house of Whulatesailok, or the lodge of Seemaertum, the crowd hurried up to the open space near the hill-top, where Metaltza and his klotchman had erected a little shack of matting, inside which the dancers were donning their finery. Outside the klotchmen had gathered and sat in two long rows, some 40 yards apart. Before them they held a small pine board, and in their hands were the clubs to beat time for the dancers. In the center of the space was a little heap of native blankets – the monument to the dead children in whose memory the dance was given. On the top of the pile where the blankets were fastened together to form the semblance of children's heads, little straw hats had been placed – thus completing the totem to the dead.

In the center of the square close by the blankets, stood Metaltza, and by him his klotchman. He was shouting in a loud voice the story of his dead children. In lengthy detail he told of their deaths, and of what each had said when they died, and then he called up from the village front all those women who had lost children by death. In one long line they were marshaled, fronting the monument, and Metalatza repeated the story of his dead, and sang the death dirges, while the klotchmen kept time. Then to each of the bereaved women he potlatched one blanket – a gift given in memory of his dead.

From the matting-hidden closet came roar as though of a wild animal, and then as the gatekeeper swung the entrance matting aside, the dancers issued into the open space. Quickly the young women took up the beating, and as their rhythmic clangor echoed, the dancers jumped and hopped, around the pile of blankets, alongside which a klotchman stood with her head covered with frayed rope, dangling in long chains over her head and all but obscuring her face. The dancers – four in number – swayed their strangely-garbed bodies as they danced in a manner both weird and novel, while the klotchmen sang the weird rhythmic chant – the dirge of the dead children. They were all but hidden in great wooden masks, which like great carven panels, represented great ravens – for the raven is the great bird of the pagan belief, the god supreme over all gods. From the huge masks of wood, arrangements of great feathers dangled down on to a short skirt-like costume, which was likewise coated with feathers. Their legs were encased in leggings coated with feathers, and moccasins covered their feet. From the top of their headdresses was a huge cluster of feathers, with varicolored puff balls interspersed, and dangling behind them from the headdress was a bepainted cloth – the whole being a costume seldom seen outside of the out-of-the-way villages of the Indians.

The picture was a strange one. At the back were the fir trees, with the lodges for a background, and beyond the winding river and the clusters of alders, were the snow-capped hills. On either side were the rows of gaudy-colored klotchmen, with shawls of green and yellow, and many faces well greased and painted with red and yellow ochres. Behind them stood the spectators, crowding in towards the open space. At one side of the rectangle of grass was the matting-covered place of the dancers,

with the solemn-looking gatekeeper. As one by one the dancers issued from this place, rattling the strings of bear-claws and waving their wands, the sights and sounds – for the klotchmen were beating their planks, men were beating skin drums, and all were slowly chanting their monotone song – were bewildering.

Now running as a fugitive animal or swaying like a wounded elk, jumping at the assembled Indians like a maddened cougar, the dancers kept up their weird movements. One minute they were ambling about the little heap of blankets, shaking their claw-hung arms and feet, and the next they were rushing up and down, hopping and jumping suddenly high in [the] air, and then again they swayed and glided, until one by one they ambled, exhausted and worn out, to the tented square – the dance was over.

Incident quickly followed incident, though, at this great potlatch of the Quamichans. There was a loud shout from a nearby lodge soon after the dance ended, and excitedly the tribesmen rushed down-hill to the pathway fronting the lodge of Johnnie Seeahpult and his father, Metalatza. Up on the platform, like a scaffold, stood the givers, Metalatza's klotchman with a gay yellow cloth around her forehead. Rudely the crowd tore away the roughly-built fence and dashed its pieces down the bank into the river, so that there might be no impediment before them when the blankets were hurtled from the platform – and then the scenes of the morning were repeated. Down came the blankets into the midst of over a hundred uplifted hands, and then they struggled and finally cut up the spoils. Then they fought for possession of a rifle, [and] struggled for the stick which represented money, until the cultus potlatch ended, and then the little crowd on the platform began calling their friends, one by one, each man in his turn, and to each they gave a blanket.

While they called loudly and slowly their friends came and received their blankets; the Indians wended their way to the further end of the village, where in the big lodge of Willie Binns – which is his English name – other potlatches and dances were to take place. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon when the Siwashes began to fill the lodge and the Euclataw dancers from the further north began their strange midwinter dances. The platform on the rafters had been spread with blankets, and two blanket-covered trunks were suspended from it. Around the walls of the big lodge the Indians – men and women together in this instance – were gathered, a rectangle of excited and picturesquely garbed Indians, many with painted faces and oiled skin.

At one end of the rectangle, on a manner of dais, sat two klotchmen, their heads hung with frayed rope, like the delate ankety, which made headgear for chiefs. They were the leaders in the song, while a group of siwashes nearby beat skin drums in accompaniment. A rhythmic but even-toned dirge these women chanted, ending their song with a wail-like cry, and then from the little apartment of matting in which the dancers waited, came a shrill eerie cry, like the shriek of an eagle.

Out into the open jumped a dancer, his bronzed face only partially hidden in the strange head-dress of eagle feathers, one cluster of which stood up high on his head, with two other clusters spread like huge wings from the side of his head-dress. Two long frayed bark ends dangled from the wreath of bark which circled his brow,

and he wore a skirt-like costume little dissimilar from the masked dancers of the open square, and in his hand he carried a great wand, with rattles and feathers galore.

To and fro he rushed while the time-beaters clapped their hands and beat the pine board fronting them. His movements were slow, and well-timed with the clapping and chanting, and the dance was unique indeed. From the tent came another dancer, and together they whirled to and fro, their movements being more or less graceful. They were dancing the dance of the eagles, swaying to and fro, and they stepped from one foot to the other and slowly made their way around the rectangle of excited Indians.

As they retired to their tent a shouting crowd hauled a great war canoe through a breach knocked with axes in the walls of the lodge. Others followed with a smaller canoe, and then Binns, the sub-chief, giver of the potlatch, with his face painted and showing excitement galore, sang his feast-giving song – which, like all Indian songs, was boastful in the extreme. As he finished his song he grasped a long stick which was thrown hurtling down the lodge. Quickly the Indians jumped out from their places and fought for hold. The stick was to represent the canoe, and the scenes of the potlatch were re-enacted, with the customary struggles, until at last one bought the others off, and the canoe was his. The trunks, blankets, horses, cows, etc., were all potlatched, a stick being used in most cases, except in that of the trunks, which held money, and the blankets and then other dances were held.

The greatest excitement was the initiation of two medicine men, the sons of Binus, as doctors of the tribe. The methods of the medicine man are strange, for he beats drums and scratches and punches a sick man, and sometimes throws cold water in bucketfuls over a fever patient, but for all that, the ancient medicine man has not lost his vogue, and many of the Indians put their dependence on him to cure their maladies, which he sometimes does – by chance.

The two eagle dancers issued again from their place, the chant started again, and slowly they advanced, until from the side of the lodge there sprang up another dancer who had been hidden. Then began the weird “tamamamass,” or midwinter dance. Wriggling their bodies as they hopped about, the three dancers advanced rapidly to where the two old klotchmen sat leading the singers at the end of the lodge. The center dancer swayed from right to left and back again, while the other two kept turning to face him as they changed position. Thus they advanced, swinging their wands hung with cedar bark, until they arrived facing a row of pegs placed in the hard pan of the floor. These they extracted with the split end of the wands, and danced back again, while the assembled Indians sang. For half an hour or more they swayed and wriggled backward and forward, the chant rising and falling, until as they dropped the pegs back in place, they screeched like eagles and rushed back to the cover of their tent.

Then from the tent two boys rushed out. They were gone but a few minutes, during which the old medicine man sang their doctor’s songs, when they returned with their heads hidden in ferns and green stuff from the hills beyond. As the doctor sang the story they had been to gather the good herbs, for they were doctors who could administer to the people. After dancing outside the lodge door for a space, the

young men entered the lodge, and they danced their first dance, in a manner similar to the costumed dancers, after which the eagles issued again from their place, and all danced until exhausted. The medicine men had been initiated.

Chants and songs followed, and after further potlatches had been given, the crowds dispersed to their several lodges, where after nightfall feasts were held, followed by many minor dances and ceremonials – for to the Indian ceremony is as bread. The next day the dances and potlatches were continued, and so it was until the gathering dispersed and the canoes carried their cargoes of humanity to the home villages far away, each canoe laden with a part of the store which Bill Whulatesailok and his friends had given.

And thus did the Quamichans celebrate their potlatch.

“The dancers of the Somenos tribe”³³⁷ (January, 1903)

An interesting masked dance by the dancers of the Somenos tribe was a feature of the potlatch, which is being held at the Somenos reservation, which lies on the banks of the Cowichan at Duncan. The feast givers, Joe Hermalock, George Hatilth and Tom Sartamult, who are among the leading men of the Somenos Indians, invited the neighboring tribes to the potlatch, and since Sunday, when the annual Corpus Christi procession was held, they have been feasting in the lodges and gathering in their debts.

The debts have been practically all gathered in, and now in their goodness of heart, the feast-givers intend to scramble from the platform in the big dance house of Hermalock, boxes of pilot bread, blankets, [and] both Hudson’s Bay [Company] blankets and the “swaukis,” which is woven from the hair of the mountain goat. Preliminary to the potlatches, dances are being held – and yesterday afternoon saw a masked dance, in which a large number of dancers participated.

The dancers wore strangely carved masks, and mantles of feathers, which gave them a strikingly picturesque appearance.

“The potlatch lasted all night”³³⁸ (January, 1903)

The Somenons Indian village was the scene last night of one of their peculiar ceremonial dances and potlatches. Imagine a huge building rudely constructed of cedar shakes measuring probably 60 x 100 feet, richly carpeted with mother earth and for mural decorations large sheets of the grotesque figures common in the totem poles. In the center were two great fries of cordwood, and crowded around the sides were a mingled crowd of 400 tyees, klotchmen and [infants].

After much doubtless eloquent oratory both from the men and women, piles of blankets were brought out and duly potlatched to the friends of the donors. Then

³³⁷ From MASKED DANCE BY THE INDIANS. (1903, January 23). *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 5.

³³⁸ From DUNCANS DOINGS. (1903, January 28). *The Province*, p. 7.

arose a rhythmic chorus from the throats of the tyees, accompanied by the thumping of the drums of rawhide stretched upon large hoops and the rattling of staves garnished with rings, the whole affording a kind of rude but not discordant music in perfect time to the movements of the dancers, who were young men fantastically attired in gorgeous suits of grey stuff, decked with tinsel, feathers and streamers, who went through certain steps and whirling motions, at intervals leaping high in [the] air to the crash of the instruments. The dancers were, we were informed, going through a solemn ceremony of taking their Indian name.

After this long ladders were brought in and some of the men carried large blankets, loosely woven of the hair of the mountain goats, high up on the overhanging beams, whence they were thrown down to the crowd below, who seized them, struggling for possession, and finally cutting them up into small pieces which were distributed among all to be afterward gathered, we were informed, and re-woven into blankets for future potlatches.

We left at a late hour, and, judging from the sounds, the potlatch lasted all night.

“Great potlatch at Somenose”³³⁹ (June, 1908)

Duncan, June 20 – The word potlatch signifies gift, but most of the giving is “bread cast upon the waters”. Generally, potlatches are ceremonies for the payment of debt.

When the young Indian reaches the age of 21 he is started out in the world by gifts at a potlatch. By and by he must repay these with interest, but those to whom he pays must pay back, because the interest is looked upon as a gift, and so the giving may go on forever.

In addition to this giving and paying back, there is the free potlatch which may take place at any time during the ceremony. The “lord of the feast,” to show his good will and his wealth, throws silver or blankets among the crowd. The men scramble, and in the case of the blanket half a dozen may catch it and cut it in pieces, each taking away his piece. The ceremonial blanket used on these occasions is made of the wool of the mountain goat and is not used as a covering. In potlatches, when it is cut in pieces the man takes all the pieces he has won to his women folk, who weave them together again. These blankets are handed down from generation to generation and are worn only on great occasions. The fixed value among the Indians is \$5 for the small size and \$10 for the large size. They are nearly always decorated with strips of colored cloth or feathers, or hair inwoven in strips.

Besides blankets, anything may be scrambled for – a canoe, a carriage or a sewing machine. This is done by throwing a pole among the crowd, and those who are able to take hold of the pole have a share in the gift. One man will buy the others out, and the gift will be his.

³³⁹ From GREAT POTLATCH AT SOMENOS. (1908, June 26). *Victoria Times*, p. 8.

Throughout all of the tribes there are lawyers or accountants (men or women), whose business it is to know everything that is given at a potlatch and who can tell the exact amount of any man's debt. They never make a mistake, but could tell you offhand each man's financial standing.

The man who is paying his debts comes to the front with his lawyer, who also acts as a master of ceremonies. The lawyer calls out name after name of those the debtor must pay; they come up or the debtor goes to them and gives them their due with interest. Should a man not be able to pay his "debts of honor" at a potlatch, he is allowed until the next one takes place, but he is more or less disgraced before his fellows. He will part with his last cent, and even his necessities, rather than suffer this indignity.

The givers of the potlatch are men of influence and wealth; they are great men of the day, and besides paying all of their debts, as the ordinary men do, they make a great many free gifts and they also lend out money and property which will be returned with interest at future potlatches.

The giver of a potlatch has the privilege when traveling of receiving lodgings and courtesy from anyone to whom he has given anything at a potlatch.

LORD OF THE DAY

To-day in Duncan the givers of the potlatch held in the Somenos reserve, which adjoins the town, are Louis Gabouri, who is half French; Sam Sequalem; Somenos Willie, otherwise known as "Willie the Runner;" and Jimmie Tatluck. This potlatch has lasted during the whole week.

To-day Somenos Willie held the stage. He gave his share in the potlatch to celebrate his re-christening. From today he is to be known no longer as Somenos Willie, but will be called Sinemacha, the name of his great-grandfather on his mother's side. The lawyer, and master of ceremonies, acting for Somenos Willie, was Binn, of the Quamichan Indians. Had Binn made a mistake in his reckoning, there were half a dozen lawyers or chiefs who could correct him.

Binn, the master of ceremonies, called up fifty or more great men of the tribes who stood in a circle. Marching in solemn procession from one of the lodges, dressed in the beaded buckskin coat of his ancestors, and surrounded by four Indians clad in blankets made of the wool of the mountain goat, Somenos Willie came into the center of the gathered tribes. His buckskin garment was decorated with red and blue ribbons, and he wore a red and blue turban made of strands of wool. Over one shoulder was slung a beaded belt holding a bag that in the olden days had carried his ancestors' arrowpoints. This was the dress of the old Sinemacha, his ancestor.

The Indians who marched beside him, of whom Chief Tzouhaltem was one, were supposed to have power to communicate with the spirit world, and they chanted songs to call up the spirit of the old Sinemacha who had died more than fifty years ago. His spirit, called back to earth, was to re-enter human form again and take possession of Somenos Willie, who thus would possess both the spirit and the name of his great ancestor. The mother of Somenos Willie then went forward to welcome the spirit and give thanks to those who had called it up.

The master of ceremonies made a speech recounting to the leading men gathered in a circle the glories of the old Sinemacha, who had been a great giver of potlatches, and whose name was always mentioned at these feasts. He called upon these men to remember that his descendant was now Sinemacha, and as such should have his place with the men of honor and be mentioned in potlatches.

Dick, an old Indian of the Songhees, then told of the deeds of the great Sinemacha.

Somenos Willie then went around the circle of leading men, presenting each with a dollar to impress his new name upon them. These men are now the new godfathers of Somenos Willie. To emulate his great-grandfather, Somenos Willie then scattered coin and blankets among the crowd.

Following this, the master of ceremonies called up eighteen women who seated themselves on the ground. The name, Sinemacha, was impressed upon their memory, and they received 50 cents. They will be the godmothers.

After this Somenos Willie, followed by the crowd, went into one of the large lodges and there gave the dance and song of Sinemacha, which will hereafter be his dance and song at the feasts, for Somenos Willie is now head of his family and from to-day, the date of his re-christening, is Sinemacha.

AN INDIAN CHRISTENING

It may be interesting to recall how the boy receives his first real name. When the Indian boy is about 18 he leaves his home and spends four days fasting, alone upon the side of a mountain beside a clear cold stream. During this time he is supposed to communicate with the spirits, who teach him many things. At the end of his feasting he returns to his native village at the time of one of their dances, held generally about the beginning of the year. He gives them his dance and song which the spirits have taught him on the mountain. While he dances and sings about the great fires, the whole assemblage, even the infants, will beat time with sticks and drums. This song and this dance will be his until, like Somenos Willie, he becomes head of his family and takes the name of a noted ancestor, whose crest and totem will be his as well.

Among the debts paid Somenos Willie was one of \$150 by Chief George of the Clem-clemalitz Indians. Chief George paid his \$150 and gave as interest a Columbia river boat valued at \$150. Somenos Willie will give this boat as a free potlatch to be scrambled for by the men.

Somenos Willie, or Sinemacha, is spending a great deal of money on his re-christening potlatch, and the greater will be his fame among his people.

THE DEATH DANCE

The Swywhe dance, or the death dance, held alternately with the ceremonies of the re-christening of Somenos Willie, was another performance perhaps of greater interest. It was the memorial service to Jacob of Westholme, whose Indian name was Isalatza. He was an aged man who died last winter.

Johnny Pilqueelum, of the Somenos Indians, was master of ceremonies for the relatives of Jacob. The dead man in effigy was seated beside one of the lodges, where, if alive, he might have had the best view of the ceremonies. The figure wore on its

head a sailor hat and was draped with blankets of the wool of the mountain goat. About twenty yards in front was a bed covered with blankets of the wool of the mountain goat. On the bed were figures, representing two small children who had died some time ago, and at the other end was a photo of Isalatza in a large gilt frame, draped with purple silk.

Seated on the ground, a number of Indian women beat time with sticks and ever and anon chanted the song of the dead man. This song was an especial gift to him from the spirit world.

An old woman came forward and made a touching speech with gestures, saying she was the last of her people, she was all alone, and she was always naming her ancestors. She asked the privilege to name a young girl and to have this young girl belong to her people. Afterwards during the ceremony the young girl, whose name had been Ada, clad in a yellow skirt and draped with a blanket of the wool of the mountain goat, which trailed behind like a coronation robe, received the new name Hulcacod. The master of ceremonies called up members of the Saanich Indians who came out of one of the lodges, each one carrying a rattle made of wood or horn decorated with strands of wool and having a few stones inside. These they rattled in time to doleful chanting as they danced around the bed on which were the two figures and the photo of Isalatza.

The other tribes at different times will pay similar respect to the dead.

The master of ceremonies then called up leading men and friends of Isalatza. They formed themselves in a semi-circle around the bed, while the orator spoke of the merits of the dead. Then two of his tribe, one carrying a bag of coin, and the other the framed photo of the dead, went to each of the semi-circle, showed the photo, and gave to each one money to remember the dead. The spirit of Isalatza will be called back to earth at some future date and take possession of some Indian as yet unborn.

FANTASTIC FIGURES

A masked figure with a black headdress and a rich garment of furs reaching the knees, came out. His object seemed to be to create amusement. Following him came ten masked figures dressed in the most wonderful costumes. The headdress was enormous, the front bearing balls on wires and feathers extending nearly two feet from the head. Hanging from the head over the shoulders were handsomely embroidered or beaded pieces of cloth or skin reaching over the shoulders. The skirts reaching the knees were made of rows of light-colored feathers. The leggings were of rabbit skin. In their right hands they carried a sort of tambourine made of oyster shells on a ring decorated with a large piece of pink ribbon. In their left hand they carried a piece of something that looked like broom. Seen from a little distance it was a most gorgeous sight. Their costumes seemed to be neatly put together and were very fantastic. Each mask bears an emblem representing the ancestor of the tribe and the figure thereon was that given him by the Creator at the beginning of time and according to ancient custom this mask should be worn only at the salt water, but in late years this has been modified.

The dancers are picked men of their people. They must be only those of high rank and must have the respect of all.

BUFFOON AT CEREMONY

While the women kept time with sticks, and the dancers with their tambourines and a drum was beaten, and the song of the dead chanted, their figures danced about the bed containing the photo of Isalatza. It would have been exceedingly solemn but for the conduct of the man in the black headdress who had a sort of baton with which he tried to poke the eyes of the dancers, who retaliated with the pieces of shrub they carried. He acted as a sort of buffoon and caused amusement to the audience, who applauded any happy stroke.

During the dance the master of ceremonies presented each dancer with a blanket, and as they became worn out they retired to a dressing room to remove their headgear. There was a great endeavor to dance as long as possible, for the one who danced the longest was the winner of a prize. After the dance a sack of money was distributed among the dancers, and blankets were "potlatched" in honor of the dead.

The crowd dispersed for the evening meal. The potlatch will be continued on Monday and Tuesday, when one of the other leading men will be "lord of the day".

"A big potlatch has just been held"³⁴⁰ (November, 1909)

A big potlatch has just been held in the Comiakén Indian village near Duncan. During last week Indian Johnny called in all his accounts. On Monday and Tuesday the potlatch ceremonies and masked dances were held, and free gifts of parts of blankets and 50-cent pieces were made on Wednesday, and the visiting Indians dispersed. A number of white people, on the invitation of the Indians, visited the potlatch to see the dances on Tuesday.

"Indian festivities at the Quamichan village"³⁴¹ (June, 1910)

Duncan, B.C., June 22 – The Indian festivities at the Quamichan village have finished and to-day the visiting Indians from Vancouver and the different parts of our own island are returning to their homes by canoes, wagons or train.

The great givers of the potlatch were Leo Whinam and Mrs. Binn. Indian Leo gives his share to the memory of his two children, who died some time ago, and Mrs. Binn gives her part in memory of her husband, who died a year ago.

The moneys Binn owed are all paid, and what was owing to him was gathered in during the potlatch, and Mrs. Binn and Indian Leo have both given many free-will offerings in memory of their dead. Blankets have been thrown among the crowd to be scrambled for by the men of lower rank and by the boys. These blankets are the ceremonial ones made of the strands of the wool of the mountain goat or sheep, and the crowd scramble to get a hand on the blanket. Those who succeed have it cut in pieces and divided amongst them. At a potlatch they may get a great many pieces and as the wool is not very plentiful, these are valued. They are taken home and the Indian women re-weave them. These blankets are not used as coverings, except for

³⁴⁰ From INDIANS HOLD BIG POTLATCH. (1909, November 20). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 18.

³⁴¹ From POTLATCH AT QUAMICHAN. (1910, June 23). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 12.

honored guests and extreme cold, but only on ceremonial occasions, and are exchanged at a fixed value at any time. [...]

On Wednesday last at daybreak the mediums between the living and the dead visited Indian Binn's burial place and called his spirit back. In the supposed presence of Binn's spirit and through her minister of ceremonies, Mrs. Binn gave her husband's last messages to his friends. His portrait was carried around the circle of his friends and each [were] given a present of money in remembrance.

“The Great Potlatch recently held at Quamichan”³⁴² (July, 1910)

Anybody who is at all acquainted with their customs may tell you that a potlatch is by no means an uncommon event in the lives of our Indians, which statement is almost certain to be followed by any amount of information on the subject, but as a rule the descriptions of the different events that take place during a potlatch are so vague and disconnected that it is doubtful whether you are much the wiser after listening to such accounts than you were before. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to extract anything at all about the matter from the Indians themselves, who look upon the potlatch and everything pertaining to it in a most serious, one might almost say reverential light, and show little inclination to satisfy the curiosity of onlookers.

There are a few, however, who are more disposed to discuss the proceedings than others, but they are the exception and not the rule, and even when you do happen to find such a one, you have still to learn that he may not always feel in a conversant mood, for the Indian who will talk to you today may not be inclined to do so tomorrow. Then too, there still remains the disconcerting fact that more often than not your talkative Indian has a very incoherent way of expressing himself, and the doubt that he is practicing a little innocent deception upon you grows into a certainty when after a little further acquaintance with more of his kind you realize that he could tell you a great deal more, if he would. And even as you make this lamentable discovery arises an insatiable desire for a deeper knowledge of all that lies beneath the strange outward ceremonies.

To the casual bystander, they may resemble no more than a curious game of make believe, yet even what may appear to be the most trivial action has a particular bearing upon the whole, which traces its origin back to the very beginning, to the time in the words of the Indians “When every peoples was first made.” Be sure that when an Indian can not, or will not, say anything else about the matter he will always tell you that, and the manner in which the statement is invariably given never fails to impress you with the feeling that you must take that as an explanation and be satisfied.

³⁴² From The Great Potlatch Recently Held at Quamichan Reservation. (1910, July 2). *Daily Province Magazine*, p. 8. Also includes the continuations published on July 9, 16 and 23. Written by Ida Wiltshire (d. 1917), who would later gain some fame as an Australian-based writer.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

As luck would have it, upon the evening of my arrival in Duncan the train from the north, an hour earlier, had deposited upon the same little platform one who, like myself, had traveled thither to attend the Quamichan potlatch.

Duncan is generally known as a country town. If it happened to be in England instead of Vancouver Island it would, without a doubt, be spoken of as a village. It is so small that you can walk the length of its main street in five minutes, the arrival and departure of the morning and afternoon trains are the most important events of each day, and its hotels can be numbered on the fingers of one hand and still leave two and a half to spare. Therefore, it followed most naturally that we who had arrived in Duncan almost simultaneously from two opposite points on our way to one destination should meet, and that we should immediately begin to talk about the potlatch. The next day saw us leaving for Quamichan together.

It did not take us long to discover that my newly-made friend understood the Indians, as far as it is possible for any man to understand them, and that his position amongst them was already assured. He was greeted on all sides as a “hyas kloshe tillicum” (very good friend), and it is entirely due to his kindness in establishing an understanding between the Indians and myself that I succeeded in winning a little of their confidence during the week I spent at the potlatch. Otherwise it would have been impossible to break down the barrier of reserve that they erect against all strangers, for they take no pains to conceal the fact that open curiosity on the part of uninvited guests is considered an intrusion and is greatly resented. As it was, upon several occasions I found myself locked out behind a wall of cold silence, but at such times his name, given as a guarantee of good faith on my part, [seldom] failed to act as an “open sesame”.

After several days I began to feel, when smiles of welcome greeted me, that I had found a few friends at least, and at this stage my questions always succeeded in eliciting a response, although, it must be admitted, the explanations I received more often than not left me “halo delate kumtuks,” otherwise in a state of bewildering uncertainty. For, apart from the fact that even the most conversant Indian when speaking of the traditions of his race will only tell you as much as he thinks you should know, it is very doubtful whether the full significance of all that takes place at a potlatch is wholly understood by the younger generation, while as for the old folks who could perhaps explain matters, they are not to be persuaded to throw any light at all upon the subject. Besides which, each tribe has its own traditions, its own secret orders, and its own language, so that it may often happen that the performance of a dance or a funeral ceremony given at a potlatch by the members of one tribe is almost unintelligible to those of another.

WHAT A POTLATCH MEANS

My experiences during the Quamichan potlatch were full of surprises and have left me puzzling over many unsolved mysteries, but one thing at least remains clear. It is that a present-day potlatch really is a very different thing from what it is supposed to be. It did not take long for me to arrive at that conclusion, and I have it from no less than three distinguished chiefs that a potlatch does *not* mean a wholesale

giving away, or to use their own expression “throwing away,” of blankets and money for the public good.

They told me that a potlatch is usually “called” by one or more influential Indians of a certain tribe who, while they certainly entertain the visiting tribes at their own expense, are helped by loans from friends, and who take this general meeting as an opportunity to collect debts that may be owing to them. It seems that to a very great extent everything that is given away at a potlatch under the guise of a distribution of gifts will be returned to the owner at some future time. This explanation somewhat reduces an act that is apt to be regarded by onlookers as one of munificent generosity, but my chiefs assured me emphatically that this is not so.

In the matter of paying off old debts, the Indian not only has a remarkable memory but proves himself to be a man of honor. He has no written record of debts contract, yet although years may elapse the debt, with interest, will surely be paid at a potlatch of some later date. It is this general settling of public and private debts that occupies the longest time at a potlatch, and it was the prime cause of the Quamichan potlatch lasting for two weeks instead of one, although the naming of Young Chief Capilano, and a football match, were amongst the chief features of a very interesting, if rather drawn out, program.

The Quamichan potlatch was given principally by the widow Brinn, with Leo of Quamichan as chief participator. Truding back to Duncan one night, escorted by a Somenos Indian, I learned that Leo had told the Cowichan Indians about ten years ago that he intended giving a potlatch one day in the future, so they had all been expecting it for some little time and were, therefore, not at all surprised, but very glad, of course, when it actually did come to pass. Then too, Mrs. Binn, he said, must be quite wealthy and would surely potlatch many blankets after all the debts had been paid up, for Binn must have had lots of money and was a good friend to the Indians. He added after a long silence that the masquerade dance was going to be a very fine one, but that he had no idea which day it would be, only he knew that the day it did happen would be the big day.

ELECTING A CHIEF

Later, young Chief Mathias told me that the most important event of the potlatch would be when the head council of the Indians formally gave to him his late father’s name – Capilano. He was not sure *when* they had decided to call a meeting of the council, but it would be one day, sure, and he was going to make a big speech. Then did I realize that I was indeed fortunate in being present at this particular potlatch, which was evidently regarded by the Indians as one of the most important that had taken place for years.

At first there appeared to be some delay in getting the potlatch properly started. This was explained by the fact that Mrs. Binn was waiting for the arrival of a number of Campbell River and Cape Mudge Indians who had been specially invited in return for the hospitality they had shown to her late husband during his visit to the Northern tribes not long before his death. Time is of no moment to the Indian, however, and at the end of the first week there was no sign of them, although trains from the north and south were daily depositing late arrivals upon the Duncan station,

and from the leafy verandah of the Tzouhalem Hotel – named after the great bluff Tzouhalem, or Sun Mountain, which stands like a grim sentinel guarding the lands of the Indians where the Cowichan River runs to meet the sea – I watched the reunion of many friends, and small girls and boys being stowed away amongst bags and boxes of provisions in the trays of buggies that possessed an elastic capacity. And still the Campbell River and Cape Mudge Indians tarried, but not until the last day of the potlatch approached was their advent given up as hopeless.

Upon the day that we made our first appearance at Quamichan, matters had evidently come to a temporary standstill, and my friend at once seized the opportunity to show me around the reservation and to make me acquainted with several of those who were playing an active part in the potlatch.

Such an important proceeding as an introduction is treated seriously by the Indians. So they received me with much dignity, and I went through a ponderous performance of hand-shaking while they listened thoughtfully to our repeated assurances that I had come there as a friend. In their own tongue they made many enquiries, presumably of a personal nature, about me, and apparently feeling satisfied, nodded their heads in slow approval, looked me up and down with eyes that scrutinized the most trifling detail and finally agreed to help me, in every way possible, to see all that was worth seeing. A half-grunted sigh and the flicker of a smile in those critical eyes was a signal that the ceremony was over.

Several chiefs were amongst those whose acquaintance I made during that first visit. It was a trifle disappointing to find them strolling around in their shirt sleeves looking exactly like any Indian you may see driving through Duncan every day in the week, but they were very courteous and affable and always appeared conscious of the dignity of their position as head of their own particular tribe.

QUAMICHAN RESERVATION

There being no sign of anything out of the ordinary taking place, we turned our attention to the reservation. The Cowichan Indians are divided into eight tribes – the Quamichan, Comiakén, Clem-Clem-a-lits, Hamutzen, Someons, Koksailah, Kilpahlas and Kanipsin. Their reservations are closely connected and occupy a beautiful tract of land to the extent of 5,723 acres in the Cowichan Valely. Of these, Quamichan lies about two miles distant from Duncan and is entered by a sharp curve from the main road, by a public thoroughfare which cuts through the lands of the Indians until it meets the main road again, three or four miles further on.

Quamichan is ideally situated on the brow of a gentle hill that slopes away to the log-strewn banks of the Cowichan River, where it sprawls untidily in its course for the span of a few miles, then where it winds away under the green leaves of overhanging trees that whisper a message from the bay. As we reached the top of the slope the panorama that spread into view was one of fertile lands rolling away in variegated undulations to the foot of fir-clad mountains gracefully outlined against a dome of exquisite blue relieved by a solitary white cloud.

To your left as you enter the reservation, in a small enclosure, is a neat cottage with a red roof. A winding creek separates it from an uneven row of buildings that run for some distance along the bank of the river. Immediately to the front of the

cottage are four or five rancheries. They are barn-like in shape, about a hundred feet long and forty feet in width. The roofs are battened, the floors are earthen, the walls unlined. A few small square openings in the roof and walls allow the air and a little daylight to enter. Around the interior of the buildings is a wide shelf, about two feet from the ground, covered with rush mats which also hang against the roughly built walls to a height of about six feet. These are to keep the wind from blowing in through the wide cracks, upon the sleepers. For it is in these buildings that the Indian and his guests live *en famille*.

The first rancherie below Petel's pretty little cottage belongs to Leo, the third to Mrs. Binn. Her homestead differs from Leo's in that it is better built and has three glass windows. Also several fine carvings, in the possession of the family, adorn the interior, which is scrupulously clean at all times. Opposite is a modest little house, plainly constructed on the most simple lines. This also belongs to Mrs. Binn, and during the potlatch she lived here, apart from her guests, with the picture of her dead husband, and mourned his loss with many tears.

Out in the sunlight, sitting on low benches around the buildings and dotted here and there about the reservation were groups of Indians waiting patiently for the next item on the program which, although the potlatch had been in progress for a week already, had hardly yet begun. They were a motley gathering and the scene was an oddly picturesque one, for while men and youths in the ordinary drab clothes of the male attire were monotonously alike, the costumes exhibited by the women betrayed wonderful variations in the feminine mind upon the matter of dress.

THE LATEST FASHIONS

Many still adhered to the simple fashion of large shawls, generally in dark shades of green, and colored kerchiefs knotted tightly round their heads, but there were others resplendent in all the bravery of modern attire and fashionable headgear, while occasionally a quaint note was struck by the combination of the two when shawls and ribboned or flower-decked hats adorned the wearer. Gay colors were much in evidence in the matter of ribbons and shirtwaists, neckties and sweaters, while the legs of sundry small boys, who played ball the live long day, were so violent in colors as to be almost explosive.

We had been at Quamichan for quite an hour before we noticed a movement towards one of the rancheries, whence began to issue a subdued hum of voices as the audience filled the building. We had just reached the door when a halt was called, as the cracked notes of a gramophone, stationed on a table at an open front window of Petel's house, burst loudly on our ears. The tune, evidently a favorite one with the Indians, who listened to it with great delight and found much amusement in it, was unrecognizable for a confusion of shouting voices, laughter, and sounds as of bones rattling together. It was a gambling song, and an old man at the door in childish excitement and very broken English tried to describe to me the game as it is played, from which I gathered that it is much like the nursery game of hunt-the-slipper, with a difference. Two rows of men sit opposite one another, and while two bones – one painted and one plain – are passed from hand to hand on one side, those on the other guess correctly who holds the bones.

“Hold ‘em this way and that way,” explained my informant, “and shake ‘em up, and whoever find plain bone then he can got! A-a-h!” How he chuckled with pleasure, and rubbed his hands over his old knees. Then as the song ceased abruptly, “Hyas kloshe! Hyas—“ (very good—*very*—) he said.

Entering the building I came in sudden contact with a few sides of beef and some very large fish hanging inside the door, and at first not perceived in the gloom. Later on they would be cooked for supper on fires that were now only heaps of ashes on the long earthen floor. We were politely told to come right in and take a seat, and felt duly honored when we observed that the invitation was not extended to a few curious onlookers who were standing by the door.

At the far end of the building were indications that preparation was being made for a performance of a serious nature, and a hush fell upon the audience as a man stepped forward and spoke. He appeared to be calling names, and in answer to each loud summons the person he had evidently addressed went forward and stood in line until two open half-circles were formed, the men on one side and the women on the other of those who were about to take part in the proceedings. Then came a long pause. One of the center group whispered to another, then slipped quietly behind the waiting line and whispered to a woman in the audience. My friend murmured that the unbroken half-circle of motionless women in shawls were Nanaimo Indians, and I had time to admire their finely carved features and dignified demeanor, before the woman in the audience who had received a message rose silently, passed the [infant] she was nursing in its tiny basket cradle to her husband, and waited till he gently put it into the arms of the man beside him. Then together they went forward and joined the group. A breathless interest fell upon the audience as someone carried over a few sticks and quietly made a fire in the circle.

THE SHOWING OF THE PICTURE

Then stood up Big Bill of Quamichan and spoke long and loudly. When he had finished he sat down on an upturned box and waited. Big Bill is the Quamichan lawyer and was a prominent figure at the potlatch. When two young men stepped forward, evidently in answer to an unseen signal, he rose and draped them with gray blankets, twining them around the waist and over one shoulder and knotting them at the side, leaving one end hanging loose to the knee. Then, very carefully, a picture was placed in their arms, and they began slowly to walk around the inside of the two half-circles before stopping for each person, while another followed close behind and handed a coin to each one as they passed on, while Big Bill’s voice boomed out like a foghorn into eloquent speech.

I learned later that the ceremony of showing the pictures of the dear departed is a very favorite one. It is carried through with great reverence and deep mourning, the performance of this rite being supposed to wipe away the tears of the mourners who until that time have been grieving for their lost relative, and the sincerity with which it is carried out is undoubtedly genuine at the time.

Young Chief Matthias explained it in this way:

“You see — ‘Spose the father of those two boys is dead; they been grievin’ and frettin’ all the time, same as I been doin’ for my father — Well — they like to show his

picture and they pay mans four bits each to see. Witnesses? Yes – I guess. Well – after that, then see – they done stop their grievin’ no more. It’s just same as if you took a handkerchief and wiped away all the tears from their eyes; they been cryin’ for their father since he was dead.”

The picture safely put away, Big Bill called the names of a few more to join the circle while a woman lifted an old black skirt from the bottom of a large trunk and placed it in his outstretched hand. Holding it high he spoke a few more words, then returned it to the woman who, aided by a friend, rolled it in a blanket. This act, slightly varied, was repeated by different people with a fresh garment each time. Evidently they all belonged to the dead relatives of one family, but not possessing pictures they resorted to an older method of burning the clothes, and has he had done during the showing of the picture, so while the skirt – blanket and all – with the other clothes belonging to the dead were sorrowfully laid upon the fire, and until they lay in a smoldering heap of charred ashes, Big Bill enumerated the merits of those who had passed in true oratorical style.

Curiosity prompting me, I expressed a wish to see the picture. My request was deliberated long and earnestly, after which Leo hurried forward and discussed the matter in a hushed voice with my friend. He was stipulating in Chinook that on no account whatever must I dare to take a picture. I promised but he did not appear to be satisfied, and pushing the camera behind my back he kept a watchful eye on it and shook a warning finger at me as he went forward to superintend the raising of the picture. Thus at a respectful distance, we were allowed to gaze upon the features of the deceased, and since the giving of money is inseparable with the ceremony of picture-showing, we each received fifty thanks and with many thanks were ushered out of the building.

[THE FOLLOWING MORNING]

The following morning a rumor floated through Duncan that a big masquerade dance would take place that afternoon. This was good news indeed, and I decided to make an early start for Quamichan in order not to miss anything. The general opinion amongst those who were more familiar with the little peculiarities of the Indians was that the dance would not take place for a week or more.

Said they, “The Indians themselves have not the slightest idea when it will happen. An Indian never makes plans, and if he tells you he is going to do something tomorrow you may be sure that he means the next day or the day after that, if he doesn’t forget about it altogether. The masquerade dance will take place just when the spirit moves them, but not before.”

To all such discouragements, I resolutely turned a deaf ear, for I was possessed by the cheerful conviction that there were other entertainments at a potlatch quite as interesting as a masquerade dance. So I turned my face towards Quamichan with the feeling of one who is about to enter unexplored regions. Truly a land of mystery through which one must grope under a cloud of uncertainty. “Halo delate kumtuks!” Brown, silent people, when will you make yourselves known to your white brothers?

The first person I met as I left the high road and turned into the reservation was genial Billy Yacklem, headman of Nanaimo, an acquaintance of the previous afternoon. He came towards me with a broad smile and greeted me as a friend.

“Is the dance going to take place today, Billy?” I enquired after a little while.

“Not the big masquerade dance,” he said, “that’ll be ‘bout Tuesday or Friday next week some time.”

This was Saturday.

“That means about Wednesday, I suppose,” I surmised.

“Yes – I guess so. Wednesday, perhaps.” He brightened visibly as though he had received an inspiration. Then – after a long pause – “It’s hard to say. It all depends, see!”

“What does it de–“

“There’s going to be a small dance in that house over there – later on this afternoon. Some people from Nanaimo, I think.” He had interrupted me quietly and I knew that, for the present, Billy Yacklem had no more to say about the matter. But at that moment Chief Michael Cooper of the Songhees joined us, and not to be dented, I repeated my question.

He took off his hat and rubbed his head, gazing into the distance with half-closed eyes.

“Well,” he said, “you never can tell. You see it’s just this ways. There’s so much business to be done at a potlatch we never can say when we’ll get through. Some people think it’s all feasting and dancing. That’s all wrong – you can see for yourself if you stay here for a week. Everybody’s got their debts to pay, and it takes a long time. The dance comes at the end. There’s going to be a little bit of a one this afternoon, but that – well, I suppose you’d call it something on the side. Now, here, they’re potlatching blankets. No, they’re not giving them away for nothing. You watch,” and with this more satisfactory explanation he left us.

We were now in full view of about fifty Indians sitting in a ring on the ground in front of Leo’s rancherie. Before the crowd stood an Indian woman who addressed them in a loud, harsh voice. A well-preserved woman past middle age, tall and stout, she was a most imposing figure and held herself with a fine dignity. She was clad in a brightly-colored skirt and blouse over which she had thrown a large shawl. An orange handkerchief was neatly bound about her head and she wore long earrings.

She was conducting the business of “paying up debts” for several private parties, for like Old Bill Geweechieluck – or Big Bill, as he is better-known – she acted in the capacity of lawyer for the Cowichan tribe, and her services were in great demand throughout the potlatch. When so engaged her speeches, delivered in short, disjointed sentences, commanded the greater attention, and her arguments apparently never failed to give entire satisfaction on all sides. The business in hand settled, she always retired to some quiet spot where she would sit with a few chosen friends, apart from the common herd. Anxious to make the acquaintance of so important a lady, and failing to obtain an introduction, I took my courage in both hands and attempted to make friends without one.

“Klahowya tillicum,” said I, approaching with a smile.

“Ow ah!” was all the reply I received, contempt and annoyance written on every feature of her polished face. Then with an icy stare she opened her umbrella and turned her back upon me. I retreated in confusion and, not daring to risk another rebuff, I contented myself by admiring her from a safe distance.

The paying of debts was conducted in this way: The debtors, having collected their blankets and piled them up in several bundles according to their value, took their stand beside Milady lawyer, who opened the proceedings by calling the names of the creditors, repeating each one until the owner made his appearance and joined the circle. Then, after much argument, blankets were distributed in payment of each debt. It was a long and tiresome proceeding, but the patient witness and onlookers were always rewarded by the little excitement that invariably followed, when blankets were thrown away for a scramble.

This provided a constant source of enjoyment to the younger men, who would wait about four hours so that they might take part in it. It did not only take place after the paying of debts, but was looked forward to as the finale of every event at the potlatch. It never failed to create amusement, and while the youths joined in the tussle, old men and women crowded around with the laughing girls and applauded vociferously when a particularly good catch was made as the blanket fell.

If the potlatch took place indoors, the blankets were thrown from a platform built across the rafters of the rancherie. If out-of-doors, they were tossed from a scaffolding erected for the purpose, or from the roof of one of the buildings. The number of blankets thrown would amount to a dozen or more. They were beautiful blankets woven by the women from the hair of mountain goats. As they fell into the outstretched arms of the eager crowd below a rough, but perfectly good-natured scrimmage ensued, and while each man clung tightly to the piece he had managed to seize, he was cut apart with his prize from the others until all were set free. Sometimes it was a mere handful, the size of a pocket handkerchief, but the more agile who caught the blanket first often succeeded in winding a corner around his waist, and so managed to secure quite a large piece. When it was all over the torn pieces were given to the woman-folk, who carefully put them aside to weave into new blankets for a future potlatch.

Inside the rancherie to which my friend Billy directed me I found the Capilano family, who kindly made room for me on their bed of mats and rugs which served as chairs in the daytime. Old Mrs. Joe, widow of the late chief, was there, with her daughter Emma, young Chief Matthias with his wife, and a merry little baby girl, and Mabel, the pretty young daughter of Chief Michael Cooper of the Songhees. They all chatted easily in English and were quite willing to explain to me a little ceremony that was being performed by a group of Cowichan Indians centered around a long canoe at the far end of the building. But alas! my hopes were raised only to be dashed to the ground when I discovered that they did not understand the language of the Cowichans except for a word here and there picked up at the potlatch.

This was an unforeseen difficulty, but I was still more surprised to find that the language spoken by the Capilanos and the Songhees differed again. So the daughter of the late chief of the Capilano, and the daughter of the chief of the

Songhees, both of whom are convent-bred girls, chatted in English, preferring it to Chinook, and voted the potlatch “tiresome and old-fashioned!”

Meanwhile, Chief Matthias, who takes everything seriously as befits a person of his position, had been listening intently to a long harangue between two men who were gesticulating with great effect, and he is responsible for the information that we were witnessing a kind of baptismal ceremony. The young man, he said, who stood in the middle of the circle of men and women was being called, so that all could hear, by the name of his grandfather. The chief was not certain why he was taking a new name, but he thought it possible that it might be to settle some little question of property ownership.

The ceremony was performed with very little outward variation from the one I had witnessed in Leo’s rancherie on the previous day. Those who had been publicly called into the circle stood as witnesses, and after the usual lengthy speeches they were each presented with a blanket in payment. Then, while the lawyer spoke of the merits of the boy’s grandfather and, no doubt, explained the whole case, the picture of the deceased was carried slowly around the circle by two friends draped with blankets, while a third followed in the rear and distributed fifty cent pieces.

As a rule, after a performance in one rancherie, the audience immediately dispersed and wandered way to another in search of some fresh amusement, for there was always certain to be a minor potlatch at the same time in one of the other houses. But as the witnesses returned to their seats, an expectant hush fell upon the waiting Indians.

[A DANCE]

Chief Mathias pointed to a corner of the building that had been curtained off with blankets.

“There are dances behind there,” he whispered. “Soon they dance. Last night at midnight, one man climbed on the roof and sang three times. That’s to say, some Indians going to have a little dance today over someone dead long ago. There it is again. They’re coming from the river. Listen!”

A gust of wind swept around the building and whispered into the rush mats hanging loosely against the rough walls, and as it subsided a low mournful wail reached our ears. Outside, nothing more beautiful could have been imagined than the brilliant sunshine of that cloudless afternoon. Inside, the gloom of the lofty building was almost eerie, and the shaft of light that filtered through the roof and slanted down to meet the thin wreaths of blue smoke from a smoldering fire in the center of the hard earthen floor threw into deeper shadow the dark faces of the Indians, who waited for the cry to be repeated.

It came with the next playful gust that blew in at the door, and this time it swelled in sound until the sobbing notes of this little dirge were distinguishable.

The full low voices rose and fell over the notes in the strange melody. This was the first time I had heard it, but it was not to be the last, for it was used in every act of mourning that took place at the potlatch. Sometimes the singers treated it differently, but the theme remained the same, and it was always accompanied by a

rhythmic beating of time with sticks, the effect produced being that of the muffled tramping of many feet.

Thus the mourners entered, carrying between them a large traveling trunk which they placed gently upon the floor, and standing around it with bent heads they finished their song of sorrow. Then, placing a man's straw hat and a rifle upon the trunk, they stood aside, and as a prolonged cry broke from the row of men and women who sat at each side beating time, the dancers sprang from behind the blanket screen.

There were four in all, and they were gorgeously dressed in white feathered skirts and leggings, while over their shoulders they wore a bright-colored drape, very much like a silk table center. Their heads were completely covered by huge wooden masks, carved and painted and gaily decorated with feathers. The masks were supposed to represent the faces of birds and animals, and they were wonderful and fearful to behold. In his right hand each dancer carried a large rattle made of clam shells on a wooden ring, and while they danced they shook them in perfect time whether they minced lightly backwards and forwards, or sprang first on one foot and then on two, round in a circle. In the left hand they held a green twig with which they made sweeping passes over the trunk as they hovered about it.

As Chief Mathias had said, this dance was looked upon as quite a small affair. It was over in less than no time, and I found it quite impossible to draw from Billy Yacklem and Mathias anything further than "Everything goes in fours with Indian customs," and "when they brushed the trunk with the twigs that means the same as washing the body before you put it in the coffin," also – during the dance – "Oh! them fellows what's actin' now – they've got their *own* ways, see! An' *they*, see (long pause), well, you see they're talkin' about what all *their* fathers, and their *gran'* fathers is done. I guess (pause), just the same as them *other* is doin' yesterday, only a little different because it's not quite the same thing they was talkin' about. Everybody has their own ways, see, and he don't always understand the other feller's, see. Well – *them* fellers is doin' what belongs to their tribe, but every tribe is different!"

I decided to wait until I could find Chief Michael Cooper again, or until some further event might help me to work out the puzzle.

[THE NAMING OF CHIEF CAPILANO]

The light began to dawn with the dance of the Songhees, but there are other things to record before that, not the least important being the naming of young Chief Mathias of the Capilano.

The ceremony had been arranged for Sunday afternoon, but an unexpected interruption occurred in the form of a football match between the Kuper Island and Cowichan boys. Thus I found the reservation deserted except for a few who were late in starting. Luckily, amongst them I came upon a group of boys and girls who were typical of the modern young Indian, and I seized the opportunity to secure a photograph. With one exception they agreed to the operation, and tumbling into a canoe they posed before the camera.

The exception was a damsel of twelve, Adelina Mike of Marietta, Wash. She hesitate, then came up and looked me straight in the face.

“Will you send me a picture if I do?” she asked. I promised, and she walked towards the canoe. “I don’t have to pay for it?” she asked, as she put one foot in. And then she consented.

It was a pleasure to find such willing subjects for, as a rule, the would-be-photographer at a potlatch does not receive much encouragement and finds his way paved with many difficulties.

After the football match everyone hurried – actually hurried – back to the reservation, for it was after six o’clock and they were growing hungry, and Leo of Quamichan had announced his intention of holding a feast. We were invited into the rancherie and offered a seat in the middle of the floor. While the guests waited at one end of the building, members from the head council of a certain number of the tribes were called upon to take their seats in a square, arranged around Chief Charlie Tiselpaymeld of the Kanipsin tribe, at the other end. Chief Charlie was a friend of the late Chief Joe, and he sighed when they brought forward a chair and placed it beside him, for it represented the empty throne of the former Capilano chief.

From Chief Mathias I obtained, as follows, the names of those who formed the council: From the chief council at Quamichan, old Bill Geweecheluck, Alphonse Thecomet, Joe Memconame, Louis Wonam, Joe Cuckleack, Solomon Quamichan, James Tashlea; Nanaimo – Billy Yacklem, Johnny Lechia, Albert Wesley, Peter Pelektion; Ladysmith – Chief Simon, Charlie Chemainus; Kuper Island – Louisa Walsome, Jim Jahn; Valdez Island – Charlie Joe Gaseeze, Tommy Gesamton; Koksailah – Chief George, Louis Underwood, Johnny Kokleea; Kanipsin – Moses Charlie, William Gelcalem; Saanich – Chief Harry Seeyaloquitza, Steele Chamid, Keely Colton, Jimmy Jim, Sam Lacklehek, Johnny Sampson, Louis Jim, Johnny Clowton, Chief Edward Jim; Chemainus – Chief James, Louis Hackaluck.

The members took some time to assemble, and as usual with Leo’s proceedings there was much delay in arranging his food potlatch. One of the guests called for a song, and a quaint old man in a soldier coat and cap responded in deep bass tones, while the company joined in the chorus and beat a quick four time with the palms of their hands, applauding loudly and shouting for more after each verse. The swing on it was quite inspiring, and the words caused much amusement. Charlie Charles, who had promised to interpret young Chief Mathias’ speech, told me that the old man kept repeating the line, “I don’t want to go on walking round doing nothing all the time – I want to work,” and that he was such a funny old fellow the boys couldn’t help laughing at the way he sang it.

A voice from the other end suddenly calling for attention, the song ceased abruptly after the fifth verse, and all turned to watch the naming of the young Capilano. One of the councilors was about to deliver a speech. It was short and to the point. He mentioned briefly that they were there to publicly acknowledge young Chief Mathias as the successor of his late father, and would call him by the name of Capilano before witnesses. Then he called upon two others to bring Mathias to the empty chair. This they did, after standing together with hands firmly locked while they vowed to uphold one another in all that followed, and as the young man was led into the square the councilors rose and stood with bowed heads. Then Chief Charlie

came forward with outstretched hands to meet Mathias, and they sat together in silence. The speeches that followed were all to the same effect. They spoke of the good deeds of the late chief, of his activity, and his desire to help the Indians. When the visit of the chiefs to England was mentioned, the words "King Edward" were uttered reverently.

"King Edward told the chiefs that he would settle about their lands in five years. But now King Edward is dead, we do not know how things may go. King Edward is dead. He said he would help us, but he is gone." This was the pith of all that was said, as Charlie Charles told it to me.

"King Edward is dead!" How sorrowfully the words rang through the gloomy rancherie. He had promised to help them, and their faith in him had been implicit. But he was dead. They had lost him when they most needed him. In their still grave silence and in their troubled faces I read how much in need of him they felt, how greatly they mourned for the King they trusted as a "good friend to Indians." It was a touching scene and one that will always be associated with the naming of the young chief who sat fingering nervously the gold sovereign that had been given to his father by the "greatest man on earth".

"My son is very young," said Mrs. Joe, widow of the late chief, rising to speak. "His father was always good company. We went to many places, and made friends everywhere. He was known amongst you all here and was much liked. I have never visited you before, but you have received me well. His father wished to do many things, but he is dead now. He wished to help the Indians, he tried to look after their rights, and my son will do the same. His father was named Capilano by the chief of the Musqueam tribe. I am a Musqueam Indian. He took the same from my tribe. My son will do what his father wished. He has eyes and hands that can read and write the language of the white man better than his father. He can speak to them in their own tongue, making things more clear so that there will be no misunderstanding. My son will help the Indians. He will follow in the footsteps of his father along the same trail to the end."

She finished in a voice quivering with emotion, and sat down weeping amidst a sudden burst of applause.

Her son's speech was short and boyish, and he only repeated his mother's words, that he would carry out his father's wishes as well as he could. His mother had pleaded his youth and the councilors nodded encouragingly as he concluded, for it was obvious that he was intensely nervous.

So while Leo distributed biscuits amongst his guests, young Mathias was called by his father's name before paid witnesses, and publicly acknowledged chief of the Capilano.

[PREPARATIONS FOR A DANCE]

While everyone was looking forward to Leo's much-heralded "Masquerade Dance," another, the "Dance of the Songhees," came and went so quietly that only a handful of white people knew anything about it until it was all over.

The "Dance of the Songhees" was given by the visiting tribe of Songhees Indians from Victoria, and should really be called a dramatic performance, but the

word “dance” is the only English epithet applied by the Indians to all their entertainments.

Unlike Leo, who loved to keep the multitude in a high state of expectation by dropping hints everywhere that the magnificence of *his* dance would outrival anything that they had seen before, the Songhees, from first to last, observed a discreet silence regarding their arrangements. Indeed, so closely did they guard their secret that when the other tribes learned, on Wednesday morning, that a performance quite out of the ordinary was about to take place that night, they were struck dumb with surprise at the unexpectedness of it.

They received the first intimation of it in the early hours of morning when they were unceremoniously brought back from the land of dreams by sounds of lamentation, mingled with the beating of drums, issuing from the house occupied by the Victorian visitors. Sleep being out of the question while the din continued – and according to all accounts it continued without interval of several hours – they put their heads under their blankets and waited until some of the more venturesome of the men folk, who had sallied forth to satisfy their curiosity, returned with the news that they had seen a number of Songhees going towards the cemetery. They were taking the picture of Binn along with them, they said, and in the procession were two men crawling on their hands and knees, masked and dressed like wolves.

These strange proceedings were discussed in awe-struck voices, until someone received a happy thought that helped to explain matters a little. Binn had been one of the Songhees tribe; he had belonged to their secret society, well – now the Songhees must be preparing to commemorate his death in honor of his widow, whose guests they were at the potlatch. This explanation was generally accepted as the most satisfactory one that had yet been offered, but further they could not go, for the Songhees persistently refused to speak about the matter. So there was nothing for it but to watch and wonder until night came when, from the nature of the dance, they might better understand the reason for the Songhees’ peculiar behavior, and as the hours wore on, their curiosity became so great that one after another they subsided under the tension, and all business for the day had to be suspended.

That afternoon, visitors who came to the potlatch in search of amusement went away disappointed, for all they could find was a reservation full of Indians sitting about in an outward state of silent abstraction, from which it was impossible to arouse them. Their attitude gave no suggestion to the outsider that anything unusual was pending, and it was only by the merest chance that we heard anything about the dance that was the cause of all this supposed excitement. And this is the way it came about.

After strolling about for over an hour waiting for something to happen, it occurred to me that Chief Michael Cooper might be able to explain some of the mysteries of the dance of the four Indians around the tin trunk of the rancherie, for he was always most willing to help me whenever he was not too busy assisting Mrs. Binn in all her business affairs that had to be settled before her potlatch took place. I suggested this to my friend, and together we went toward Mrs. Binn’s rancherie –

the house set aside for the Songhees tribe – as the most likely place in which to find the chief, since he did not appear to be anywhere in sight.

Our invitation to this rancherie was a standing one, so that we just walked in as usual, without waiting to be admitted. The door was at the side of the house, and as we had not passed the front we had failed to notice that the windows were closed and covered with a black drape, so that not until we came upon the chief at the other end of the building, busily hanging a curtain on a long pole supported on the forked end of two stakes did we realize, too late, that we had made a grievous blunder. The pained expression in the chief's face and his coldly distant manner warned us at once of our intrusion and, apologizing for our mistake, we hastily withdrew. But the chief of the Songhees is a large-minded man, and when, half an hour later, as we were leaving the reservation, we met him again, it was evident that he quite understood that we had erred unintentionally, for without making any allusion to it he graciously invited us to return in the evening to see the dance.

THE SYMBOLIC "DANCE OF THE SONGHEES"

Half past nine was the time the chief said that the dance would begin. Very punctually we arrived and hurried down the hill as a prolonged roar of many bass voices, mingled with a rattling of sticks and clamshells, broke upon the silence of the still and peaceful night. It was a blood-curdling noise, rising in a vibrating crescendo, and diminishing into a sobbing moan, then a pause followed by three loud "whoops" accompanied by the resounding beat of a drum – and silence. We arrived breathless at the door, fearing that we might be late, but the audience was still pouring in, and our haste had been quite unnecessary, for the performance did not begin until long after ten o'clock.

Since we were there by special invitation of the chief, we felt quite confident of our position, and went forward with an air of assurance that received a rude shock, however, when we were thrust aside to make way for a party of Quamichans, by the arms of an individual who was quite unrecognizable under a coating of black paint that completely covered his nose and cheeks. By the time we recovered sufficiently from our surprise to realize that he was the doorkeeper, we agreed that our best plan was to wait for an opportune moment, and then politely to send word to Chief Michael Cooper that we had arrived, for he seemed to be of an excitable temperament and was apt to lose his head in the rush of the moment when three or four Indians arrived at the same time. Not the flicker of an eyelid, however, betrayed that he had even heard it when we tactfully delivered our message during a temporary lull.

At first we thought he intended to ignore us altogether, for how, when or where he communicated the intelligence to his equally bedaubed assistant, who was showing a party to their seats when we took the doorkeeper into our confidence, we have never been quite able to decide, but about five minutes later we saw the usher coming up from the performers' end of the building, carrying three chairs. These he first carefully arranged in a row and then placed a cord of wood beside them, after which he signaled to us "this way please," and we were admitted.

The Songhees certainly had a "bumper house" that night. The bunks around all sides of the building were packed, and extra seating accommodation had to be

supplied for the eager audience that continued to stream in by twos and threes, by spreading rush mats on the floor where they squatted contentedly for the rest of the evening.

The scene was quite theatrical in effect. Right in the center of the floor a square-shaped bonfire, almost four feet high, blazed and crackled merrily. Piled close by was a heap of wood from which, between each item on the program, a cord was taken and thrown upon the fire that leaped into flames and lit up the building anew. There were faces cruelly scorched by the terrific heat, and large sparks ascended slowly and lodged in the blackened roof, threatening to set it on fire. But no one appeared to be in the least alarmed, the only precaution deemed necessary to prevent an outbreak being the placing of a ladder against one of the middle beams, and when the performance began, the danger was completely forgotten. The wonderful part about it was that nothing did happen, and we escaped the excitement of a fire alarm.

When the “dance” was about to begin, the “time-beaters” took their places in a row on each side of a square of the earthen floor that had been kept free for the stage at the extreme end of the building, between the fire and a blanket curtain that hid the performers from view. The curtain was suspended by loops tied in the fringe of a pole, about eight feet from the ground, just high enough to allow the painted faces of the carved figures on the end wall to be seen as a background. At each side the curtain slipped easily on the pole, and whenever an entrance or exit was made it was pulled back ever so cautiously, and the performers slipped out or in under the soft branches of tall green brushes, so arranged to prevent the audience from catching even a glimpse of anything or anyone behind the scenes. The performers, as well as “time-beaters,” all had their faces daubed with black paint.

For over an hour the audience had been waiting in silence for the performance to start, and when, at last, three men stepped out upon the “stage” and stood close against the curtain in a row, every pair of eyes opened wide and remained fixed and unblinking, watching every movement with breathless interest while never a change of expression crossed the dark, heavy faces that shone in the glow of the firelight.

One of the trio, standing nearest the entrance, carried a gourd-like rattle in his hand. He filled the duties of stage manager, and had dressed himself up for the occasion in great style. [...] ³⁴³ For a few minutes the trio stood in silence, hands folded in front of them. At last the “stage manager” turned and put his ear against the curtain, listening intently. [...] Mrs. Binn came forward, looking the very picture of grief, with tears streaming down her blackened cheeks, and her usually neatly bound hair falling loose about her shoulders. With arms outstretched and palms upturned, she thanked the audience for their presence, then, wiping away her tears with the end of her shawl, walked slowly and sorrowfully across to an empty rocking chair placed on the opposite end of the stage. Here she paused and sighed deeply, and the chief (who was one of the trio beside the curtain) stepped forward and helped her to lift it into another position. The arrangements of this piece of stage property took some time, and caused much widespread whispered discussion, and the audience

³⁴³ I've excised from this transcription details of a dance only to be witnessed under very particular circumstances. These intentional omissions account for the large number of [...] in this passage.

looked upon it as part of the performance. [...] After this the scene was changed. [...] And then from behind the curtain came two dreadful creatures, on hands and knees, their bodies completely hidden by black shawls and their heads by terrible masks. These were the wolves. [...] The fourth and last act was entirely different. [...] When the curtain had been lowered for the last time, Mrs. Binn advanced to the center of the stage and thanked the audience again. The “dance” was over, and we departed in mystified silence.

KLAIL TA-MAHN-A-WIS: “THE SECRET SOCIETY OF BLACK MAGIC”

During the entire week that I spent at the potlatch, I saw nothing that could be compared to the “Dance of the Songhees,” nor was there anything amongst the various entertainments I witnessed that left me so completely in the dark. For the next two days I watched closely for the least opportunity that might help to throw some light upon this interesting subject, and I scornfully refused the somewhat haphazard, if brilliant, suggestions offered to me by the members of our small party.

It was all well to imagine, for instance, that the last act depicted “the spirits of the departed in the happy hunting ground,” but then again there was every likelihood that the “happy hunting ground” had nothing whatever to do with it. One cannot judge the inner meaning of a performance by its outward appearance. Just to show how far one may be from the truth by simply guessing may be realized when the fact is made known that not one of us had seen any resemblance to *wolves* in the creatures that crawled around Binn’s picture in the third act. We thought that they were crocodiles, and not one of us had remembered that they do not exist in this country.

Once more I turned to Chief Michael Cooper. It was on the afternoon of the last day while we were waiting for the dance. He told me that this dance represented nothing less than the Freemasonry of the Songhees tribe, and as it was a secret society, none but members could take part in it whatever, while only those whom they chose to invite were ever allowed to witness it.

“None of these other tribes know what it is about,” he said, “no more than you do – and no more than you know about any of the lodges of the white people that you don’t belong to. They won’t tell you their signs because they are not allowed by the society – *well* – it’s just the same with us. We can’t explain to anyone who don’t belong to the society – and that’s what I always say – how can any of the white people say, ‘this is not right and that shouldn’t be,’ when they don’t know what they are talking about? No. They only make themselves look foolish to Indians. What would they say if Indians got up and said that the white people were doing things wrong just because *they* didn’t understand? They wouldn’t stand for it, of course. Well, that’s how Indians feel. These things have been from the beginning, before any of us can remember. No one knows how they came – just been handed down from the old peoples right away back from we can’t tell when – so that’s why Indians must go on having them.

“Of course,” he said, after a pause, “*we* don’t do everything quite the same as they did in old times. We don’t bring the body of the dead people in like *they* did – that’s very old-fashioned and savage. We have pictures and pretend. Now this dance – do you know we really shouldn’t have brought it from Victoria? It really has no business to come out of the Songhees reservation, and we’ve never taken it anywhere

before – it’s a great thing for you to have seen it – and it’s only because Binn was a Songhees and belonged to this society that we *did* bring it.

“Mrs. Binn belongs to it, too – that’s another thing. Binn paid to have her belong to it. You see we all liked Binn, and Mrs. Binn, too, but – *well* – I guess it must cost him something like four or five hundred dollars to pay for her to join. And when she asked us as a personal favor to bring the dance – *well* – we felt we could do it. But, of course, that is why we had to keep it so quiet. I guess they told you what we did in the morning? You know about that?” He gave me a keen look and shook his head. “Well, that’s the first anyone knew about it, because we never told them anything. That going up to the grave is what they done in old times, so we got to do it, too. And they used to think it was wolves –” he stopped and smiled. “Of course, you can just understand how it is, I can’t tell you any more about the dance – no one must know about it but the Songhees – and then only the ones that belong to the society, but I am always very pleased to help you all I can, and whenever you come to Victoria, my wife and I will be very pleased if you come to see us.”

Chief Michael Cooper was ever courteous, and with this kind invitation, he bowed slightly as he unfolded his arms and walked away, leaving me watching his straight, slim figure disappearing through the door of the rancherie with a keen sense of disappointment, for I really understood as little as I had before of the meaning of the symbolic dance of the Songhees. [...]

MRS. BINN’S POTLATCH

All the week Mrs. Binn had been busily preparing for her own particular potlatch. She was generally to be seen coming and going between her big rancherie, and the unpretentious little building opposite, and as a rule her arms were full of blankets. Mrs. Binn possessed a certain grace and dignity that set her quite apart from others. At first glance one might only have seen a little woman of uncertain age in a tidy black dress, neatly pinned shawl, and black hat without a vestige of trimming tied underneath her chin with a narrow piece of ribbon. But upon closer acquaintance one could not fail to notice the intelligence and humor of her soft eyes when her face became illuminated by one of her rare smiles, and the gentle sweetness of her manner at all times.

There were seventy “witnesses” at Mrs. Binn’s “picture-showing”, and while she slowly followed her husband’s picture around the circle, paying the customary “four bits” out of a blue enamel basin, I came to the conclusion that “picture-showing” on such an extensive scale was quite an expensive luxury for the potlatcher.

Mrs. Binn’s potlatch was carried out in the usual order; the calling of names; speeches; picture showing; more speeches, and [a] scramble for blankets. The only difference was that she had a magnificent display of dummies representing different deceased members of her family, sitting in a blanket bed, and covered with a really beautiful blanket that had a colored pattern, artistically designed down the center, while a flag flew gaily from one of the posts supporting the blanket screen. A dramatic note was struck by Leo, who dashed into the circle when the picture had been carried halfway round, and began to wring his hands and cry so loudly that he upset poor Mrs. Binn completely and made everyone else begin to cry, too.

Poor Leo! He could not hide the fact that he craved for social distinction, and wished to be regarded as the man of the hour, and when the morning of his dance dawned, he had worked himself up to an almost hysterical state of excitement and importance. His manner was quite overbearing, and he showed an utter disregard for cameras and their owners. Indeed, it was not until it was made clear to him that the pictures of his great dance would be sent to him as a present and that it would do splendid things to show them to his friends, that he would allowed the photographers to proceed. He agreed to the arrangement with an injured air, and immediately said that he would not be satisfied with less than two dozen!

The whole morning was spent in arranging and carrying out the procession. It was a sight never to be forgotten. About twenty young men and women with white blankets draped about their shoulders, their heads rakishly decorated with green boughs and their faces blushing under a coat of red paint, came at a little jog trot down the hill and completed three or four circles of Leo's house. If they had not looked so serious, they might have been mistaken for a little party of Bacchanalians arriving home after supper, with their wreaths all awry, dragging their togas carelessly through the dust. They were chanting the same dirge that the Nanaimos had sung, only they had chanted the time from an andante to allegretto to suit the occasion. Leo and Big Bill headed the procession, walking backwards, beating time and shouting angrily if anyone sang out of tune, while Leo's little daughters, wrapped in blankets, were borne aloft on two long, gaudily painted "drums" that were afterwards used by the women "time-beaters" during the masquerade dance.

When this was over a crowd collected around his house. The women, squatting on mats, made a wide circle in the middle of which Leo's brother, George Petel, sat in state. He was gorgeously attired in a buckskin coat, fringed with little bells, and ornamented with beads. His robe was a blanket, his crown an old gray hat. He proved the Indian's power of endurance by sitting there bolt upright for the rest of the day with nothing more than the knowledge that he was upholding the family pride to sustain him. In a wagon, close by, an effigy of Leo's dead son and his own nephew, made of a roll of blankets with a couple of dissipated-looking tails of the noble chanticleer, kept him company through the weary hours of that chill day.

If it had not been for a certain amount of audible grumbling on the part of several of the visiting Indians, who had grown heartily tired of the potlatch and who were beginning to make anxious enquiries about returning to their homes the following morning, Leo might *still* be preparing for the dance. How he managed the great undertaking all in one day I really do not know. There was so much to be done. There were the blankets to be carried along, one by one, and arranged on a scaffolding above the door of his house; there were two canoes to be brought in to keep the onlookers back, and provide space for the dancers; there were mats to be laid on the ground for the women to sit upon; there was the wagon to wheel into the circle; there were sticks to be provided for the "time-beaters," and a hundred and one other duties to perform.

There were annoyances, too, that had to be dealt with. The dancers *would* insist upon rattling their shells and making a great noise when they began to feel

cold and impatient. Then, too, Mrs. Leo, who was fussy and interfering, had to be subdued – and constant arguments take up a lot of time. Oh! and, of course, all those who were so kindly carrying water from the creek and laying the dust, must have blankets wrapped around them; for all that the onlookers laughed a trifle derisively. Dear! dear! Who *ever* heard of such a thing as anyone performing the simplest office at Leo's potlatch without wearing a blanket?

Thus he fussed and fumed, until late in the afternoon, the masquerade dance at last took place.

It was a great success. Eleven dancers gorgeously arrayed in white feathered skirts and feathered leggings, huge masks and colored mantles, shook their clamshells and tripped the light fantastic to the applause of the assembled company. Billy Yacklem, standing near, kept me well posted. [...] This dance did not appear to have any other motive than to supply a little amusement for the general public, and it is the usual thing at a potlatch to have it on the last day, when all the business of paying debts has been performed.

It was followed, half-an-hour later, by a *pas seul* by George Petel, in front of the effigy in the wagon. He skipped about with the stiff movements of a Dutch doll, while Leo and the Petel family sang a lusty accompaniment in minor key.

I asked Billy Yacklem what it all meant.

He said, "You see Leon's son what's supposed to be sitting in the cart, there – *well* – he was a dancer. *That's* why!"

[...] Whatever it may have been, it brought the potlatch to an end.

SOME STORIES AND OPINIONS OF THE QUAMICAN POTLATCH

"The potlatch was the greatest institution of the Indian, and is to this day. From far and near assembled the invited guests and tribes and with feasting, singing, chanting and dancing, the bounteous collection was distributed; a chief was made penniless, the wealth of a lifetime was dissipated in an hour, but his head ever after was crowned with the glory of a satisfied ambition; he had won the honor and reverence of his people. It was a beautiful custom; beautiful in the eyes of the natives of high or low degree, confined to no particular tribe, but to be met with everywhere along the Coast." – From "*The Siwash*."³⁴⁴

"POTLATCH – That which is given, bestowed, bequeathed, etc.; *i.e.*, a gift. Always given with the expectation, greater or lesser, of a return."

"POTLATCH – An old Indian feast and custom, forbidden by law, characterized by extreme extravagance on the part of the host or hostess, in the bestowal of gifts upon guests." – *Buchanan*.

"POTLATCH – The potlatch is a most ingeniously devised system peculiar to the northwestern tribes of America for acquiring social prestige and influence, and at the same time laying up a provision for the future. By a well understood rule, which is observed with a greater punctiliousness than any observance among ourselves, every recipient of a gift at a potlatch gathering is bound in honor to return another of double value to the donor or his legal heirs at some future time. And in this repayment

³⁴⁴ Costello, J. A. (1895). *The Siwash: Their Life, Legends and Tales*. Seattle: The Calvert Company. Written by Joseph Allen Costello (1854 – 1943).

his relatives and fellow-clansmen are expected to aid him if necessary. They, indeed, become his sureties; and the honor of the family, clan, gens or even tribe, is involved in the repayment of the gifts. From 2,000 to 5,000 Indians meet together at these potlatch gatherings. About twenty years ago one of the Vancouver Island chiefs gave a great potlatch to about 2,500 persons from different tribes. He feasted his guests for over a month, and then sent them home with his accumulated savings of the five previous years. This prolonged feast spread the fame of this man far and wide over the province, and he was thereafter looked upon as one of the greatest chiefs. There can be no doubt that in earlier, pre-trading days, the effect of such a custom as the potlatch was on the whole good and beneficial, engendering as it did feelings of goodwill and friendship between settlement and settlement, and tribe and tribe, and making war almost impossible between them.” – *Hill-Tout*³⁴⁵

“POTLATCH – Some people think they are very big. They like to look big, and they really are not big at all. Then they give a potlatch and they just run round and imagine they’re everything, and that everyone is taking notice of them. It’s just all the time like what white people call bragging about themselves. They think all the time that everyone imagines they are a very important person. They don’t give all that away that you see. It all comes back to them later on. They don’t lose a cent by it. That’s understood. All Indians know that sometime sooner or later they’re expected to pay that all back. Everyone who gets something at one potlatch, he must give it back another time.” – *Chief Louis Goode*.

“POTLATCH – Before the white men came, a long way back ever so far, the potlatch was very, very different from now. Then there was great dancing around the fires at night, and much singing and feasting, for many, many people came from all over the country. Too many to count. And they sang songs for everything. All the tribes had their own songs. Well, s’pose yakka mamma, yakka papa (smother and father dead). *Well*. The children feel very sad and cry much – but at the potlatch; then they give away blankets and sing and sing till just as if all their tears were wiped away. Well. They tell it to their children and *they* grow up and tell it to *their* children, and so it goes on till everyone must know.” – *Old Petel*. [...]

“A QUAIN T COMBINATION OF TRADITIONS.”

Chief Louis Goode expresses his views on the potlatch and the Indian marriage custom, and tells the story of Haals, “the man with the lightning eye.”

Chief Louis Goode does not care for potlatches. He, himself, told me as we sat, chatting in a friendly fashion, in a cozy corner of the Tzouhalem verandah. He made no secret of his disapproval of this Indian custom, so that I do not feel that I am betraying a confidence by repeating his statement. His manner, even more than his speech, gave me the impression that in no way did he wish to be classed with the Indians who believed in the “old-fashioned ways,” and he took great care to let me know that he and his son had only come down from Nanaimo on a flying visit, and that instead of staying at the reservation they had engaged a room at a small hotel across the road. Altogether, I felt that Chief Louis Goode wished me to quite

³⁴⁵ Charles Hill-Tout (1858 – 1944).

understand that he was an exception to the general rule of Indians, and that his dignity, and pride, in his own illustrious family forbade him to accept the hospitality of such a bumptious potlatcher as Leo of Quammichan.

“No,” he said, contempt written on every line of his handsome face, “I don’t think much of a potlatch at any time.”

Then he paused, as though waiting for me to speak.

“No? Why not, chief?” I asked carelessly, with the slightest emphasis upon the last word.

He drew himself up an inch and brought his gaze back to mine, a slight flickering in his keen eyes.

“I think it is because I have had a lot to do with the white people, and I don’t care much for Indians’ ways,” he said. “I have many white people for my friends.” He paused again and gave an apologetic cough, then – “excuse me,” he said, “but what church do you belong to? Anglican? Ah!” in a tone of great satisfaction, “so do I.”

Now, was it fancy, or did I really remember hearing Chief Louis Goode’s name mentioned in the Corpus Christi Procession of the Roman Catholic Church that had taken place two weeks previously? I put the question tactfully, and he answered with the utmost frankness that he had carried one of the candles before the bishop.

“But, chief,” I remonstrated gently, “I thought you said–”

“Oh, yes, - *well* – you see, it’s this way,” he replied before I could finish, “I was brought up part of my life by a Church of England clergyman. I took his name – my own name is Skinahan – and I lived quite a while with the white people. So I got used to their ways, and I like them. My son does, too. I’d like you to meet him. He is a champion runner.” He proceeded to relate his son’s victories, and I waited until he had concluded and then led him back to the subject. “Of course,” he went on, “I like the Roman Catholic Church very much, and all my people’s Roman Catholics, and my son will be married in that church because I’d like him to be married that way, and I believe it. That’s my second son. Not this one I have with me.”

“And so he is going to be married?” I asked.

“He *is* married,” he corrected, and added:

“That is, he is married now in the Indian way, but he will be married in the church later on.” Then after a pause, “you see, the idea white people have of Indian marriages is wrong. They can’t understand everything, of course, I know that, although, as I say, I like them and have many friends amongst them. But when my son gets married – that is, before he was – well, when he gives the blankets to the girl’s parents, that is not to say that he is *paying* for her. No. It simply is to show that he means what he says, and that he *does* intend to marry her. What is it that you would call it? I suppose you might say, a guarantee of good faith. No man would be so foolish as to give away good blankets if he was not serious, so that tells the parents that he really *wants* the girl, and will keep her all his life.

“There’s a great deal of talking to be done first. Say it is my son. Well, I don’t do the talking. I get a woman who can talk well to do it, and she tells the parents all about me and my family, and who our parents are. It isn’t everyone who knows it all, and you must have someone who does, and who is a good speaker. I don’t speak at all.

And when it is all settled, then my son or I give the blankets. Different tribes have different ways, but it all comes to the same thing, and means the same in the end.

“Indians are very particular about who they marry. My son – you see, my father was a chief, and my wife’s father was a chief and right back as far as anyone can remember, all their fathers were chiefs. That’s the right way. Well now, my son must marry someone equal to him. So when I knew of a girl I thought would be right for him, I asked him what did he think. And he said, yes, he liked her very much. Well, I told her parents – or rather, I told the woman who was speaking for me to say was the girl quite willing. I didn’t want her to say yes if she didn’t care for my son. I liked to give the girl a chance, because I think that’s right, but I want to show that I don’t intend to go down on my knees for her either. Well, she was quite willing, so that’s alright.”

There was a long pause, but I saw that he had not finished, so I waited, and presently he continued.

“I suppose you haven’t heard the story of the wonderful man with the lightning eye. No, of course you wouldn’t. Well, if you like, I’ll tell it to you just to show you. It was right here amongst the Cowichans, ever so long ago, I couldn’t tell you when. He was just a very young man, and when he looked like *this* his eyes seemed to flash like lightning. No matter which way he looked, it flashed the same.

“Well, of course, that frightened everyone. They got so scared, all the Indians did, they couldn’t move or do anything. And he could do just as he liked with them, so they looked upon him, not exactly as a god, but a very high person, and whatever he said was to be done, they had to do it.

“Finally, well, he called the tribes together from everywhere and they were just trembling with fear. He had them all round him like slaves. He was called Haals. Well, it was discovered that the daughter of a Nanaimo chief was about to have a child, and when she was asked by her parents who was the father, she told them that it was this great man.

“Now, Haals told the mother of the girl: ‘If it is a boy, kill it; if a girl, let it live.’ Well, it was a boy, but they let Haals believe it was a girl, and so the child lived. Then Haals said to the Indians, ‘Now, you can go. Go back to your homes. This child has set you free; and it was just as if chains were broken from them.

“Well, my family is descended from that child, and, of course, if it had not been for him, the Indians would not have been set free, and as he was a child of that great man, my family feels that. I’m very proud of myself. I can’t tell the story well, because I forget exactly the family connections on my mother’s and father’s side, but I have an old aunt who knows it all. She’s quite wonderful, and I always say I am going to have that written down in a book. But first I shall have to get her to think it all out exactly.”

“How interesting it would be, chief,” I exclaimed.

“Yes, wouldn’t it? Now you can understand one reason why I don’t like the potlatch,” he replied.

“I don’t quite see. You know, chief, this is my first visit to a potlatch.”

The excuse sounded a trifle lame, but I wished to hear more.

“Well – some people think they are very big. They like to look big, and they really are not big at all. Then they give a potlatch and they just run round and imagine they’re everything, and that everyone is taking notice of them. It’s just all the time like what white people call bragging about themselves. They think all the time that everyone imagines they are a very important person.” He laughed a short laugh of scorn and adopted a half-pitying tone. “So foolish of them, because how can giving away things and showing off make them big when they’re just a common person? Besides, they don’t give all that away that you see. It all comes back to them later on. They don’t lose a cent by it. That’s understood. All Indians know that sometime sooner or later they’re expected to pay that all back. Everyone who gets something at one potlatch, he must give it back another time. That’s why I don’t like it, and I just stand out of it. Those people are just nobody. I’ve got my little farm in Nanaimo and I can’t leave it, either, so I just ran down for the day because I said I would interpret for Mr. — if he speaks to the Indians this afternoon, and I think I’ll make a little speech myself. I was asked to make it before at some other big meeting of several tribes, but for some reason or other, the whole thing fell through. So I’ll just give it here. It will do just as well. No. I won’t speak it in English, but in Chinook. If you like, I’ll tell it to you now, and you can take it down, so all you’ve got to do this afternoon is see me and you’ll have it all the time.”

“Splendid,” said I, and retired for pencil and paper.

“Now, are you ready?” The chief looked around him with a disturbed expression. Some children were playing not far away, and their young voices called to one another in a shrill treble. “The noise disturbs me,” he said, “but I suppose I can manage it. It’s on Repentance and Faith. I learned it and I think I can remember it. You’re ready? Repentance to be full and complete consists of three steps. We must realize that we are sinners. This is the first step, and the hardest—” He paused. “Have you got that down?”

I nodded.

“Just read it over, please,” he said, “to see if you have got it right.”

I complied with his request, and he nodded approval. So I took down his speech to the end, and he showed much pleasure when I complimented him upon his excellent memory.

“I don’t suppose,” he said, modestly, “that there is another chief at the potlatch who could make a speech like that.”

But sad to relate, the speech was not heard at the potlatch at all, for the simple reason that the Indians were not to be persuaded to assemble to listen to it. They were evidently not in the mood for speeches, and Chief Louis Goode, who had outgrown the potlatch and held himself aloft from his fellows, hid his feelings in a dignified silence and returned to Nanaimo by the evening train.

OLD PETEL’S POINT OF VIEW

Old Petel speaks briefly upon the subject of the potlatch and tells the story of how the Cowichan Indians acquired their lands.

Old Petel threw himself heart and soul into the potlatch. He was a little old man, with long gray hair, hanging well over his crooked shoulders, his movements

were active, and he was always busily trotting here, there and everywhere, helping his son, Leo, to entertain his guests. But one day he tired of his duties and, inviting us into the house of his son, George, entertained us with a story upon a subject of his own choice.

His preliminary remarks, which he uttered in the tone of one who begins a conversation by saying “what lovely weather we are having!” were about the potlatch. He talked in Chinook, using a few English words here and there, and prefacing each fresh thought by a slow “*well*,” and a dramatic pause before continuing the sentence in animated tones. My own knowledge of Chinook being very limited, my friend kindly interpreted Petel’s words, as nearly as possible to the way in which they were spoken.

This is how I heard the old man’s stories:

“Everyone is having a very good time at the potlatch. It is very nice indeed, and I hope you are enjoying it, but before the white man came – a long, long way back ever so far – the potlatch was very, very different from now. Then there was great dancing around the fires at night, and much singing and feasting, for many, many people came from all over the country. Too many to count. And they sang songs for everything. All the tribes had their own songs.

“*Well* – S’pose someone died. S’pose yakka mama, yakka papa (mother and father dead). *Well* – the children feel very sad and cry much, but at the potlatch they give away blankets and sing and sing till just as if all their tears were wiped away. *Well* – they tell it to their children, and *they* grow up and tell it to *their* children, so everyone must know. Not everyone has the same song, and only the children of one family know that song and hand it down to all their children. But there are some songs that all may sing.

“*Well* – one time the young men and young girls sing those songs into *that*’ – he turned and pointed to a gramophone by the open window – “and so the songs go into *those*” (indicating the records on the bureau) “and the songs stay there all the time. So now everyone can hear all those old songs of the potlatch, and so the children of these children may hear how their fathers and grandfathers sang in the old-fashioned days at the potlatch. Yes – it would be a pity if they were forgotten. It is a very good way to keep them. – Thank you. *That* stops.”

He gave a smile of satisfaction, and a long pause followed. Then:

“*Well* – once a very long time ago, many, many moons – too many to count – when the white man first came in a man-of-war boat up into Cowichan Bay, they tried to make friends with the Indians. *Well* – one day an Indian crept up behind the white man who was left minding the ship and killed him. *Well* – the white men went away quietly, but after some moons had passed, I have forgotten the number, they returned and brought back Chames Tuckelas” (Sir James Douglas). “*Well* – the Indian who had killed the white man ran away into the woods and hid, but the other Indians went and pleaded with his mother to make him return, because the white men had said that if they did not find him and bring him to the ship, they would destroy their villages. And they *did* fire a great ball from the ship that went boom – boom – *boom* – ffsst! and tore up the earth, making dust fly and thick smoke, too. That was to show them how. But Chames Tuckelas told them that they need not be afraid, that no harm

would come to them, if they gave up the Indian who had killed. *Well*—” (he stopped and counted slowly on his fingers) “ten, yes, ten men – said that they would go and find him, and after a few days they did so and brought him to the ship. Then the white men took him to Victoria and put a rope round his neck and hanged him – like this.” He showed the action of hanging in pantomimic gestures, making the sound of choking in his throat. Then he folded his arms, and said again, “Thank you. *That stops.*”

Another long pause, the while his eyes filled with thoughts that went back over the years as he called up events before proceeding. Then:

“*Well* – about a year later, the man-of-war boat returned with Chames Tuckelas again. And my father – Petel – who was now dead, asked for a mirror like that he had seen in the boat the time it came before. And he painted his face all over – like that – and made ready to meet Chames Tuckelas, who came ashore and talked long with the Indians. And Chames Tuckelas told them that they were to keep so much land for their own. It was in a square – like that – and there were as many as one thousand,” he stopped, and thought deeply, while he calculated, “and four – fourteen – there were *fourteen thousand acres* in that square. And Chames Tuckelas said that no white men should ever take it from them. If the white men *did* enter their ground, it would only be for a little while, and they would only come as tillicums – not to stay for *always* and take away their land – so the Indians must be good to the white men and keep peace with them. Then Chames Tuckelas went away again to Victoria. And *that stops.*”

“*Well* – after some time, one – two – white men came into their ground but stayed only a little time. They soon went away. Then came some more, but they, too, went as Chames Tuckelas had promised they would.

“*Well* – one day came ‘le plate’ (priest), and he told them many things. God was pleased with the Indians then, only just sometimes if they were not very good he was a little bit cross, and punished them by making the crops bad. But one day they heard a strange and dreadful noise – chains rattling and great moaning, and they were afraid, and went down on their knees – like that.” He knelt on the floor and crouched down, crossing his arms and acting the terror of the Indians. “What is it – what does it mean?” they cried to ‘le plate,’ and he told them it was *Lee-om, Lee-om*, the tyee below ground. Yes, devil – thank you. *Well* – then he went away. After that, white men began to come into their square – like that.”

Pulling an old envelope out of his pocket, he placed it on the floor and once more kneeling, carefully marked a square. Then he made a dot here and there, showing where the white men gradually came in and saying each time, “He came here – and then here – and *here*. And he did not go away. But ‘le plate’ always told the Indians to keep quiet, and to say nothing yet. And so they did not kill, and they waited patiently, but still the white men came and stayed. At first they built up big log fences round their houses for fear the Indians try to kill, but after a while, no. And so it all happened, and today there are *halo* (not) six thousand acres left. The white men say *six thousand*, but it is *halo* six – only five thousand and something – well – *that stops.*”

He paused for a long while and gazed out of the window with a puzzled expression in his eyes. Then he turned and said in a speculative tone, "I often *wonder* if the government can know that big logs are sent down the river – so many that they break and tear away the Indians' land all the time – because nothing has been done to stop it. I often *wonder...*" Then a minute later, in a brisk voice, "I shall be glad if you will write down on a paper the true story of the land for the white men to read. Thank you – Thank you."

Aside: "How the white men arrived"³⁴⁶ (August, 1910)

Old Dick of Nanaimo tells the story of how the Indians of Departure Bay and the Hope Mountains behaved when they first saw the white men.

Of all my tillicums at the Quamichan potlatch, old Dick of Nanaimo holds the warmest corner in my heart and will live in my heart and will live in my memory long after the potlatch has become merged with other dreams of the past. Dick is one of the very few Indians whose temperament is apparently free from moods. His chief charm – the greatest charm of all – is that he is absolutely unconscious of himself and of the impression he is making, and also that he enters into the little enjoyments of life with the zest of a child.

Dick was always genial, and a smile was never far from his wrinkled old face. The sense of humor fairly danced in his eyes, and it was impossible not to join with him when he burst into infectious laughter, none the less hearty for the long wheeze that unflinchingly caught his breath and ended in a cough.

Even the mystery that hung like a cloud over the reservation on the day of the Dance of the [Songhees]³⁴⁷ failed to disturb his equanimity. My friend and I, who were wandering rather aimlessly down towards the river, caught sight of him in the center of a group sitting on the bank almost at the same moment that he noticed us. He hailed us with delight, and running up the slope as fast as his rheumatic limbs would allow him, seized a hand of each with both of his and shook them long and warmly. Then he invited us to come in and sit on his bunk in the rancherie. My friend suggested that he should tell us a story of the old days and Dick's face beamed with pleasure. So he sat between us and graphically described the curiosity of the Indians when the first white men came into Departure Bay, and of their amazement at the sight of the first steamboat up the Fraser River. So little English could Dick speak that he did not attempt more than a word here and there in Chinook which my friend interpreted, but his nature was so sympathetic and his manner so expressive that he was able to convey much to the understanding by his gestures and wonderful facial expressions.

"The story I am telling," he began, leaning close to the shoulder of my friend, "is long before the Indians knew the white men – before ever they came to the island.

³⁴⁶ From Witshire, I. (1910, August 27). Old Dick of Nanaimo Tells How the White Men Arrived. *Daily Province Magazine* (Vancouver), p. 11. Written by Ida Wiltshire (d. 1917).

³⁴⁷ The original reads "Longees".

Well – one day a tremendous sailing ship came up Departure Bay. The Indians wondered whatever it could be, and they called to one another to come and see this strange sight. It looked very queer with those tall masts sticking up, and the sails – and the Indians could not understand it at all. *Well* – when the boat came in closer the Indians were more amazed than ever. The white men were smoking! *Steam was coming out of their mouths!* The white men were burning inside; they were *on fire!* That is what the Indians thought. They felt very curious – it was so very, very strange, for no harm seemed to come to the white men – it did not seem to hurt them! *Well* – after a while the white men came on shore and tried to make friends with the Indians, and gave them presents. First – they gave them potatoes. The Indians looked at them this way and that – and wondered *what* they could be. ‘Ugh!’ they said, ‘They eat *stones!*’”

Old Dick seized my arm and shook with laughter, then after a fit of coughing, restraining his amusement with difficulty, he continued. “Then the white men gave them biscuits – dry, hard biscuits. The Indians turned them over – like this – and smelled them. Then they broke a piece off, and ‘ugh!’ they said, ‘ugh!’ – *rotten sticks!*”

Dick shook again with merriment, but silently this time, then – “*Well* – *Then* the white men tried molasses. And the Indians thought it was pitch and tried to – tried to –,” Dick held his sides and forced the words out, wheezing and laughing all the time, “tried to *paint their boats with it!* Oh, dear! So silly!” He wiped the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand, and when he could find his voice, went on, “*Well* – one Indian got some of the stick black stuff on his hands, and he licked his fingers – like this – and o-oh!” Dick’s eyes bulged with surprise, “it was *sweet* – it was good to eat. Oh! *then* the Indians understood that the other things might be good, too.”

Dick rubbed his hands across his knees and rocked himself gently backwards and forwards, a smile flickering about his mouth as he murmured, “Ah – ha! Ah – ha! That’s how it was at first.”

“Did you ever hear how *frightened* the Hope Indians were, though, when they saw the first steamboat on the Fraser River and the first man on horseback?” he asked presently. “No? Then I must tell you, for it is very funny, too. *Well* – this was later, and the Indians knew the white men then, but when that boat came up the river they rushed down to the beach and cried in fear to the priest to help them. ‘Oh! we will be good,’ they cried, and they fell on their knees and began to tell all the bad things they had done, and they were so frightened that they could not listen to the priest when he told them that nothing would hurt them. And *then* – what do you think happened? A man rode off the boat on horseback. And the Indians fell down again with fear, because they thought it was a big dog coming to kill them, and they trembled and crossed themselves – like this – again and again, and prayed ever so many times to be saved. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! it was so silly,” and Dick continued to chuckle over it till we reached the door and took our leave of him for that afternoon.

THE QUEER RELIGIOUS SERVICE OF THE SHAKERS

“Long ago – a good many year – there was a chief, well, I think he was a chief, called Louis. He was a Mud Bay Indian, in Washington. He was a very good Indian,

and a very good Roman Catholic. This man, Louis, died, but a very wonderful thing happened. He came to life again before he was buried – yes – came to life. And he said that he had been to Heaven and that he had been told by God that he must go back to earth and tell the Indians what he had seen, and that He would give him the power to heal them. He must tell them that they were very wicked, and that he had come back to make them good and cure their diseases. And he must tell them they were not to drink whisky, or swear, or steal, or do anything bad, and that if they came to him that he would help them. But there was one thing that they must do when they approached him. They must come to him shaking in every limb, and only in this way would their sickness and badness fall from them.”

That is how Edward, an Indian of the Somenos reservation, described the Shaker religion, as he drove us to Quamichan one morning. His story of the resurrection of Louis, the Mud Bay Indian, rather took my breath away. He was so serious as he gave this child-version of, surely, a very old story, and I longed to hear more. But Edward had said all that he had intended to say about the Shakers that day, except to advise us to see Albert about it when we asked him if we might attend the Shaker meeting that evening.

Albert readily consenting, after dinner we sauntered across from the Tzouhalem hotel to the Somenos reservation, adjoining Duncan. The Shaker “Temple,” a long plain building, was about five minutes’ walk from the main street of the town. Upon our arrival we were ushered in with great ceremony and were offered chairs at the end of the building near the door. The Cowichan Indians are extremely fashionable in the matter of beginning their entertainments at a late hour, and although we did not set out until half-past nine, we found that we had waited over half an hour when the “service” commenced. When we entered, an Indian in his shirt sleeves was slowly and carefully filling his hip pockets with candles that were stowed away in a box under cover of the “altar cloth”. Then he proceeded to walk around the building, sticking them at intervals of about twelve inches, upon a narrow shelf, and also placing them upon a very large and simply constructed wooden chandelier, which he let down from the ceiling by means of a rope and a pulley. The building was as clean as a new pin and quite brilliantly lighted. The floor was bare except for six chairs, placed in two rows in the front of and facing the “altar.” The floor consisted of narrow polished boards, and the “congregation” were accommodated by a plank seat around all sides of the building.

The “altar” was covered with a white cloth, the front of which was embroidered with three crosses. Upon the table stood three plain, unvarnished wooden crosses, and upon each of these three lighted candles. Seven bells, of seven different sizes, also occupied a place beside the crosses.

A placard arranged against the central cross drew my attention, and as the candle-lighter came my way I asked him what it meant. I wondered why he showed such willingness to pause in his duties and escort me to the “altar” that I might satisfy my curiosity, until I read the following:

NOTICE

201. Criminal Code of Canada.

DISTURBING RELIGIOUS OR OTHER SPECIAL MEETINGS

“Every one is guilty of an offense and liable, on summary conviction, to a penalty not exceeding fifty dollars and costs, and in default of payment to one month’s imprisonment, who wilfully disturbs, interrupts or disquiets any assemblage of persons met for religious worship or for any moral, social, or benevolent purpose, by profane discourse, by rude or indecent behavior or by making a noise, either within the place of such meeting or so near it as to disturb the order or solemnity of the meeting.”

I stole a glance at my friend with the candles. Not a muscle of his face moved.

“Thank you – I quite understand,” I murmured, and tiptoed back to my seat.

The manner in which the members of the congregation conducted themselves when they arrived interested me greatly. As each one entered the door at the right hand corner of the building, he – or she – turned himself around where he stood, and then, crossing himself with his left hand with lips murmuring a prayer, eyes half-closed and downcast, he placed his right palm to the palm of the doorkeeper and lifted it above his head. Thus he continued [on] his way, greeting all who had arrived before him – even including my friend and self – and making a complete circle of the room before going to his seat. As he passed the altar he turned two or three times and occasionally picked up a bell and rang it. The “service,” throughout which the congregation remained standing, was conducted in Chinook, by an Indian who, like every one else, had divested himself of his coat and hung it on a peg above his seat. He intoned everything and frequently repeated the words “Mahsie – Mahsie – Mahsie, Wawa Mahsie, Kloshe Nezika Mahsie Kopa Saghahie Tyee (Let us pray to God, etc. – *Mahsie Kopa Saghahie Tyeee* – the Doxology).

The congregation repeated the words irregularly after him, and every now and then two or three would beat their heads and bodies with the palms of their hands, sighing and moaning as though in pain.

When the peculiar chanting ceased six men and women were chosen and seated in the six chairs in the front of the altar, and while they took their places the seven bells were placed in the hands of seven young men. And then, without warning, everyone began to trot slowly around the room. Following the priest, they circled around the six seated in the center, keeping time by ringing the bells. Not once did anyone cease to jump and shake, until the room became a giddy, bobbing mass of loose heads, hands, arms and legs. Some of them remained in the one spot limply shaking, while others surrounded them, making strange passes and performing a few crude movements of massage “to draw the pains from their bodies and heal them.” So shouted the doorkeeper in my ear. He also told me that the six in the center were very bad cases of “loomatism”.

I listened to his explanation above the din, then put my hands over my ears once more and left hurriedly with my friend. Once, before dawn, I awoke with my ears buzzing. I looked at my watch. It was 2:30 a.m. I thought I heard the sound of bells and the tramping of feet in the distance, and leaned out of my window. My ears had not deceived me. The Shakers were still shaking.

THE LORD'S PRAYER IN THE CHINOOK JARGON³⁴⁸

Our Father who stayeth in the above good *Neiska papa laxta mitlite kopa sa-ha-lie, klosk* in our hearts (be) your name; good though chief *kopa nesika tum-tum miko nem; klosk mika tyee* among all people; Good thy will on *kopa konaway tillicum klosk mika tum-tum kopa* earth as in the above; give every *illahe ka-kwa kopa sa-ha-lie; potlatch konaway* day our food; If we do *sun nesika muck-a-muck; Spose nesika mamook* ill, (be) not thou very angry, and if anyone *masachie wake mika hyas sollux pe spose klaxta* evil towards us, not we angry towards *masachie kopa nesika*; [illegible] *sollux kopa* them; send them away far from us all evil. *Klaxta; mahsh siah kopa neskia konaway masachie*.

“For this week and two weeks following”³⁴⁹ (June, 1914)

DUNCAN, June 2 – Chiefs George Halmack, Geroge and Tom Hackle and George Quitquatlin, of the Cowichan Indians, will be the chief hosts at a grand potlatch to be held here this week and for two weeks following. Their guests will number 500, and will include Indians from Saanich, four villages, Penelacut, Nanaimo, Victoria, Esquimalt, Sooke, Nitinat, Lumley Island and Yakima, Wash., Chemainus, Ladysmith and Vancouver.

The usual ceremonies, including the distribution of gifts, will attend the potlatch. The grand climax will be the masked dance in which twenty Indian [Indians] in native costumes and weird headpieces will take part.

Chief Bill Quelateselock, of Quamichan, who will be official orator and master of ceremonies, states that the utmost order will be observed, during the carrying out of the time-honored rites, and no liquor will be permitted the participants.

“Distinguished by the utmost orderliness”³⁵⁰ (June, 1914)

Dominion Indian Constable Thomas O’Connell arrived in the city yesterday from Duncan, where he has been for the past three weeks assisting Indian Agent Robertson in supervising the Indians at the recent potlatch, at which representatives from all the tribes on Vancouver Island and adjacent islands were present. Not an untoward incident occurred during the celebration, and the event was distinguished by the utmost orderliness.

At the conclusion of the celebration the officials notified the Indians of the orders of the Indian Department, that in future no more potlatches will be allowed. A full report on the matter will be forwarded by the agents to the Department in Ottawa, before whom petitions from all the Indian tribes throughout the Island,

³⁴⁸ From Blanchet, F. N. (1878). Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon to which is added Numerous Conversations thereby enabling any person to speak Chinook correctly. New Westminster: W. H. Keary. Written by Francis Norbert Blanchet (1795 – 1883).

³⁴⁹ From INDIAN POTLATCH. (1914, June 4). *Daily Colonist*, p. 1.

³⁵⁰ From CITY NEWS IN BRIEF. (1914, June 25). *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

protesting against the carrying into effect of the instructions to put an end to the potlatch, are to be presented.

“No more such gatherings would be allowed”³⁵¹ (July, 1914)

At an Indian potlatch recently held at Duncan, Vancouver Island, Indian Agent W. R. Robertson announced to the tribe that in future the regulations prohibiting potlatches would be rigidly enforced, and that no more such gatherings would be allowed. The chiefs of the various tribes have signed a strong protest which will be forwarded to Ottawa.

“Indians arrested for holding a big potlatch”³⁵² (February, 1921)

At Duncan yesterday before Magistrate Maitland Dougall, five Indians were charged with an infraction of the Indian Act. The charge was engaging in an old-time Indian potlatch which had been held at the Comakin Reserve at Duncan on the 27th, 28th and 29th of January, and continued at Halalt Reserve on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of February. Constable O’Connell, attached to the Indian Department, and an Indian constable sat through the entire festival at Comakin, and at Halalt, the Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police were also present. The five accused were the ringleaders of a series of these festivals which were to be staged throughout the season. The Indian Department, after having warned the men, were finally compelled to call a halt to these proceedings by taking the men to court.

Mr. C. F. Davie, counsel for the Indians, pleaded guilty, and threw himself upon the mercy of the court, stating that these festivals were considered by the Indians as not being harmful. On these grounds he asked the Court to treat the accused leniently.

The Magistrate explained to the Indians that it was not the intention of the government to abolish all their tribal festivities and dances, but that when the potlatches became of such size that the Indians gave away all their goods and chattels, then it was the duty of the government, and in their own interests, to call a halt. The law required that he should sentence them to jail, but he would accede to the request of their counsel and to the suggestion of the Indian Department as suggested by N. H. McDiarmid, the prosecuting counsel, that the accused be allowed out on suspended sentence and be bound to refrain from participating in any more festivals of this sort for a period of six months. The Indians entered into their own recognizances and returned to their home.

³⁵¹ From PROVINCE AND GENERAL. (1914, July 9). *Vernon News*, p. 2.

³⁵² From INDIANS ARRESTED FOR HOLDING A BIG POTLATCH. (1921, February 22). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 3.

VANCOUVER AND VICINITY



Vancouver and vicinity c. 1888

“An early conflict on Burrard Inlet”³⁵³ (Before 1877)

Nearly every person who has been a resident of Vancouver for any length of time will know where Seymour Creek is. To those who do not, let me say that Seymour Creek discharges its ice cold waters into Burrard Inlet on its northern side, a short distance from the outer entrance to the Second Narrows. By the deposition of soil carried down from the mountains a considerable portion of land has been formed at the mouth of the creek, and on this extension a few families of the Squamish tribe have lived for many successive generations. [...]

Forty years ago my professional duties compelled me to pay occasional visits to this settlement, either to prescribe for sick Indians or to obtain a well-manned canoe for some distant trip up the coast. Among the Indians who made their homes there was one [...] known to the whites as “Big Footed George”. [...] Unlike any Indian I have ever met with upon this Pacific coast, he was extremely well posted in the traditions of his tribe. [...] He told me many interesting legends of bloody battles with Haidas and especially with Euclataws, whom he described as the most cruel and bloodthirsty of all the tribes on the northern coast.

“At one time,” said George, “our tribe was many times more numerous than they are today (1877), but constantly recurring forays made by the Chilcotins, the Talkotins, Euclataws, Haidas, Cowichans and Fort Ruperts reduced our numbers. Many of our women and young girls were carried off into slavery, and the distance to which they were taken and our inherent weakness prevented their ever returning,

³⁵³ From Walkem, W. W. (1916, May 22) AN EARLY CONFLICT ON BURRARD INLET. *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 10. Written by W. W. Walkem (1850 – 1919).

except those which were given up in exchange for valuable presents offered for their release.

LAST BLOODY BATTLE

“I am now getting to be an old man,” said George one day, “but I can well remember the last bloody battle which was fought within this inlet. It was one which lasted three days between our tribe under our [Indians]t and most celebrated chief, Koolama, and ended in the defeat of our enemies, but the Squamish tribe, after their victory, were much reduced in numbers and too weak to follow them in their flight north.

“This terrible battle arose in this way. Our chief, Koolama, had announced his intention of holding a grand potlatch in the fall of the year just after the last run of the salmon, and as was customary, sent messengers to those tribes with whom they were friendly, carrying special gifts to their chiefs and their eldest sons, inviting them to the feast. Among those invited were the Nanaimos and the Cowichans, as well as a small tribe which lived at Chemainus. When the day arrived there was a great congregation of Indians, but all the tribes from the big island were absent. But the chief of the Nanaimos, who was considered one of the greatest warriors on the coast, sent word that they dare not leave their homes as the Euclataws and Haidas were planning a foray in combination, and it might be that in the course of their southern movement they might destroy their homes and the old men, women and children who were unable to attend the potlatch. He warned our chief to be on guard, as they might have heard of the proposed potlatch and attack us. It was good advice, and when Koolama announced to those who had accepted the invitations and were then present, the message of the Nanaimo chief, many of them, to their great shame, deserted us in the most cowardly fashion.

“I was not at the potlatch. I was taken by my mother some distance up Seymour Creek where she and my young brothers and sisters were hidden, and placed in charge of an old woman who went up with us.

WARNING IS SOUNDED

“When the potlatch was at its height some scouts whom Koolama had posted near the Indian Rock outside the inlet came in great haste and announced that forty war canoes were in sight, and that they contained Haidas only. Of course the feast broke up at once, and other scouts announced that their enemies were landed near where Jericho now is, and were making fires as though intending to camp. This was about two hours from sundown, and later on word was brought that thirty more war canoes were approaching from the gulf containing Euclataws who were singing, beating the sides of their canoes, as well as big war drums. All our kin from the Squamish River loaded their canoes with their women and children and hurried them to Capilano creek, where they hid themselves in the dense bush.

“No attack was made that night, but many of the tribes who had come from the inlets to the north meanly sneaked away during the night, and when morning broke and the Haidas and Euclataws approached the mouth of the narrows to enter on an inward current, the only ones left to meet this large force were Indians of the Squamish tribe.

“But Koolama was a great chief and was as brave as any Indian on the coast. He was very expert with the bow and arrow and in handling the war club he had no equal. He had given directions that many of the women should load as many of the light canoes as possible with rocks they could lift, and while the men engaged the enemy they were to throw as many rocks as they could into the canoes of their enemies and try to sink them.

LOADED WITH HEAVY PEBBLES

“The only Squamish who owned a gun was Koolama. It was a very large one which was used to shoot geese and ducks with when they were in large rocks. He had mounted this in his own special war canoe which had on its stem the mask of a big wolf in which were large real teeth made to look as wicked as possible. He had loaded this gun with heavy pebbles which he had obtained on Texada Island, the only place where they could be found. The only fault with this gun was that it took a great deal of powder, and Koolama had only sufficient for three “poohs,” or shots.

“However, the members of our tribe, headed by our brave chief, boldly shot out into the current, and each canoe attacked one of the enemy. In a leading canoe of the Haidas was a medicine man beating on a big drum and singing at the top of his voice. Our chief Koolama was in a leading canoe, making to where he could head his foes off. On reaching this the canoe was turned swiftly to meet those canoes of the enemy which were sailing with the current. At a suitable time he fired his gun, killing six in the leading canoe, among whom was the noisy doctor, and wounding several and killing one in the second. This threw the Haidas into great confusion, and while in that state our women began filling their canoes with rocks, which they threw as quickly as possible. But they only succeeded in sinking one, as these northern canoes will hold a large quantity in weight. The one which was sunk was badly cracked down the middle from stem to stern, and with the weight of stones and the heavy blows parted in two halves. Those who were thrown in the water were thirty in number, and the women speedily clubbed them to death as they hung on to the pieces of the canoe.

“In the meantime the Euclataws also arrived and the battle was continued until all the canoes were nearly opposite to where Moodyville now is. Koolama fired two more shots with his big gun, and as he was run out of powder he had to take his bow and arrows and continue the fight. While drawing his bow at one period of the battle, he was struck by a Haida on the back of the neck with a war club, which rendered him insensible, and his companions in the canoe, to save his head or scalp or both, hurried him back to the rancherie in Coal Harbor.

LOST GREAT MANY MEN

“We lost a great many men that day, and when night came both sides drew off, to continue the battle the following day.

“The battle next day was among small parties, for the numbers on both sides were much reduced, although the Squamish had killed many more of their enemies than the Haidas and Euclataws had killed of the Squamish. In the meantime Koolama, by good care and the treatment given him by his wives (he had six) quite recovered, and putting on his breastplate made from elk hide, he took his station

again at the head of his tribe. There were no hand to hand combats now, but the battle was mostly confined to bows and arrows, and fights on land in the dense bush where the enemy was foolish enough to follow the Squamish who led them into ambushes, where they were killed to a man.

“The next day, the Haidas and Euclataws who were in the inlet and who had camped the previous night near where the Hastings mill now stands, assembled together to run the narrows in force. They knew that their passage through those narrows would be full of danger and they made preparation to face it. The Squamish were highly pleased at the terrible slaughter they must have made, as the canoes of their enemies were manned by only one-third of the number they contained when they first arrived. But our tribe was to receive a sudden surprise which proved what skillful and wily foes these northern Indians were. The latter had at a very early hour in the morning landed a large number of their best warriors, who were good swimmers, at a spot close to the exit or upper part of the narrows.

SING DEFIANT WAR SONG

“To give these men ample time to reach the summit of the land which bordered on the narrows, and thus protect their main body in the canoes from the arrows of the Squamish, whose powerful bows could shoot an arrow across the narrows in some parts, they delayed the departure of their war canoes from the waters opposite their camping place until the sun had well risen. Then, singing a defiant war song, they paddled slowly towards the mouth of the inlet. In the leading canoe they held a wounded prisoner whom they treated in the most cruel manner, and in another they held two women whom they were carrying into slavery.

“No sooner were the canoes near the narrows than the members of our tribe rushed along the trails to shoot arrows as they passed through the gulf on the powerful eddies caused by the flood tide. Two of these Squamish speeding through the bush sank to the ground, pierced by poisoned arrows, and as a speedy arrival at the border of the narrows was necessary to be in time to cover the retreating foe with arrows, these Haida scouts made this impossible. As the canoes passed through, the Haidas on land hurried along the trail, and were in the water and in the canoes of their friends before the Squamish arrived on the outer beach to find them out of range of any bow in their possession. [...]”³⁵⁴

“That this was a most sanguinary engagement may be concluded from the fact that the Squamish lost more than one-half of the number engaged. There was still, however, a large number of the tribe living at the Squamish River who had not been present [at] or taken part in the contest. This was the last raid made by these northern tribes upon the Squamish on Burrard Inlet.”

³⁵⁴ I've omitted brief but graphic “Evidence of Brutality” contained in a paragraph with that sub-heading.

“Out for a potlatch”³⁵⁵ (1898)

From far and near the Siwashes up the coast have gathered in Vancouver, to have a hi-yu time. They came in their dugouts during the night and have made quite a settlement along the waterfront where they encamped.

From the little [infant] to the wizened old hag who performs the back work of the camp there is an air of joyful anticipation on their countenances. An event of unusual importance is, according to the [Indians], to transpire during the present jollification. During the potlatch, which will continue about four days, “Jimmy Fraser” of Victoria, a comparatively new light in the medical man and dancing way, will give one of his unique performances.

“Jimmy” started in the business last January, and has been an instantaneous success. A pale-face lady wearing a white shroud appeared to him in the night, he says, and predicted that he would become a great medicine man and dancer. Although Jimmy had never developed any great inclination for hard work, he abandoned what little he possessed after this prophecy, and immediately set himself to the study of Indian witchcraft and dancing. Residents of Victoria will remember what a furor Fraser created on the Songhees reservation when he first performed. He proved himself a whirlwind, and put his old rival in the same line completely out of the business.

Since his debut Jimmy has been in constant demand on the coast. He lives like a prince – that is, a B. C. Indian prince – and is said to possess more blankets than any [Indian] on the Songhees reservation at Victoria. The present gathering in Vancouver was, it is understood, planned some time ago. Most of the Indians have considerable potlatch money, some of them having been very successful in their fishing operations up north.

Just when the performance will take place is not known. Jimmy, the medical man, is expected over to-morrow, and great preparations are being made to-day for his reception. The festivities may close with an Indian marriage, which will be solemnized in a manner known only to the natives during times of great prosperity.

The waterfront in the vicinity of Evans, Coleman & Evans’ dock presented an animated appearance all morning. Already about 100 Siwashes have assembled there, and they were arriving all morning. Dozens of little tents were hastily put up, and active preparations for the big potlatch were being made. Quite a flotilla of canoes have been drawn above the high water mark. One of the boats³⁵⁶ is quite a gorgeous affair, with the head of an Indian god at the bow and an inscription painted on it under the word Newhiti, stating that its market value is 200 blankets. It is capable of accommodating several good-sized Indian families.

³⁵⁵ From OUT FOR A POTLATCH. (1898, October 18). *The Province*, p. 8.

³⁵⁶ A “very large one from Qualicum, cut out of a huge tree, and on its bow is painted in green and red a dragon and device as elaborate, almost, as that of one of the Empress liners. This canoe has an English name, too; it is the Seaweed, and under the name plate is written ‘200 blankets, War canoe, Qualicum.’” AN INDIAN JUBILATION. (1898, October 18). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 8.

If the local authorities do not interfere in the coming festivities of the Indians, a very warm and interesting time is promised.

“A big Indian dance”³⁵⁷ (1898)

Nearly a month ago a potlatch was arranged among all the Indians of the Coast to take place at Vancouver. Two or three hundred of the natives congregated in town, and a special feature of the jubilation was to be a clever dancing feat by Jimmie Fraser. However, Jimmie did not turn up and the potlatch ceremonies have been called off³⁵⁸ for the time being.

Lately, however, some Indians decided still to have their celebration, and nearly 100 of them arrived in town yesterday. At a private dance that Jimmie was giving up the coast, he got into such an awful frenzy that he became sick and could not come to Vancouver. The performance has been arranged to take place to-morrow afternoon, either in town or over at North Vancouver, and some interesting times may be looked forward to.

The return of Jimmie Fraser³⁵⁹ (1898)

Jimmie Fraser, the Indian dancer, arrived in the city on Sunday from the north. He was showing himself off to advantage down at the Union steamship wharf in the afternoon, although it was raining.

Jimmie has just returned from a visit to Atlin lake, having originally intended to go to the Klondike, and he was more than pleased with the reception he received from the Indians around that section.

“I danced on three consecutive nights,” Jimmie explained to a World reporter, “which is something that I have never yet done in my life. The Actawas tribe around there were delighted, and I received many presents of new blankets and that sort of thing. Then we had a regular potlatch in which nearly 300 of the Indians joined, and again I performed there and received many more presents in the shape of metal cooking utensils and such stuff.”

Jimmie is now on his way to his home at Cowichan.

“A proud day for Chief Joe Capilano”³⁶⁰ (September, 1906)

It was a proud day for Chief Joe Capilano when on Thursday afternoon he returned to Vancouver from his visit to the King. Though the Indian petition to His Majesty was not presented personally, but through a high commissioner, Joe seemed

³⁵⁷ From A BIG INDIAN DANCE. (1898, November 10). *Daily World* (Vancouver), p. 6.

³⁵⁸ “The Indian potlatch is off, as the authorities informed the Siwashes that it would not be allowed to take place. The Indians are accordingly packing up their iktas and leaving for home.” The Reporters’ Note-Book. (1898, October 22). *The Province*, p. 8.

³⁵⁹ From AN INDIAN DANCE. (1898, November 29). *Semi-Weekly World* (Vancouver), p. 8.

³⁶⁰ From CHIEF CAPILANO AGAIN AT HOME. (1906, September 1). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 2.

pleased with his reception by the Great White Father. [...] After driving in state through the streets from the C.P.R. station, Chief Joe Capilano embarked with his followers on the steamer St. George en route to North Vancouver, thence in procession, headed by the famous Squamish band, playing “See the Conquering Hero Comes,” along the narrow highway which leads from the suburban town to the borders of the Capilano river. [...]

Chief Joe [...] was kept busy talking all day, and in the evening a giant potlatch was convened, and amidst the beating of tom-toms and singing of native songs he told them all over the story of his voyage and his interview with the ruler of the greatest kingdom on Earth. He told them, amongst other things, that their interests would be looked after by the powers, and that so long as they proved themselves loyal subjects to the government under which they were now enjoying freedom and many privileges, they would never have to suffer hardships because of their color.

The potlatch was unlike any of its kind, insomuch that instead of the customary hijinks, the assembly was of an educative character, with Chief Joe in the role of prime narrator, and although there was the firing of guns, etc., the festivities on the whole resembled more the reception that would be tendered to any pale-face ambassador on his return from a foreign mission.

Chief Joe Capilano on the potlatch³⁶¹ (1910)

White men say potlatch is very evil thing. Now potlatch is tried to be stopped by missions. I see men and women dance in Pender Hall in Vancouver and they dance worse than any potlatch dance. They hug each other, and we do not do that. Potlatch is only big dance, and when big potlatch is held, and many blankets and money give away it is what you call giving away property so that poor Indians may have something. Rich Indians hold big potlatches and give lots away so that they may be good Indians. I have heard men in Vancouver talk of new ideas for dividing property among each other. They think it new idea, and it is older with us than anything. Only we not make it politics. Indians, they give away what belong to them; they give their own property, but those men talk of giving away to everyone what not belong to themselves, but to some other men. They see big chief a rich man, and they want what he got. They want go and take away from him, but Indian, he not feel like that. Potlatch is good thing. We not interfere with white men’s dances; why they interfere with ours?

Yes, I know white men say we give away women at dances. That not so. Many women may be given in marriage at dances, but then marriage is arranged by their father and mother. White men say we take blankets or gold for girl. Yes, why not? Whit emen give the girl presents when she marry, but with us Indian, men give parents presents to show he able to support girl. You make everything of wife, we make more of parents. Why should father and mother bring up girl and give her to man who they think will be good husband, and not be sure man can make home for

³⁶¹ From Capilano, J. (1910, March 26). FOR NOW WE SEE THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY. *The Province*, p. 8. In the words of Chief Joe Capilano (1858 – 1910).

her? It is only what you call goodwill on part of husband that he makes presents to father and mother. With white people girl gets all presents, parents nothing; that not right.

Mary Capilano's potlatch³⁶² (1913)

Mary Capilano was a capable woman of strong personality. She was never the lazy, shiftless type – not she. Around her little home at the water's edge were many berry bushes and fruit trees which she had planted. Strawberries, raspberries, currants, cherries and apple trees gave their bounty year by year, and she also gathered much wild fruit from the mountains. She kept a large flock of chickens, and sold eggs as well as fruit.

In addition to all this Mary used to gather clams in her spare moments. Three times a week she paddled across the Inlet in her old dugout canoe with 300 pounds of them. She would tie up near the Immigration Sheds and pack her heavy burden up to the Hotel Vancouver, where the chef paid five cents a pound for her produce. She knew how to save her money, too, and at one time had over \$2,000 in the bank.

Because she was the widow of a chief and the descendant of an important family, she felt she had a certain prestige to maintain, and in 1913 she did a very unusual thing for an Indian woman – she gave a big potlatch in her brother's house at Squamish.

It was one of the last events of its kind in this region, and people came from far and wide to do her honor. Everything was in accord with the best traditions of her people. She provided immense quantities of food for her guests, and had lots of money and blankets to give away.

Her potlatch lasted three days and wound up with a big ceremonial dance as a grand climax. Most of the Indians were in full costume to execute the ancient dances and to perform the many secret and mysterious rites which attend these occasions, the significance of which are known in full only to the Indians themselves.

With the roar of the sea beating in lusty rhythm to their steps, and the majestic mountains – protective and serene – looking down upon their revels, the scene must have taken on a wildly colorful note of primeval grandeur and romance.

“Native Sons plan novel entertainment”³⁶³ (November, 1915)

The special social committee of the local post of the Native Sons of British Columbia have made arrangements for a bumper entertainment for the members and their friends in the form of a potlatch, for next Tuesday evening at their post in the Eagle building [Vancouver]. The members of the New Westminster post have been invited, and will attend in a body. The old historical customs of the Indians and

³⁶² From Thornton, M. V. (1946, November 2). MARY CAPILANO, Daring, Venturous. *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 35. Written by Mildred Valley Thornton (1890 - 1967).

³⁶³ From NATIVE SONS PLAN NOVEL ENTERTAINMENT. (1915, November 14). *Daily News-Advertiser*, p. 16.

Pioneers of the early days will be sacredly observed, and the old camp yarns will be in order.

Among the other “stunts” the “aborigines” will hold a blind auction, each member bringing something worthy of a good bid, which will be auctioned off by the comedian of the post. The proceeds will be used to provide Christmas presents for British Columbians who have gone overseas.

Mr. J. Edward Sears, 470 Granville Street, who is the recording secretary of the post, will be glad to hear of the whereabouts of soldiers who are natives of this province.

This is the first of a series of entertainments the natives have arranged for the winter. On Dec. 21 there will be a Christmas tree, [and] in February a pow-wow, when the Vancouver Pioneers will be invited. Following this there will be a dance, a Night on the Trail and a Sockeye Night.

“The ‘potlatch’ held in the Eagles’ Hall”³⁶⁴ (November, 1915)

The “potlatch” held in the Eagles’ Hall, Homer Street, [Vancouver,] last night under the auspices of the Native Sons of British Columbia, was a most enjoyable affair in every respect. One of the features of the evening was the holding of a “blind auction” which netted \$32.

Musical selections were rendered by Messrs. Percy Clay³⁶⁵, Herbert Brent, George Crane and Sid Deane.

Dr. Bamford³⁶⁶ dispensed the refreshments.

A number of native sons were over from New Westminster, among them Ald. Johnston, O. S. Peel, A. W. Dawe and J. P. Hampton Bole.

Those present included Messrs. S. D. Miller, Fred H. Fletcher³⁶⁷, A. H. Urquhart³⁶⁸, L. Behnson³⁶⁹, Fred Gosse³⁷⁰, F. H. Behnson, G. A. Roedde Jr.³⁷¹, J. Douglas, Vernon A. Smith, Vic Phillips, W. J. Bailey, C. C. Benson, J. G. Macdonald³⁷², W. L. Jewell, S. C. Beverley, Wm. Bolton³⁷³, W. Parker, W. Johnson, G. C. Laughlin³⁷⁴ [and] J. Edward Sears³⁷⁵.

³⁶⁴ From ONE DAY IN VANCOUVER. (1915, November 17). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 8.

³⁶⁵ “Clay Percy r 1953 1st Av W”. *Henderson’s Greater Vancouver Directory* for 1915.

³⁶⁶ Possibly “Bamford R Carmichael dentist 511, 718 Granville h 1509 Haro”. *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ “Fletcher Fredk H clk r 3402 Osler Av”. *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ “Urquhart Alex H mgr A Magnano Co Ltd r 742 11th Av E”. “Magnano A Co Ltd A H Urquhart mgr importers 123 Powell”. *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ “Behnson L. A. meter reader B[ritish] C[olumbia] E[lectric] R[ailway]”. *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ “Gosse Fredk A clk City Assessor’s Office r 1806 48th Av E”. *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ “Roedde Gustave A Jr comp G A Roedde r 1415 Barclay”. “Roedde G A Ltd G A Roedde mng dir b[oo]k[b]i[nd]e[rs] 616 Homer”. *Ibid.*

³⁷² “MacDonald J G s[all]e[sm]a[n] h 30, 101 7th Av E”.

³⁷³ “Bolton Wm foreman works dept City h 1400 8th Av W”. *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ Possibly a typo for the only Laughlin in the directory, “Laughlin Harold C sec-treas Alaska B C Bedding Co Ltd home 2146 7th Av W”. *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ “Sears J Edw barrister 516, 470 Granville h 1625 Pendrell”.

A Point Grey potlatch³⁷⁶ (February, 1917)

Fine day for a potlatch yesterday.

Maybe you hadn't heard about it, though. It was rather exclusive. The Musqueams gave it, and only the first families of British Columbia were invited, the Squamishes, Duncanses, Chemainuses and Nanaimos. We didn't belong; it's no use putting on side. But one of us had a friend who had a friend who knew a very prominent man among the Musqueams, the organizer of the potlatch, and he got us admitted to the gallery, so to speak. We just horned in.

We were four, and we took a sea-going motor and bowled along the Marine Drive for a few miles, till we came to the edge of the reserve. There we turned down a squashy trail, the car taking to the water like a duck, or hopping from log to log, till we came up against a picket fence, with several Chinamen and Indians in the distance. When we asked for the potlatch, we were told to go right ahead, so we got out, crawled through a hole in the fence, and walked.

Suddenly there came to our ears a queer droning noise³⁷⁷, like the sound of a horn or a conch shell. Ahead loomed two barn-like buildings with smoke coming from the roof-peak. A few Indian babies and mangy dogs sat outside in the sunshine. Our sponsor, on being found, passed us in through the big door, which closed behind us.

COLOR AND ACTION HERE

Two log fires blazed in the middle of the room, one toward either end. The floor was of packed dirt. More of the same was visible on the faces of the numerous children who played or sat about quietly. Around the walls ran low-trestled benches, covered with clothes and bedding, where the several hundred Indian guests sat. Red blouses and shawls, green and purple skirts, [and] multi-colored hair ribbons made spots of color here and there.

As we entered, every eye was fixed on a klotch in a pink blouse and green velvet skirt, who was dancing with monotonous jerky steps around the fire. Her black, coarse hair was loose and fell over her face; her feet were bare. The dust rose as she stamped, and settled on her draggled velvet skirt. The wailing sound we had heard outside swelled to a deafening volume. Everyone was singing; a dozen or so of the men had great rawhide drums, or tambourines rather, which they beat steadily; others had only a stick, with which they thumped on the railing in front of the bench.

³⁷⁶ From I.P. (1917, February 17). NATIVE CHROMATICS AND MUSIC AT POTLATCH. *The Province*, p. 19.

³⁷⁷ "POINT GREY – Citizens of this municipality who are not wise to the ways of the original occupants of this country, kept the telephone wires running into the police offices hot last night with enquiries as to the cause of weird noises which seemed to be emanating from the waterfront, and the like of which they had never heard before. They were afraid that some sea monster had stranded there and was in need of assistance to enable him to get away again to his aqueous home. The police investigated and found that an Indian potlatch and dance was in progress on the Point Grey reserve. There was no disturbance except in the matter of noise." POINT GREY. (1917, February 15). *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 4.

BRONZE MUSICAL CHIEF

There was a musical director, a big Indian with a face like something carved on a totem pole; he stood up and sang out of one corner of his mouth, his eye roving continually about the room. Suddenly the singing stopped, except the voice of the dancer. She was gasping and moaning rather than singing. This occurred several times. At last she staggered to a seat, subsiding by degrees. It looked to me like acute hysteria. The chorus singing and the drums went on. Soon a young [woman] sitting quite near us began to wave her hands and wiggle her shoulders and moan. Her neighbor placidly took down the sufferer's hair, braiding only a bit of it on her forehead; then she took off her shoes and stockings. Casting off her shawl, the girl, thus prepared, began dancing and chanting about the fire to the same rhythm with the same step.

"What is she singing?" we asked a venerable and intelligent-looking Indian who had moved up to give us a seat.

"It is the story of the tribe," he replied in very good English. "You see the ones with faces painted? They are the dancers. All will dance by-and-bye, one at a time, keep up all day."

But the next dancer was a young buck, who wore plaid golf stockings and a kind of mantle and headdress of ermine tails over his cotton shirt and overalls. He danced, with his knees stiff, coming down on his heels and waving his arms.

NOT THE SAME FAMILY

"Isadora Duncan never danced like that," whispered one of us, with conviction.

"Never," I had to admit. "Different family of Duncans, anyway."

"Let's go on to the next cabaret," another of us suggested. So we sneaked out and made for the number two dance hall, where we were given a bench to ourselves.

There were not so many guests in this room, and only one fire. A homelike touch was given by an enlarged photo on the wall. A small boy, whose garments depended precariously from a single gallus, wandered about. There were other children, one a very pretty little girl, with [...] masses of black hair tied with a green ribbon. They made no noise at all; they didn't have to. Their elders did it for them. As we entered, a dancer was just beginning. She had a diamond cross and earrings. Anyway, they looked like diamonds, but her feet needed manicuring.

Dogs crawled unobtrusively from under the trestle benches. This cozy retreat was also shared by a sad-looking black hen, which was lame of one foot. On a table were dirty dishes, which a child was washing up. Other children picked up a bite of lunch at the same table from time to time. The youngest baby of all was also lunching, even more primitively. We began to feel hungry ourselves.

"Don't they hand out food at a potlatch?" one of us asked.

"They might," said another. "So we'd better get out pretty soon. It isn't manners to refuse what's offered."

"We could just toy with it."

"I thought there were blankets and things given away at potlatches. Of course, winter's nearly over, but I could use a blanket," I said.

I don't know; we might have got a blanket between the lot of us, if the man of the party hadn't got us in wrong just then. He went over and picked up a medicine stick, or a musical instrument. It was a long stick with four clusters of deer hoofs fastened to it with sinews. He was shaking it, as pleased as a child with a toy, when an old [woman] came and snatched it from him. She glared at him, too. I dare say we had committed sacrilege. We felt we had better go away from there, so we went back to the first – The Dansant.

An old, old klotch, with grey hair and a wise, wrinkled face, interested me. Also two or three round-cheeked babies, who had distinctly Asiatic eyes. But the man of the party drew our attention to a flat-faced, grim-looking buck directly opposite.

"See that man?" We did. "He's killed three men," we were informed casually. "They couldn't prove it on him, but it's well known he did it."

He was looking at us fixedly. I wondered which of us he thought would make a nice corpse and began to want some fresh air and lunch. The din was deafening and it had a saw-edge quality that got on one's nerves. It is really difficult to sit for several hours in the company of hundreds of people having jumping hysterics and not get jumpy too. When one of the dancers came off the floor and keeled over gasping and barking, one wanted to rush forward with smelling salts and cold water. But none of their fellow-tribesmen seemed to think the same. They all finished their fits undisturbed.

LAST SCENE OF ALL

"Look there; that woman's beginning to dance now; I know her," exclaimed the lady beside me. "She weaves baskets for me, does beautiful work, too. She lives in a house; they are quite well to do; she's a converted Indian. And there she is doing that pagan dance."

"Oh, well, there's no harm in it," said the man of the party. "They don't drink anything; it's all decent and orderly. Lots of these Indians are quite rich." [...]

I was ready to go. But some of our party weren't.

"I feel sure that something exciting's going to happen right soon," they insisted. I think it was the cumulative effect of the music and singing. It goes on and on, on one or two notes, [...] until you think something must happen just for variety. But our guide said that unless we stayed till Saturday night, it would be just the same.

"Saturday night, everybody will dance at once. And the gifts will be given."

But we couldn't wait. We went off and had a little potlatch of our own, where there was more food and less music.

“Vancouver Tyee potlatch”³⁷⁸ (June, 1922)

Here’s an event that no one will ever forget – here’s a Carnival extraordinary – here’s the biggest news scoop ever flashed from lofty hill by noble Redman.

VANCOUVER TYEE POTLATCH

Indian legend teaches us that the word “Potlatch” describes an occasion when men and women foregather to have a joyous time and do good to others. This Potlatch is to be a five-day Carnival of Joy. All the amusements of Coney Island have been transplanted to *Tillicum Trail* – Georgia Street Causeway entrance to Stanley Park. Gigantic parades, field sports, lacrosse, baseball, regattas, trap-shooting, fireworks, Princess’ ball,³⁷⁹ confetti festival and Mad-Moon masquerade are just a few of the events that will help to make this an occasion long remembered. The entire proceeds will be used to provide playgrounds for Vancouver children.

Nail the dates in your memory: *JUNE 30th to JULY 5th*. Five days, including Dominion Day and July the Fourth. Plan to be here. We’ll meet you on *Tillicum Trail*. “U-4-V” is the password, “*Hi-Yu-Tillicum*” the war-cry.

³⁷⁸ From VANCOUVER TYEE POTLATCH [Advertisement]. (1922, June 15). *Vancouver Daily World*, p. 11.

³⁷⁹ Notice: The Princess turning in the highest count up to Saturday will be permitted to select any suit at the Famous Ladies Ready-to-Wear Shop, absolutely FREE. [Note in the original.]

VICTORIA AND ESQUIMALT

Traditional territory of the Songhees Nation of the Lək̓ʷəŋən People.



Victoria and Esquimalt c. 1888

“Very exciting times”³⁸⁰ (1859)

We arrived here [Victoria] on 30th May, 1859. It was at that time a very small place, with but few white inhabitants, for although there had been quite a rush of people from California the year before, they had most of them started off to the mines as soon as they arrived.

There were a great many Indians at that time living on the Reserve here and at Esquimalt, who used to go round selling oysters, clams, fish, etc., also buckets of potatoes which they had grown themselves, and which were of such a fine quality that some people bought them to take to California for seed. Old women could be seen carrying big loads of tupsoo (a kind of wild pea) on their backs fastened to their heads by a strap. [...] Some of these old [women] had shells inserted above the chin below the lower lip; I suppose it was intended to improve their beauty. They also had shell ornaments attached to their ears; but I think these have all gone out of fashion. Many Indians from the north and from Queen Charlotte Island [Haida Gwaii] used to come bringing skins, slate ornaments, blankets, moccasins, mats, etc. for sale.

They sometimes had “potlatches”. I never saw one, but heard that they used to have very exciting times at them. They would throw blankets into the bay, when there would be a scramble for them, and perhaps several would get hold of the same blanket, and each would hold on with such tenacity that they would have to cut the

³⁸⁰ From Mrs. Henry Edward Wilby. (1909, June 11). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8. Mrs. (and Mr.) Henry Edward Wilby died before 1940, when their son William died at age 78.

piece he held out of the blanket. That piece would be kept by the man who held it as a great trophy.

When some Indian was dying at the Reserve, it was their custom to meet and set up a doleful howl, and keep it up for a long time. It could be heard a long way off, and was not at all appreciated by outsiders.

“The Indian potlatch”³⁸¹ (October, 1861)

This great affair came off yesterday at the Songhees village. About 2,000 savages were present, and the number of blankets potlatched is estimated at about 3,000. Other articles of value were also given away. In all, \$10,000 worth of stuff was disposed of. The assemblage was orderly, and one circumstance which struck us as remarkable was the fact that not a single drunken Siwash was seen during our stay at the village.

About 12 o'clock, one of our policemen arrested a Songhees Indian on a charge of stealing a blanket from a member of the same tribe. As the prisoner was being conducted over the bridge, the alarm was given at the camp, and 800 of his friends came across, and amid yelling and whooping, took the prisoner from the hands of the officer and returned triumphantly to the camp. The old bridge settled several feet owing to the rush and quite an alarm, for a little while, was felt by persons in the vicinity of the circumstance.

About two o'clock the stranger Indians commenced to depart for their homes, and by dark but few were left at the village.

“By special desire of King Freezy”³⁸² (September, 1863)

Yesterday morning a number of canoes belonging, we are informed, to the Swymish [sic.] tribe joined the gay band collected upon the Indian Reserve. Upon approaching the shore the newly arrived guests “potlatched” a number of blankets which were eagerly scrambled for by their hosts in canoes. It was amusing to watch the blankets thrown into the air in quick succession and tossed about from one to another with long sticks. They invariably fell into the water, but such was the spirit of fair play manifested by special desire of King Freezy that the rightful claimant was always allowed to carry off his trophy without molestation. During Sunday night, a young junior chief of the Songhees tribe died, and his body was interred yesterday in the Indian cemetery, his blankets having been previously distributed among his kith and kin. We understand from King Freezy’s court journal that in consequence of the non-arrival of the Cowichans, the grand potlatch will not take place until to-morrow.

³⁸¹ From The Indian Potlatch. (1861, October 26). *British Colonist*, p. 2.

³⁸² From INDIAN POTLATCH. (1863, September 29). *British Colonist*, p. 2.

“Indian rejoicings”³⁸³ (September, 1863)

The weather yesterday was fine, and the crowds of Indians now collected on the Reserve were all out of doors amusing themselves in various ways. Considerable potlatching went on during the afternoon, but to-day is to be the grand display. Jim, alias Skoming, whose wealth has raised him to an equal position with handsome King Freezy, will distribute about 400 blankets among his friends, and at 1 p.m., the whole of the Chiefs are invited to attend at the Indian school on the Reserve, where the Rev. Mr. Garrett will regale them with a copious supply of rice and molasses.

Among the incidents was the bestowal of the fits of an orphan girl, daughter of a Songhees chief, by a Clalum wife. The donor, a rather good-looking Indian woman, was decked out in the most approved Siwash style, being covered from head to foot with rows of fringes spun from the wool of the mountain sheep. The first portion covered her head and shoulders, below this was a tippet of the same material reaching to her waist, from which depended the kirtle which completed her attire. If nothing in accordance with Indian etiquette that the maid should personally make speeches and bestow gifts, some of her elderly friends did so for her. Next came an old siwash who spoke of the deeds of her father and the condition of the daughter.

King Freezy then shouted for five of the chief men of the Songhees, who came forward accordingly. A cap ornamented with silk ribbands was then thrown to one of them, who placed it upon a fire close by. Some blankets were thrown down when one of the songs of the deceased man was sung in chorus. The singing and giving away blankets followed each other alternately several times, when the whole concluded by the young woman going through a short dance to the music of her surrounding friends.

A government “potlatch” and smallpox³⁸⁴ (May, 1864)

Few persons living in British Columbia today have had such an interesting and diversified career as Mr. Thomas Deasy.³⁸⁵ He came to British Columbia in the colony days of 1859, being then a very small boy. [...] Mr. Deasy has been connected with the police, [and] with the Victoria fire department, having served with the brigade while he was still a small boy. Eventually he became chief. Later he served for many years with the Indian Department. [...] He knows the Coast Indians better perhaps than any white man, for he and his wife have lived among them for nearly twenty years, and he speaks the pure Chinook fluently, as well as many of the dialects.

His earliest recollection of a potlatch is not an Indian potlatch at all, but one given by the British Government at New Westminster to please and propitiate the tribes along the Fraser River.

³⁸³ From INDIAN REJOICINGS. (1863, September 30). *British Colonist*, p. 2.

³⁸⁴ From De Bertrand Lugrin, A. (1925, April 5). Potlatch of Olden Days. *The Province*, p. 42. Written by Anne “N.” de Bertrand Lugrin (1874 - 1962).

³⁸⁵ Thomas Deasy (1857 – 1936).

THIS POTLATCH NOT INDIAN AFFAIR

This happened in 1864, on May 24. He was only about eight years of age, but he can recall the event most clearly. This was in the colony days, of course, and about five years after the arrival of the Royal Engineers. Where the Mental Hospital now stands there was a cricket ground for the soldiers and marines and Governor Seymour, Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, Charles E. Pooley and all the officers of the fleet used to play there. It was on this cricket ground that the great potlatch was given by “Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria to Her loyal Indian subjects.”

Large white sails were taken from one of the ships in port, H.M.S. “Chameleon,” and spread upon the grass. Brown sugar, which the Indians loved above all the white man’s delicacies, was piled upon the canvas in large mounds. There were ship’s biscuits in piles and in boxes, and great kegs of molasses, the heads knocked in so that all and sundry could help themselves. The old “Beaver” was off the wharf there too, and H.M.S. “Grappler”. They and the “Chameleon” were gaily decorated with bunting and flags.

In 1869, when Mr. Deasy’s family came to live in Victoria, there was a terrible smallpox epidemic in the colony, and it wiped out hundreds of the Indians. This potlatch marked the last gathering of the Haidas in the southern part of the colony. They were all ordered to go home for fear of contagion. The navy gathered them together, and their war canoes were taken in tow, filled with the Haidas and their belongings.

At Seymour Narrows they anchored to await the morning and the tide. The Haidas, who were very indignant with the summary manner in which they had been commanded to leave, and who did not realize that they should have kept to themselves until all danger of infection was over, cut the tow lines in the night and promptly made off for the Queen Charlottes [Haida Gwaii], under cover of darkness. It was in this way that the dread disease reached in Indian villages and caused so much suffering and death. Up till that time the Haidas numbered over 15,000, but the epidemic decimated their ranks; whole clans were wiped out, and today by many a little stream, one comes across the remnants of villages, tumble-down shacks, [and] tottering totems, once the home of the proud Haidas.

A Haida potlatch in Victoria³⁸⁶ (May, 1865)

The Haidas had a *cultus potlatch* yesterday at their camp on the reserve. Swaine & Boord’s Old Tom, Bass’ Pale, Byass’ Porter, Islay Whisky, Hennessy brandy and other unexceptionable brands were purveyed in unlimited supplies to the assembled [Indigenous people] as they sat in a semi-circle; the men on one side and the women on the other. Amongst the group were young folks of both sexes very respectably attired. A number of blankets were also distributed.

³⁸⁶ From INDIAN PATLATCH. (1865, May 23). *Weekly Colonist*, p. 5.

“In anticipation of the potlatch”³⁸⁷ (April, 1869)

Yesterday we strolled through the Indian village, attracted thither by the large number of Indians there assembled in anticipation of the potlatch which will shortly take place. The village was in an unusual state of excitement and bustle. The number of strangers already gathered is about 700, representing thirteen tribes, viz: the Cowichan, Tsauso, Saanich, Discovery Island, Nanaimo, Sooke, Chemainus, Quamichan, Penalakites, Skadget, Nittinet, Clallm and Clemenait. About 200 canoes are hauled up on the beach, and a great many presents, such as blankets, guns and *iktas*, are stored in different lodges. During our visit, we observed a number of adult Siwashes in the various stages of intoxication; two little boys were staggering about in imitation of their elders. The sale of spiritous liquors by whites is almost unrestricted; and the most fearful consequences are anticipated unless more vigorous steps are adopted to prevent the traffic.

Behind one of the ledges about forty savages were gambling with the hard, round bits of wood which they hide in oakum. Upon the mats in front of the gambler were scattered any number of four-bit and \$20 pieces. The gambling is done by “guessing” and sleight-of-hand, not unlike the “little joker,” or the “now-you-see-it and-now-you-don’t” game at home. Two or three Indians who are called professional gamblers and travel about from camp to camp “cleaning out” the unsophisticated occupants, were pointed out. They look fat and sleek and evidently make good living.

About one-third of the Songhees tribe, including “Jim,” the great war chief, decline to enter into the festivities incidental to the potlatch, or to have anything to do with that interesting event. This division of feeling arose from the execution of “Harry” a few weeks ago - “Jim” and his adherents recognizing the hanging as eminently proper, and those who differ with him asserting that it was wrong.

“A hyas potlatch”³⁸⁸ (April, 1874)

Our neighbors at the Songhees village are having a *hyas potlach*. (Anglice³⁸⁹, a great gift.) Tribes are gathered from all parts³⁹⁰ and nights are made hideous by the orgies³⁹¹. Amongst the ancient usages still observed by the natives of this coast is that of gifts, which are made when building a new house, (sometimes thousands of blankets are given away to those who assisted to raise it by the owner of the house and his relations,) and when the chief or chiefs of a tribe acquire a certain amount of

³⁸⁷ From THE SONGHEES VILLAGE. (1869, April 24). *Weekly Colonist*, p. 4.

³⁸⁸ From The Indian Potlatch. (1874, April 23). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 3.

³⁸⁹ ‘In English’.

³⁹⁰ From a potlatch five years earlier: “The number of strangers already gathered in is about 700, representing thirteen tribes, viz: the Cowichan, Tsauso, Saanich, Discovery Island, Nanaimo, Sooke, Chemainus, Quamichan, Penalakites, Skadget, Nittinet, Clallm and Celemenalts. About 200 canoes are hauled up on the beach, and a great many presents, such as blankets, guns and *iktas*, are stored in the different lodges.” THE SONGHEES VILLAGE. (1869, April 21). *The British Colonist*, p. 3.

³⁹¹ In this case, ‘wild parties’, as opposed to the modern meaning.

property, all of which is given away to the neighboring tribes, who are present by invitation.

Of the latter sort is the one now on hand. It commenced last Sunday and will last all this week. An invitation has been sent to every tribe from Cape Beale to Comox, on this island; in Washington Territory, from Cape Flattery up Puget Sound as far as Nisqually; from Port Townsend, northwards by Semiamoo, up the Fraser to New Westminster, thence along the coast by Burrard Inlet to Sheechell. The number present exceeds 2,000. The supply of provisions will cost over \$1,000.

Already, as a bill of fare, there are, our informant tells us, four barrels of salt black bear, an enormous quantity of fat porpoises, seals, halibut, fresh and dried; a great many strings of dried clams; also hundreds of baskets full of mussels, oysters, clams, sea snails, and skimmock³⁹² (the last a sort of fish resembling tripe); any quantity of crabs, salt and fresh salmon; also gallons of molasses, several sacks of potatoes and flour, with loaf bread in the bargain; a large quantity of tea, four barrels of sugar, and a great many other articles. Several parties are out trying to get deer meat. In order to quench their thirst and for cooking purposes they are about to engage a water cart to supply them.

There will be given away one thousand blankets³⁹³ in the following order: Three bales³⁹⁴ of white, three bales of fancy and a few bales of green, and so on with the other sorts; in all, 20 bales. There will also be a gift of nine canoes, one of which is worth \$100. The bales will be opened on the roof of one of the lodges and the blankets thrown down to the people below. The canoes will be given to the chiefs of the various tribes present at the feast. While assembled the grievance of the Cowichans will be discussed. The position of the Puget Sound Indians will also be discussed, how they like the mode of treatment on their several reservations from the United States Government, etc.

It is to be hoped that the affair will go off quietly. It would be advisable for Capt. Molit to see the chief and get him to tell the dissatisfied ones that we wish to do justice to them, and as Dr. Powell³⁹⁵ will soon return with a clearly defined policy, it is to be hoped that all troubles will be settled forever.

³⁹² I've been unable to identify this fish.

³⁹³ The final count was higher: "Two thousand pairs of blankets, two crates of crockery, 100 full suits of clothing, calico shirts, pieces of calico, specimens of beadwork, 100 boxes biscutis, several barrels molasses and a washtubful of fifty-cent pieces were distributed by Chief Jim and his aides." The Potlatch. (1874, April 28). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ Bundles.

³⁹⁵ Probably Dr. Israel Wood Powell (1836 – 1915). He was a Freemason, surgeon and superintendent of Indian affairs (until 1889). In the latter position, it was his influence that led to the ban on potlatches being included in an 1884 amendment of the Indian Act. In 1886 he was elected the first president of the Medical Council of British Columbia, and in 1890 he became the first chancellor of the University of British Columbia.

“Ended yesterday”³⁹⁶ (April, 1874)

The potlatch at the Indian village ended yesterday. Two thousand pairs of blankets, two crates of crockery, 100 full suits of clothing³⁹⁷, calico shirts, pieces of calico, specimens of beadwork, 100 boxes of biscuits, several barrels of molasses and a washtubful of fifty-cent pieces were distributed by Chief Jim and his aids.

At nine o'clock the assembled Siwashes went through the famous Bird Dance – the principal features of which appear to be a thick layer of red paint daubed on the face and bare limbs, a profusion of bird's feathers stuck to the skin, and a general howling and skipping about as if the ground was made of red hot plates, over which they were compelled to pass. The dancers are supposed to be feathered songsters, but our reporter, who was admitted to the “holiest of holies,” thinks that they more nearly resembled animal scarecrows.

At about one o'clock the visitors, with their presents packed in canoes, began to depart, and by nightfall only the Nanaimo delegation³⁹⁸ remained at the village.

“A game of baseball”³⁹⁹ (November, 1885)

A gentleman who was driving in the vicinity of Mr. J. Parker's property at Craigflower, the other day, was somewhat astonished at seeing what he took to be a game of baseball going on. The players were dressed in the regulation uniform, one side having one color, the other another. Upon enquiry he found that the men who were playing were Indians who the day before had asked permission of Mr. Parker to use his field, as they were going to have a grand “potlatch” at Esquimalt. Whether the game had anything to do with the “potlatch” it is difficult to say, but the supposition is that it had. This shows advancement towards the manners and customs of white people, and should be encouraged.

³⁹⁶ From The Potlatch. (1874, April 28). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 3.

³⁹⁷ “A ‘genial and gifted’ Siwash, with a pair of legs encased in three pairs of trousers, was arrested last evening. His ‘genial’-ity was such that he had become quite inebriated, and he was much ‘gifted’ in the way of trousers, having received them at the potlatch.” A “GENIAL AND GIFTED”. (1874, April 26). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 3.

³⁹⁸ Nanaimo would soon have its own potlatch, before being invited to a third celebration: “The assembled tribes of Indians are holding a great potlatch. On Wednesday evening about 400 [Indians] assembled in the Council halls where the ceremonies commenced with a dance, witnessed by a number of curious pale faces.” Nanaimo. (1874, June 17). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 3. “The Nanaimo Indians have been invited to a potlatch at Alberni, next week.” Nanaimo. (1874, July 23). *Daily British Colonist*, p. 3.

³⁹⁹ From ADVANCEMENT. (1885, November 21). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

Potlatch near Esquimalt⁴⁰⁰ (November, 1885)

A grand potlatch is being celebrated on the Indian rancheria, opposite Esquimalt. It has been in progress for the past four days. The singing, hooting and general discordant sounds are plainly heard in the town across the bay. Officials are watching to prevent any rupture, pending the old time demonstrations.

“Discouraged and not resorted to”⁴⁰¹ (1886)

Mr. Duncan asks, “why did that great and good man, Sir James Douglas, as governor, meet the Indians of Victoria and neighboring tribes, and buy out their right to a large tract of land, including the site of this city”?

The answer is that Sir James made what *he* termed a treaty of amity and friendship with the Indians in order to put the earliest settlers on an amicable footing with the Indians. It was a matter of policy. The buying out – as Mr. Duncan terms it – consisted in giving the Indians a quantity of blankets and other *iktas* – they had no further claims. Although Sir James Douglas continued governor for many years after this transaction, he never repeated it – never gave any other tribe a potlatch on this account. The Indians were not averse to the settlement of white people among them, so “potlatches” being unnecessary, they were discouraged and not resorted to. This very case, then, goes to show that Sir James was of opinion that the Indians had not any legal rights – thus agreeing with the judges and jurists.

“An addition”⁴⁰² (1886)

The following I unfortunately omitted from my letter published Sunday [sic]:

He bought, in fact, their bows and arrows; their Hudson’s Bay muskets; their long iron pointed spears, and other offensive and defensive weapons! (call this the Indian title if you please), and gave in return a potlatch of comforting Hudson’s Bay blankets and *iktas*, to the value of £2 10s. per head of a family; large pieces of land for their additional means of subsistence (remember the coast Indians were fish eaters, who did not cultivate land), and, what was and is still of greater importance, protection to their homes, their life and property from everlasting dread of enemies, and as much of liberty as the civilized enjoyed. He took nothing away but gave them these blessings, and others derived from the presence of the whites, in exchange for their goodwill.

The Indians have *moral* claims; the civilized arrivals have moral and civil *duties* relative thereto. The moral claims are acknowledged and the moral duties would be performed, did not the natives of Metlakahla unhappily assert that they

⁴⁰⁰ From POTLATCH. (1885, November 23). *Victoria Daily Standard*, p. 3.

⁴⁰¹ From Helmcken, J. S. (1886, November 12). The Indian Title. *Daily Colonist*, p. 3. Written by John Sebastian Helmcken (1824 – 1920).

⁴⁰² From Helmcken, J. S. (1886, November 30). An addition. *Daily Colonist*, p. 2. Written by John Sebastian Helmcken (1824 – 1920).

have a *legal title – a fee simple – an inalienable and God-granted title* – not to the seventy thousand acre reserve given them, but to an indefinitely large extent of land around them, and threaten to prevent, *vi et armis*,⁴⁰³ any person trespassing or the government’s robbing them of what they term their land.

Here, then, are unlawful threats and claims which cannot be allowed or allowed to pass unnoticed. This is one of the serious mischiefs arising from a false education and the use of that misleading and legally meaningless term, “Indian title.” Let the Indians be taught and convinced that the land belongs to the crown (Her Majesty) and that they must give up the one thing which prevents their claims being adjusted, viz., their illegal and pernicious notion of the land belonging to them or having any legal title thereto. This being done, their requisitions and desires would receive every attention and probably be easily met and adjusted.

Honesty is the best policy.

J. S. HELMCKEN,

Victoria, Nov. 29, 1886.

“Old Shakes”⁴⁰⁴ (November, 1889)

The steamer Boscowitz arrived from the north yesterday. [...] “Old Shakes,” chief of the Kitkatlah tribe of Indians, also came down, with \$3,600 “in his inside pocket” to purchase supplies for a hyas potlatch.⁴⁰⁵ His body guard of four, in vivid uniforms, accompanied him to take care of his royal person and see that no one got the money away from him.

“A first-class coffin”⁴⁰⁶ (November, 1889)

Chief Shakes, the old Indian monarch who recently came down from the north to procure supplies for the potlatch, has purchased among other prizes a handsome tombstone and a first-class coffin. Happy will be the [Indian] who secures these treasures.

⁴⁰³ A type of lawsuit regarding damage due to trespass.

⁴⁰⁴ From *The Boscowitz Arrives*. (1889, November 1). *The Colonist*, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁵ “Chief Shakes has been giving a potlatch at his village on the northern end of the island, on a grand scale. Steamers were chartered to bring and return the native participants, and a great and glorious time, from an Indian standpoint, was had. The chief gave \$1,000 away in cash, besides heaps of blankets, crackers, etc. In the fulness of his heart and in the magnanimity of his exalted aboriginal position, he potlatched \$100 to Queen Victoria, saying she was one big chief and he was another. The \$100 was given to Bishop Ridley to be forwarded to Her Majesty – the biggest chief of all.” Chief Shakes’ Potlatch. (1890, January 10). *Weekly Colonist*, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ From LITTLE LOCALS. (1889, November 7). *The Daily Colonist*, p. 1.

“Potlatch preparations”⁴⁰⁷ (February, 1891)

The Beechy Bay Indians were in the city in force yesterday purchasing presents to be given away at the great potlatch to be held at their home next week. The value of the donations will exceed \$5,000, and all the tribes of Vancouver Island will be well represented.

“A misused Indian”⁴⁰⁸ (January, 1894)

From what has been learned, the charge against the Indian Aleck Tom that he had murdered his wife was a trumped up affair. He did put in a term at the penitentiary, it is true, but when he came out he tried to lead a better life.

His wife was a bad woman, and was the cause of his first getting into trouble. He did not go back to her when he got out, but went to live at the Indian Mission across the harbor. She hunted him up and ensnared him into again going with her, and she has led him a dog's life ever since. Aleck Tom has tried to be industrious, and she has always been dissolute and abandoned. He told his story plainly enough, and all he said was borne out by the report of the doctor who made the post-mortem.

It appears that the other Indians are jealous of the fact that Aleck Tom can work and save money, and are anxious to get him out of the way, especially in view of the approaching potlatch, his absence from which would give a greater share to the others. When his wife died, therefore, they seized on the opportunity to get him in trouble, knowing that the fact that he had been in the penitentiary before would make their story the more easily believed.

That they lied was evident, even if the post-mortem had not been so conclusive, because one of their stories was that the woman had been hit with an axe, the other that she had been pounded with a paddle.

“Fully a thousand”⁴⁰⁹ (May, 1895)

Fully a thousand visiting Indians are gathered on the Songhees reservation, partly to attend a potlatch and have a celebration of their own, and partly to attend a potlatch which is to be given by an Indian named George. The attendant festivities will be shared in mostly by older Indians from outside places, many of the younger Indians having learned better, as one of them stated in talking upon the subject. The visiting Indians come from Nanaimo, Chemainus, Kuper Island, Duncan, Cowichan, Saanich, Discovery Island, Beechy Bay, the West Coast, and from La Conner, Snohomish and Lumi, on the American side. In all these places the whole Indian population has left everything behind at the summons to the potlatch, for it is a great insult to not respond to such a bidding.

⁴⁰⁷ From Potlatch Preparations. (1891, February 17). *Daily Colonist*, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁸ From A MISUSED INDIAN. (1894, January 4). *Weekly World* (Vancouver), p. 3.

⁴⁰⁹ From THE POTLATCH. (1895, May 22). *Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

To-day at daybreak the ceremonies begin by a gathering at the graveyard and dancing from there into the village. Indians will point out the graves of their dead relatives, and after telling the story of the dead distribute clothes, or something in memory of the dead. In the village there will be scrambles for clothes, blankets, guns and other things, and dancing will go on. The potlatch proper, with George as presiding genius, will be held on either Saturday or Monday.

“The whole place is dotted with tents”⁴¹⁰ (May, 1895)

For some time past Indians from near and far have been arriving at the Songhees reserve, and now the whole place is dotted with tents and presents a most animated appearance. There are representatives from many of the British Columbia tribes, and several canoe loads from the other side. The utmost harmony prevails, and all seem to be enjoying themselves. They will not only assist in the general celebration, but will do considerable on their own account. Yesterday morning at sunrise the Indians went to their graveyard on the point and gathered in a large circle around the last resting place of those who have departed to the “happy hunting grounds”. Relatives and friends then recited in glowing terms and with dramatic emphasis the virtues and prowess of the dead, and occasionally one would break into a strange, weird song, full of plaintive melody.

After this the party returned to the village, where a series of small potlatches were to take place. The first one came off at 8 o'clock, under the direction of the Cowichan Indians. At the back of one of the houses a scaffolding had been erected, and upon it was a collection of blankets. Just below a considerable space was curtained off by means of blankets, and behind it the “actors” took their places. There was a chorus of twenty-five men and women with blackened faces, and in the front row were four [Indians] having the heads of birds and animals. Before the play commenced several old men took their place before the curtain and proceeded to deliver short and eloquent orations descriptive of the great deeds of the Cowichans. Then the musical director, who carried an instrument which resembled a gourd, rattled the aforesaid instrument and immediately the curtain went up, or rather down, and the chorus began to sing, while the strange birds opened their mouths and flapped their wings, keeping time to the music with a swaying of the body. This was repeated four times. Then the theatre was removed and the fun commenced.

Two Indians mounted the platform, a large crowd of the young men gathered below, and the men began to throw down the blankets. As soon as they fell they were grabbed by the crowd below. Then some man would make an offer of say five or ten cents to each man who had a hold on the blanket. If the offer was accepted, the others let go and received their cash.

This was the order followed in each potlatch until the afternoon, when the sister of the men drowned on the Earle⁴¹¹ gave a potlatch in their memory. In this the

⁴¹⁰ From ON THE RESERVATION. (1895, May 23). *Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

⁴¹¹ “[T]he sealing schooner Walter A. Earle, Captain Louis Magneson, of this port [Victoria], was capsized in the open sea on Sunday, April 14th, and every member of her crew lost. [...] The Earle was

women took part instead of the men, and besides blankets a number of trinkets specially dear to the female heart were given away. The spirit of mourning entered into the potlatch, and instead of songs a wail or two was chanted.

Late in the afternoon the men gathered in one of the large houses and the story tellers of the tribe entertained them with tales of valor and love. The strange wild legends of long ago, when never the foot of a white man had pressed the land, were recited, and also of the days when war waged and the tribe went forth in all its power to crush its rivals. Then the story teller changed his story, and in softer accents told of love and how the dusky maiden had been won and borne to the home of her brave.

The great event for the Indians will be the potlatch to be given by George, a well-known Songhees. Elaborate preparation is being made, and the night will be well worth witnessing. The exact day has not been settled yet.

“Potlatches and scrambles”⁴¹² (May, 1895)

Over on the Songhees reserve the potlatches and scrambles went on all yesterday. Most of the time was taken up in paying off debts that had been formerly contracted. An old man whose position was described by an Indian as an “Indian lawyer” shouted the names of the creditors; each would come forward, receive his blanket payments and retire. This was varied by “scrambles,” some of which took place inside the houses, the blankets and other “iktas” being scattered to the crowd from an elevated platform. Others took place in the open air, the distribution going on from the roofs of the houses. Except during the “scrambles,” the Indians sat about in groups listening to the monotonous shouts of the “lawyer” and talking together in low tones.

“The Indians celebrate”⁴¹³ (May, 1895)

Over on the Songhees reservation a Union Jack is floating in the breeze from the flagstaff, which is only used on occasions of great importance. The Indians always take great interest in the celebration of the Queen’s birthday, and this year an unusually large number of Indians have assembled to participate in the festivities. Nearly a thousand visiting Indians have already arrived. They come from Cowichan, Saanich, Duncan’s, Kuper Island, Discovery Island, Beecher Bay, Nanaimo, Chemainus, the West Coast and from the Sound cities. A choice program of native sports has been prepared, but the “event” which will excite more interest than any other on the list will be the grand potlatch to be given by a celebrity named George,

on the Japan coast last year and she was the only schooner that had an Indian crew composed of Victoria and Beecher Bay Indians. [...] There were 26 Indian hunters and boat steerers on board. Five of them were from Sooke, twelve from Victoria, six from Beecher Bay and one each from Cowichan, Rocky Point, and Metchosin. Some had made previous cruises on different schooners, but this was the first trip for many of them.” WRECK OF THE EARLE. (1895, May 8). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 8.

⁴¹² From AMONG THE INDIANS. (1895, May 24). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

⁴¹³ From THE INDIANS CELEBRATE. (1895, May 24). *Victoria Weekly Times*, p. 14.

who is one of the head men among the Indians on the Songhees reservation. During this week the visiting Indians will give a number of small potlatches, which are free to all. Four were held to-day.

At sunrise this morning the ball opened by a visit of the entire assemblage to the graves of those who had left for the "happy hunting ground". Singing and dancing were indulged in on the road to the burial ground, which is quite a distance from the residential portion of the reserve. Arrived at the graves, the older ones among the Songhees related to the visitors tales of the prowess of the departed [Indians]. After the ceremonies were over the party repaired to the village, where at 8 o'clock, the Cowichan Indians gave the first of the series of potlatches, or as white men would term them, "scrambles". As has been stated, these potlatches are free to all; that is, any person may take part in the general scramble which ensues when the signal is given. The presents consist of blankets, guns and money, which are thrown right and left with a recklessness which is simply appalling.

A representative of the Times was present at the opening of the second potlatch, which commenced at about 11 a.m. About twelve hundred Indians were present and sat in a hollow square, at one end of which was the stage – a rude erection formed of native blankets hung on poles. Mysterious sounds came from behind the "drop curtain," which was manipulated by three sturdy young bucks. Soon the performance began. An aged Indian with blackened face walked to and fro in front of the stage. He held in his hand some strange instruments, hollow and containing a number of pebbles, and when shaken the noise resembled the sound made by dice rattled in a box. At a signal the band within started the music, consisting of drums, horns and rattles, the conductor gave some orders, the curtain rolled up, and the performance was on.

What a scene was presented on the stage! About twenty-five men and women in war paint and feathers were intended to represent a number of birds. They wore on their heads the most curious carvings of wood in the shape of heads of birds. Part of the bill was so constructed that it might be moved up or down by a system of strings which the "actor" occasionally pulled. At times a shout would go up from the assembled Indians, or they would all join in the chorus of some popular song. At the end of half an hour the performance was over, and then came the most interesting part of the proceedings.

Upon an elevated platform at the rear of the stage was an immense pile of blankets which were now to be scrambled for. At a signal the younger men advanced and stood in rows in front of the platform. Two men mounted the platform where the blankets were, and the fun commenced. When a blanket was thrown every man made a reach for it with both hands, some jumping high in the air. The blanket is grabbed by perhaps a dozen men or more, who immediately commence tugging and pulling in the most amusing manner. They are, however, most good-natured over the matter and immediately commence bargaining one with the other as to who shall be the happy possessor of the blanket. One man will, say, bid a dollar, which is accepted by the others as a fair price. The successful bidder then takes the blanket and the money is equally divided among those who were holding on to it when the bargain was made.

The same thing occurs in the others' cases, and it is one of the most interesting sights imaginable to see the various groups tugging, pulling and bargaining and laughing and shouting all the while.

This afternoon a potlatch of special interest to the Indians was held in front of the residence just adjoining the premises where occurred the affair described above. The sister of the two Indians who were lost on the schooner Earle distributed a large number of blankets and trinkets in memory of her departed relatives. This performance opened with a dance, and women instead of men took part in the scramble.

One cannot imagine a more interesting spectacle than one of these potlatches, and visitors to Victoria should not miss a visit to the reserve during the Indian sports.

Aside: A Songhees slave⁴¹⁴ (May, 1895)

Slavery was a part of some traditional Indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest. This article recounts one of the last traces of these practices.

An old Songhees Indian with an interesting history died on the reserve on Wednesday. Kstephset, or as he was more commonly called, Marston, was born more than eighty years ago, before the white men had settled in Victoria, and when the numerous tribes along the coast frequently engaged in war for supremacy. Marston was related to Cheetlam, one of the richest and most powerful men in the numerous Songhees Nation.

When Marston was nine years of age his people were living on the west side of what is now Esquimalt harbor. One day all the older people were away on a general fishing expedition, leaving Marston and a few other children behind. Suddenly there appeared in the harbor a fleet of war canoes filled with the warriors of the Eucletaw nation, then at war with the Songhees. With their faces and bodies daubed with war paint and uttering blood-curdling yells, the invaders urged their canoes towards the little village, and jumping ashore rushed forward with the intention of having a general massacre of the Songhees, not knowing that their hated foes were absent. At the first sight of the hostile fleet Marston and his young companions made for the woods, and all managed to conceal themselves except Marston. The frightened youngster was seized by a burly Eucletaw who at first was going to kill him, but on second thought concluded to take the boy home with him, and after the custom of the tribe either make a sacrifice of his captive or else enslave him.

The small boy was speedily bundled into a canoe and his captors, disappointed in the plans of annihilating the Songhees, set out for their own homes at Comox. Before reaching there Marston somewhat overcame his fear of his captors and at the end of the journey it was decided that as he was a fine healthy lad he would be more profitable alive than dead; consequently he was made a slave. His master after a time sold Marston to a tribe further north, and in the course of time he became the property

⁴¹⁴ From ESCAPED FROM SLAVERY. (1895, May 24). *Daily Colonist*, p. 6.

of a tribe far up in Alaska. There for many, many years he toiled for his owners, hopeless of ever escaping and almost forgetting his mother tongue, but ever mindful of the way he had come and that his people were Songhees.

Nine years ago an old Indian bent with the weight of years and hard toil appeared upon the Songhees reserve. In a few broken words of the Songhees tongue he told the wondering Indians that he was of their race, and after an absence of over sixty years had returned to pass his last days among them. This was none other than Kstephset come back like a dusky Rip Van Winkle to the place he had left so long before. A few of the older people remembered the time of the Eucletaw raid and of the taking away of Kstephset. He had almost forgotten the Songhees tongue, but recollected the names of a few of his relatives, among them Cheetlam. He was made welcome and received back into the tribe. He told how through his years of captivity his heart had ever been with his own people, and at last finding a means of escaping from the interior of Alaska he had made his way to the coast, secured a place upon a steamer from Port Simpson, and thus returned to his long-lost home.

“The big potlatch is now fairly on”⁴¹⁵ (May, 1895)

The big potlatch is now fairly on. Yesterday the Indians who were indebted to George paid up, and in the evening, gifts of calico were made to the klotchmen. The regular performance will open this morning at 9:30 o'clock with a mammoth dance, a feature of which will be the appearance of the big masks, which are seldom seen. After this there will be a “scramble” for blankets, and then the potlatch will take place, when George will present his guests with blankets, guns, money, etc. After that there will be considerable feasting, which will last for some time.

George Cheetlam's potlatch⁴¹⁶ (May, 1895)

George Cheetlam, head of the Songhees council, yesterday began the big potlatch to which he had invited his friends, and which the Indians have been looking forward to for some time. Early yesterday forenoon a large number of white people gathered on the reserve to see what a real Indian potlatch was like, and although they may not have been much wiser when they came away, they were treated to a strange and unusual spectacle, which was well worth all the time spent in waiting to see it.

A space had been roped off back of one of the large houses, and in this was placed the war canoe which is to be given away. A line of klotchmen extended around the edge having boards in front of them on which they beat time with small sticks, chanting at the same time. The dancers, ten in number, were arrayed in most fantastic costumes and looked like strange animals from some other world. They had a sort of feather dress, and their heads were surmounted by strange masks made to resemble different animals. The dance was weird and grotesque, consisting of a series

⁴¹⁵ From THE CITY. (1895, May 28). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

⁴¹⁶ From THE BIG POTLATCH. (1895, May 29). *Daily Colonist*, p. 8.

of hops and jumps, accompanied by low guttural sounds from the dancers and “music” from the klotchmen.

After the dance George mounted a platform and proceeded to throw down a large number of blankets that were “scrambled” for by the waiting Indians. During the day a number of presents were given to the invited guests, and late in the afternoon another distribution of calico, trinkets, etc., was made to the klotchmen. The ceremony will continue for some little time yet.

“An unusually large number of visitors”⁴¹⁷ (May, 1895)

Of the once powerful Songhees who, when the Hudson’s Bay Company first settled in Victoria, British Columbia, were a numerous tribe, but few remain, whiskey and other civilizing influences having succeeded in their deadly work.

It has been their custom for many years to celebrate the Queen’s Birthday in their own peculiar fashion, in addition to participating in the white man’s games and the canoe races at the regatta.

This year an unusually large number of visitors flocked together, representatives of the Puget Sound clans, and the different tribes of British Columbia, and potlatches were the order of the day. Both early and late might be heard the monotonous beating of the hand drums or tom-toms, and the weird strains of the chants which accompany the dances.

Now, a potlatch is a feast, at the conclusion of which property is distributed among the invited guests, frequently hundreds of blankets and considerable sums of money being thus given away.

A potlatch may be given for various reasons; the erection of a house or totem pole, the birth of a child, a marriage, the death of some near relative; or by a chief or personage of distinction for the purpose of acquiring influence. And to this love of power and the creation of envy among the less fortunate may be ascribed this reckless squandering of the savings of years, which from our own point of view seems so inexplicable. For be it known that Mr. “Lo,” of the Pacific Coast, is not afflicted with such painful generosity towards his fellow beings, and in this respect does not compare favorably with the red man of the plains. The more the giver of a feast distributes among the expectant guests, the greater distinction he achieves, and the more is owing to him when he in turn attends a similar ceremony. This custom, however, is dying out and does not seem to find much favor among the young men, who cannot appreciate the idea of squandering their savings in this fashion.

On May 27th, the local news column of the *Colonist* contained the information⁴¹⁸ that Chief George of the Songhees would give a great potlatch that

⁴¹⁷ From Lewis, D. O. (1895). A Potlach Dance. *The Canadian Magazine*, 5(4), pp. 337-344. Written by David Owen Lewis (1865 – 1947).

⁴¹⁸ “Some little time ago George, a Songhees Indian, sent out invitations for a potlatch, and all the arrangements now being complete, the affair will come off to-day. A large quantity of goods will be given away and all the usual rites and ceremonies observed. Rarely does any such event take place

day, when a dance was to take place, the participants to be decked in all their ancient finery. Consequently, at 10 a.m., the time stated, many Victorians and their American cousins might have been seen “wending their way” across the railway bridge in the direction of the reservation, where all was bustle and preparation, a dressing room (as we afterwards discovered it to be) having been improvised by stringing red bunting around poles planted in the ground at the corner of a large dwelling house. Many endeavored to obtain surreptitious peeps through the red bunting, in order to ascertain what progress the masqueraders within were making with their preparations, but were promptly ordered away to a safe distance by an ancient Songhees gentleman, with an authoritative manner and a face tinted up with vermilion in most hideous fashion. Nature had not been generous as far as his appearance was concerned, and with these embellishments the effect was simply diabolical. A whiff of his breath that was wafted towards me as he passed to windward was not a “bunch o’ violets,” leading one to suspect that, as Dick Swiveller expressed it, “he had the sun very strong in his eyes” the previous evening.

After mature deliberation and frequent consultations, a ring was formed by planting poles in the ground about twenty feet apart, and to these were attached native blankets, so as to form a barricade about four feet in height. These blankets, woven from the hair of the mountain goat, appear to be very serviceable, and in some cases are dyed in the most artistic fashion. Then a rope was attached to one of the adjacent buildings, carried across the circle and made fast to one of the poles. To this rope, and immediately in the center of the ring, was tied a string which hung just within reach when standing on tiptoe. What purpose this was to serve was a mystery, and gave rise to many surmises among the spectators. A man in my vicinity volunteered the information that a dog was to be hung there by his tail, and eaten alive by the dancers. To intensify our curiosity they kept fooling around that bit of string like boys around a wasp’s nest. First an Indian held the pendant loop in his forefinger, and in that position delivered quite an oration in silvery sonorous Songhees, then the string, slipping off his finger, would be jerked up with the rebound of the rope, coiling itself into a hopeless tangle, whereupon a chair was brought and the refractory coil being unraveled, it was allowed to assume its original position once more.

After this extremely interesting little performance had been repeated several times, a small box was brought, in which was very ostentatiously placed a considerable amount of money, and the lid being then securely tied down, it was attached to the loop of string. Then with shouts and singing, a canoe was carried in, and piles upon piles of blankets heaped over it, and those which had been bung up around the ring were added to the heap. In place of the blanket barricade, about thirty Klootchmen (Indian women) trooped in a seated themselves around the enclosure: each one was provided with two cedar sticks about eighteen inches long.

At this juncture our notice was attracted to a large dwelling-house nearby, from the door of which a procession of three men and three women was moving in our

inside a city, so the citizens have the opportunity of witnessing a strange and interesting performance at their very doors.” THE CITY. (1895, May 27). *Daily Colonist*, p. 2.

direction, the women carrying the effigies representing a woman and two children. They were most fantastically attired in goat's hair robes, with ermine skins sewn on, and head-dresses of down and feathers, the latter being flexibly attached so that they swayed about in startling fashion with each movement of the wearer, at the same time retaining their erect position. In their hands they carried rattles made by stringing the bills of gulls upon small wooden hoops, which produced a dry, harsh noise when shaken. As they advanced within the circle, the row of Klootchmen started up a weird chant, keeping time by beating with the cedar sticks upon boards placed in front of them. These effigies, which we discovered were intended to represent the dead wife and children of Chief George, and in whose honor this potlatch was given, were placed most reverentially in the canoe. Whereupon some of the sage counsellors and orators of the tribe came forward, and in an amazing flood of eloquence (which was all Chinese to us), extolled the character and good deeds of the departed wife, and recommended their listeners to emulate her exemplary career.

These dusky Ciceros have certainly a great command of language, albeit it is only Songhees, and the manner in which they seek to impress their audience, and work themselves up to a proper pitch of excitement, is certainly interesting to observe, the legs moving as if they were springs, and imparting to the body a trembling, jerky, up and down motion, the speaker's words being at the same time emphasized by continually gesticulating with the arms and hands. Frequent impressive pauses occurred, succeeded again by spasmodic throaty utterances, to which the native audience expressed their appreciation by many grunts of approval. There was an extreme self-possession to be observed, and a total absence of that *mauvaise honte* often met with among our own public speakers. The Songhees language seems to me to greatly resemble the sounds which might be emitted by a man undergoing a process of strangulation, with here and there a gurgling as of liquid running out of a small necked bottle into a thirsty throat, so that I was unable to obtain much mental solace from the harangues.

After the speeches, native blankets were taken out and cut into strips, and in that form distributed, and during this process a man near me, pointing out to a companion, one ancient aborigine, with very generous extremities, said: "He's got the largest feet I ever saw." Whereupon I entered the remark that they were not Trilby feet, to which he replied irrelevantly: "No, he's from Vancouver." Positively one man who has not heard of *La Grande Trilby!!*

But *ravenous à nos potlatches*; when the partial distribution of the blankets had been accomplished, the canoe was taken from the enclosure, and the remaining blankets placed upon the roof of a small shed near-by, which was to serve as a further distributing point at the conclusion of the dance. At the side of the open space were placed chairs upon which two aged crones seated themselves, and supporting between them the effigy of the late lamented Mrs. George. One of them held a framed representation in her Sunday best upon her knee. Then at a given signal began again

that monotonous weird chant, which had a most creepy effect upon one's nerves. [...]⁴¹⁹

The dancers now emerged from their dressing-room, one by one, and at intervals, until there were ten whirling, ludicrous figures tripping about in time with the chant, looking for all the world as if they had just stepped out of some picture-book of our childhood's days. The feet were bare, but ermine leggings, trimmed with ever-clashing puffin beaks, encased the legs from the ankle upwards, while the body was concealed by a robe made of gull and eagle feathers, these turning and twisting with every motion of the wearer. Hideously grotesque wooden masks covered the face, while over the back of the masks and hanging down the back were shawls trimmed with ermine. To the top and sides of the masks were attached fringes of hair made from cedar bark, dried and beaten into threads, while feathers and down stood erect upon the forehead. In the right hand was held a hoop upon which was strung a number of large pecten shells (*amusium caurinum*), so attached by having holes pierced in the centre of each shell. The slightest movement of the wrist as the strange figures danced about, caused them to clash and jangle together.

Some of the masks displayed great artistic taste and skill in their construction. [...]⁴²⁰ In some masks the eyes and mouth are so contrived that they roll about in most alarming fashion. Loops and thongs bind the mask to the head, and sight holes are pierced either in the nostrils or eyes of the mask, apertures being also cut for breathing through. It would seem that to even bear the weight alone of these masks for any length of time would be extremely fatiguing, notwithstanding which these votaries of the light fantastic retained our attention with their antics for fully forty minutes. At certain periods the time of the chant would be changed by striking the cedar boards with the sticks held in each hand, alternately; then it would stop unexpectedly, with some word, as if a question had been asked, to burst out again after an interval of a few seconds with like suddenness.

At the conclusion of the dance, the assembled Indians gathered around the suspended wooden box containing the money, the rope, in the meantime, being so lifted by a pole that the wished-for prize was far beyond reach. What a mass of black hands practically grasping and clawing!!

Now the box is allowed to drop among the expectant swarm, but being securely tied with string, it is by no means an easy matter even then to obtain the much-coveted money, and the scene that followed simply baffles description. A scrimmage at football was child's play compared with it. Like a pack of hungry wolves quarreling over some desired morsel, those on the outskirts [climbed] over the men in front of them, until they arrived at the point of interest, when they disappeared as if down the vortex of a maelstrom. It was one surging, writhing, revolving, struggling mass of humanity for fully fifteen minutes, when, with a shout, the lucky man emerged

⁴¹⁹ The original includes sheet music for the chant. I have omitted it in this transcription, as there were cultural restrictions upon the performance and sharing of these songs.

⁴²⁰ I've omitted images and connected descriptions of masks found in the original, as there were cultural rules as to the conditions under which these masks could be seen.

from the confusion minus half his shirt, and otherwise disheveled, but bearing aloft in his clenched fist the source of the excitement, and, as a consequence, was happy.

Two men commenced throwing the blankets among the crowd, when a similar scene was presented, with the exception that a man was entitled to as much of the blanket as he might hold in his hands or under his arms; those not interested in that particular blanket, cutting it into pieces with their knives, which proceeding, at first, appeared a wanton destruction of property, but it seems that these apparently useless fragments are torn to pieces and again woven into blankets. [...] ⁴²¹

Now, a potlatch dance is generally preceded by a feast, but in this instance the order was reversed, the feast taking place in the evening. It was my intention to have witnessed that also, but I was unfortunately prevented.

“In every way a success”⁴²² (June, 1895)

The widely advertised potlatch was in every way a success. It was marked by distinctly Oriental magnificence and profusion, gold-pieces, blankets and guns being as plentiful as the flowers that bloom in the spring. Indeed, there were not a few of the “superior race” who expressed open discontent with their position in life, and wished that they might be born into a people who appeared to possess more gold pieces than they themselves had nickels. The dance of the maskers was very good, the wooden masks being most hideously grotesque pieces of carving and well-qualified to give the beholder a permanent nightmare. Some degree of gloom might be observed, caused by the loss of so many of the tribesmen on the ill-fated *Earle*, but on the whole the aborigines appeared to enjoy themselves heartily. The attendance of white spectators was very large.

“Pride of the Songhees”⁴²³ (1898)

There was a period of duration remarkable for an abnormal elevation of the temperature within the limits of the Songhees reservation last night. In every hut in the siwash village there was jollification, and in the larger clusters of slabs there were big assemblages of the brunette-complexioned tribesmen. Tom-toms were beaten and night was made hideous for the residents of Victoria West by the howling of the Indians. There was a feast, the long-kept clams and codfish heads being prepared, and all were happy in siwash fashion, for Jimmy Fraser, the now famous dancer, who made his debut in the dances so well liked by the Indians on the reserve about eighteen months ago, had returned after a lengthy absence.

Soon after his big dance, which was a continual performance for fourteen hours, Jimmy went to the mainland and worked his way up the coast, visiting tribe after tribe. He went as far north as Lake Atlin. He originally intended to go to the

⁴²¹ I've omitted a long digression on canoe-making from this transcription.

⁴²² From MEN AND THINGS. (1895, June 1). *The Province*, p. 1.

⁴²³ From PRIDE OF THE SONGHEES. (1898, November 30). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 5.

Klondike, but he was so pleased by the Indians of the Atlin district that he overstayed his limit, and on that account cut short his intended journey at that point.

On his arrival from the mainland last night, he was royally welcomed. A special canoe awaited his coming at the slip near Porter's wharf, and a delegation of siwashes proudly paddled him across to the reserve, where a throng was awaiting him, and with many "Haws" and guttural welcomes he was escorted to his corner in one of the larger huts, and the celebration in honor of his coming began.

After he had hidden large quantities of Indian delicacies beneath his waistcoat, Jimmy danced. It was not the dance of the smiling soubrette; not the dance of Spain; not the dance known to Scotsmen, or to anyone else outside of the tribes of the coast. In fact, in the view of the white man it was not a dance. Jimmy sat on an upturned box and writhed, waved his arms, and chanted a dirge-like wail. Then, warming up, [he] rose, and, jumping up and down, he ran in and out among the assembly, hopping as if he was on a red-hot stove. After a short time spent in this way, he went back to his seat and slapped his chest and squirmed to the tune of the tom-toms. Then he rolled on the floor, spitting, coughing, and shivering. This had the desired effect. It brought on a frenzy, in which he danced and swung around with a demoniacal vigor. This performance was repeated time after time, with occasional visits to near-by huts thrown in, until an early hour this morning, much to the enjoyment of the residents of the reserve.

Jimmy is now without a doubt the lion of the lions on the reserves. Even a man with a uniform of gold braid and brass buttons and a rainbow colored plaid would fail to vie with him. He has indeed made a big hit, and his admirers increase momentarily as he relates the story of the potlatches, tamanamos [sic.] dances and other festivals so dear to the siwash heart, in which he has participated since he left the companionship of the decadent tribesmen. There is not an Indian but envies him and longs to again see the now forbidden potlatch.

At Atlin, Jimmy says, he danced on three consecutive nights. "Something I never do before," he said. The Octawas – the tribe around the Atlin district – Jimmy says were very glad to see him, and they presented him with sufficient blankets to stock a dozen Klondike outfitting stores, had he kept them. Jimmy did not keep them, however. His acquaintance with the white man on his travels has, if nothing else, taught him to convert all his blankets into money.

At the new gold fields a potlatch was held, which was attended by over three hundred Indians. The feature of the potlatch was Jimmy's dancing. This potlatch was one of the old style feasts so familiar to the siwash in by-gone days. There was the wild scramble for the blankets presented by the chief of the Octawas, the wolf dance, the tamanamos dance, and all the savage pomp of the lost barbaric days.

Jimmy will spend a few days with the Songhees and then return to his home at Cowichan.

A Potlatch in Settlement of Debts⁴²⁴ (May, 1900)

There was a potlatch on the Indian reservation during the early hours yesterday morning.

Willie, sub-chief of the Songhees, then paid some long-standing debts to his fellow-tribesmen and their dark-hued relations from Cowichan and other nearby rancheries. From the position of a well-to-do siwash – owner of a buggy, a sailboat, a war canoe and many, many blankets, to say nothing of a long list of “other equally valuable and desirable effects,” which were the envy of his neighbors, Willie suddenly dropped to that of the average resident of the reservation. Affluence became sufficiency.

In all, over two hundred persons attended the potlatch. The gathering began in the wee small hours, when the railway bridge was not even outlined in the gloom. The guests had been summoned by Willie, and they congregated in front of the old square hut of roughly hewn slabs which fronts on the roadway to the Marine hospital at a distance of some fifty feet from the railway bridge.

A driftwood fire was build in the center of the roadway, and the assembled guests sat in a circle around this, their bronze faces gleaming in the reflection of the roaring flames, giving the *tout ensemble* of the scene a weirdly picturesque effect.

The guests had hardly taken their seats when there was a demoniac yell from the blackness beyond the light of the fire. Then came a hurrying patter of bare feet, and a dancer, with a gaudy headdress of red flannel and heavily rouged brows and cheeks, and wearing the customary coat of feathers, broke into the circle. Then the dance began. One by one the others took up the step, klootchmen as well as men, and soon a number were jumping up and down after the fashion of the conventional siwash dance, to the tune of a couple of tom-toms and the sing-songy chant of the onlookers. So the hours passed, with little intervals of feasting, until daylight – the hour of Willie’s sacrifice of his property.

Then, mounting on the roof of the square home of many families, Willie made his “Wa-wa.” He told of how glad he was to pay back his debts; of how great he was; and of innumerable other things which the translator dropped in the translation. His speech finished, the blankets were brought to him, together with shot-guns, silver dollars, carved planks and many other things on which the waiting siwashes looked with longing eyes. The klootchmen had retired to the background, and, waiting beneath the rostrum of the giver of the potlatch, the [Indians] stood like a crowd of schoolboys below a window where another was scrambling apples.

At last the signal was given, and Willie began to throw. A blanket was swung into the air, and as the wind caught it some hundreds of hands were stretched as high as the stature of the owners would permit. Down came the blanket, and it was in an instant clutched at by at least a hundred. Then the Indians swayed to and fro in a heap, the weaker ones being swept aside and the woolen covering wrested from them. Still crowds clung on, and then one man near the corner drew a knife and cut as big

⁴²⁴ From Potlatch on the Reserve. (1900, May 22). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 5.

a piece as he held. Others cut out pieces held by them, and soon the blanket was divided in small bits which would hardly have made a doll's covering.

Thus it was for some time. Blanket after blanket was struggled for. Some – but not a great proportion – being retained whole, those holding the larger areas bought out those with the lesser handfuls.

At length the blankets were exhausted. Then shot-guns were thrown from the roof and struggled for, like long bones for which a number of dogs held claim, until at last all competitors having been either bought off, or wrenched free, the guns passed into the possession of a more fortunate one. Silver dollars were scrambled and other desirable effects made the bone of contention of the struggling horde. Carved boards, totems bearing some yet unwritten siwash story, fancifully decorated paddles, hats, etc. – all were scrambled for and the holdings auctioned off as in the matter of the blankets.

Then came the potlatch of Willie's buggy. This up-to-date vehicle was standing on the road as the throne of an alligator-like totem, the mark of the family from which the sub-chief claimed inheritance. After due obeisance and proper observance of the totem had been made, it was lifted out, and, at a given signal, the siwashes raced to the buggy. It was yanked about and pulled up and down at the risk of tearing it apart until, like the other potlatched articles, the one who tugged for it more than his fellows bought out the others. The same procedure was carried on in the potlatching of a war canoe, then of a sailboat. The clientele of some prominent Indians fought, struggled and hauled the canoe and boat about, but there was always one or more of the stronger ones who could not be ousted, and until the price was paid, the struggle for possession continued.

So it went on. Article after article went, until when the workmen were hurrying to work soon after the breakfast hour yesterday, the greater proportion of Willie's goods had been potlatched – his debt was paid.

This has been a week of celebration on the Indian reservation. On Saturday a big dance was held – the dance of the maskers. A number of Indians took part, all wearing big wooden masks, many having beaks which opened and shut with the pulling of strings, and this morning, as the Colonist reaches its readers, another potlatch is being held.

“A Songhees celebration”⁴²⁵ (January, 1901)

There was a great feast and dancing séance in Sub-Chief Johnny George's large new lodge on the Songhees' rancherie across the harbor, early yesterday morning. When the last of the “owls” were wending their homeward way, and men slept in the quiet city, there came a great noise from across the harbor, as of a boiler factory working overtime, and many trains shunting. This noise was the accompaniment to the dancers in the lodge of Johnny George.

⁴²⁵ From A Songhees' Celebration. (1901, January 22). *Semi-Weekly Colonist*, p. 8.

Ever since Willie, another sub-chief of the Songhees, gave his big potlatch of ten months ago, there has been desire in the heart of Johnny George to give a “doings” that would equal that of Willie, and yesterday morning his feast surpassed Willie’s potlatch as an event, as the sun outshines the moon, even though the expense account will not be so great.

Soon after midnight the canoes began to arrive above the railway bridge, and guests commenced to arrive by road, and by 2 o’clock yesterday morning there were nearly three hundred Indians, klotchmen and children seated around the sides of the big new hut. A low-planked bench had been built around the hut, about four feet from the matting-covered walls, and, behind this foot-high barrier, were seated three tiers of siwashes, arrayed in all their best gala dress.

The picture presented to the five white men who were present – one being a Colonist reporter – was one which artists who love quaint phrases of art would have gone miles to see. In the center of the mud floor, which was packed down hard by constant tramping, were two big log fires, from which flames leaped, and a shower of sparks rose and struggled for an outlet through the ventilators, which replaced chimneys, at the top of the ridged roof.

With their bedaubed faces shining in the reflection of the fires, were two dancers clad in skins of animals, with long hats bedecked with feathers, and with clusters of animals’ claws, all a-rattle as they hopped about, and hysterically waved their arms; and behind them were the three hundred yelling, shouting siwashes, all garbed most strangely, and all armed with short sticks, with which they beat the planking of the low benches in front in time with the movements of the dancers. One or two of every tribe assembled – there were about five in all – had tom-toms, hoops covered with skins, and they banged these in accompanying the dancers.

The three hundred took their time from one of the Songhees tribesmen, who stood at one side of the rectangle of howling siwashes, and beat time with a piece of kindling wood *a la* John Philip Sousa, they shouting when he shouted, moaning when he moaned and increasing the violence of their board beating at his suggestion. Not only the time of the dancing did they take from him, but also of the chanting. The klotchmen sang their “sad songs,” chants of the departed tribesmen and lost glories, and the Indian men sang dirges of sorrow and defiant songs of war, telling of fights of long ago. For hours they kept it up, this singing and dancing, until long after the approaching day put the electric light out of business, and then – the greatest portion of men and women, having contributed a dance of some kind or other – they held the feast.

The dancers differed much in their styles of hopping. Some did the wolf dance, where they rushed to and fro like the animals they chose to represent, howling and snapping at the assembled guests. Others did sorrow dances, moaning their dirges as they whirled here and there; others jumped, open-mouthed, towards the leaping flames of the log fires, as though trying to swallow the jumping sparks. Many, indeed, were the kinds of dancing. Each tried to outrival the previous dancer, and interest ran high, if the hysterical shouting, stick waving and clangor of the sticks on the wood, is any criterion. Many worked themselves up into such a state of hysterical

emotion that they foamed at the mouth, and were as fatigued madmen until the hysteria passed. Those who worked themselves into the fiercer states of excitement were mostly the dancers of reputation, several of whom had come hundreds of miles in order to be present at the feast, one, indeed, coming from the extreme north of the Island. He was a man of note among Indian dancers, and, draped in his skins, sat on a dais at one end, an honored guest. Other dancers of note were the tribal dancers from Beecher Bay, from Cowichan, Saanich and other nearby rancheries, who had all come attired in full regalia, with their clusters of head feathers and embroidered garb, and with their claws of animals and medicine sticks of claws and variegated gee-gaws. It was indeed a great séance of dancing, and an epoch in local Indian history, long to be remembered by the tribes present, who included the Songhees, East and South Saanich, Beecher Bay and some Quamichans, Cowichans and Saanich Arm Indians – each tribe being allotted a space for their people.

The feast was served just about the break of day, and the Indians did justice to the fare, which, in other eyes, might be considered a poor menu for such a gathering, consisting, as it did, of nothing more than bread and water. Of these staples, though, there was a plentitude, Johnny having secured no less than 660 loaves of bread for his guests,, and of water, [which] the [water-]carriers dished out with the dipper, from which everyone drank, as much as each required, for Johnny had a well nearby. Then, after the eating, came more dancing, and when the dinner-pail brigade were hurrying toward yesterday morning, the dancing was still going on.

“Married on Saturday night”⁴²⁶ (July, 1901)

Louis Bob, son of Chief Nanoose, [Nanaimo] Indian reserve, was married on Saturday night to Annie, a Victoria kloodchman. Chief Bob gave a potlatch, giving away blankets and money. The marriage was according to ancient Indian customs.

“In memory of his deceased daughter”⁴²⁷ (September, 1908)

An eagle with spread wings, its outlines depicted in all the colors of the rainbow; a whale, its generous proportions most accurately pictured and spouting volumes of what would appear to be gore; wolves, possessed of ferocious expressions truly alarming and dogs, much more formidable than those of meek demeanor which are found on the streets of Victoria, are some of the features of an artistic display which has been painstakingly drawn on the rude white washed boarding of one of the Songhees Indian reserve huts. It is the work of a member of the Nitinat tribe, a native people of the West Coast. The reason for its appearance at this particular season, when Indians from all sections are congregated in Victoria and why such masterpieces should be exposed to the gaze of an unappreciative but curious public

⁴²⁶ From SUNDAY OBSERVANCE. (1901, July 8). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 1.

⁴²⁷ From IN MEMORY OF HIS DECEASED DAUGHTER. (1908, September 2). *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p. 7.

are questions the answers to which a reporter sought yesterday afternoon. It was found that the wonderful medley of awe inspiring inhabitants of the briny and primeval forest had not originated through a desire to profitably spend a few idle moments, but, in their interpretation, exposed a tale which, in the telling, gives a remarkable insight into the character and customs of the Indian.

Paintings Unveiled

He who ordered this work, it was learned, was none other than Jacob Chipps, a prominent member of the Nitinat tribe and it had been done, on his instructions, preparatory to his giving a potlatch in memory of his deceased daughter and the latter's child. Each character, it was laboriously explained by one of the natives, represented a different family connected with the tribe to which Chipps belonged and who were the guests of honor at the "fete," if it may so be termed. The painting was started, secretly, weeks ago. When it was finished it was veiled with a piece of canvas which, while by no means immaculately laundered, served the purpose of preventing the prying curiosity of either strange Indians or "whites" being satisfied. And so it remained until late on Saturday night, when the potlatch was at its height, the cloth was removed and the wonders exposed to the admiration of the hundreds of Indians, representatives of many tribes, who had gathered together.

Tale of Heroism

The inauguration of the celebration by Chipps recalls a tale of heroism with which Victorians are familiar. The event occurred about a year ago and its scene was the lower Fraser river. Chipps, who is a stalwart native British Columbian, was bringing his family home in a fishing boat after having spent the summer months netting the sockeye. His craft was caught in a squall and upset. With him was his daughter and his daughter's child. With remarkable presence of mind he grasped the two, got them on his shoulders, and, leaving the boat, which contained all his household belongings, struck out for shore. The task he had undertaken was too great a test for the endurance of the kloothead. After a few hours of exposure she slipped into the water and sank. Later the child met a similar fate, and after being in the water over seven hours under particularly trying circumstances, Chipps crawled ashore thoroughly exhausted and slept until daylight before he told of the catastrophe.

Learning of the Indian's behavior he was recommended as deserving of the Royal Humane Society's medal, which was presented to him at the A. O. U. W. hall, Victoria.

To perpetuate the memory of his daughter and her offspring and to show according to Indian methods, the depth of his regard for them has since been Chipps' endeavor. Immediately after their death he gave away or burned most of his belongings and, afterwards, departed for Seattle to obtain employment.

The Potlatch

The potlatch, which he gave to the Indians of his tribe, and to selected members of the Songhees, Saanich and other Island bands last week was an evidence of his industry since leaving for the Sound and of his determination that the memory of the deceased should be lasting among all his brethren. He brought with him several

hundred dollars, accumulated pains-takingly, and, by the sale of some property, was able to dispense upwards of \$1,000, of which \$700 was in cash and the remainder in goods. The Cowichan representatives received \$4 each, the Saanich, \$3; the Songhees, \$3, and the Nitinat, who got the bulk, were given presents the value of which was regulated in accordance with the caste of their respective families.

But the distribution of money and the unveiling of the aforementioned tribal symbols were not the only features of the celebration. Some fourteen “dancers” had been brought here to entertain and they did so with a vengeance. Their almost gruesome “hoo, hoo, hoo,” which exclamation signaled the start, could be heard a long way off but when they really got warmed up, and gave vent to their yells the noise was audible for miles.

Advantage was taken of the occasion to marry a young klotchman of the Clayoquot Indians. The ceremony was performed in the accepted native fashion, the bride being gorgeously attired and given away amid much shouting and considerable speech-making, in sonorous tones, by the elderly male representatives of the two tribes thus united.

“He gave away \$700 in cash”⁴²⁸ (September, 1908)

Jacob Chipps, who made such a heroic attempt to save the life of his daughter and child off the Fraser River a year ago, getting the Royal Humane medal therefor, has just closed a big potlatch on the reserve here [Victoria]. He gave away \$700 in cash and \$300 in goods among a vast gathering of 1,000 Siwashes here from the Fraser River, Rivers Inlet and other reserves.

“Jacob is in love”⁴²⁹ (January, 1910)

Victoria, Jan. 6 – The biggest potlatch that the west coast of Vancouver Island has known in many moons has just been concluded, and upwards of 140 worn but contented Siwashes have returned to their respective reservations.

The potlatch lasted from Saturday until Thursday morning, and was given by Chief Watty Shewish and his aged father in honor of young Jacob Shewish. He has just reached marriageable age and now looks with loving eyes upon a noble daughter of the Ohiaht tribe. The Ohiahts were all invited and came in force, even from the far northern end of the island, 70 in all. It is estimated that gifts to the value of \$5,000 were potlatched by the hosts.

⁴²⁸ From Hyas Skookum Potlatch. (1908, September 2). *The Province*, p. 13.

⁴²⁹ From JACOB IS IN LOVE. (1910, January 6). *The Province*, p. 12.

“Will probably be the last grand potlatch”⁴³⁰ (May, 1910)

What will probably be the last grand potlatch to be held on the Songhees reserve commenced this morning, when Willie Jack, grandson of the first chief who held sway across the harbor, gave away about five hundred dollars' worth of canoes, blankets, money and other gifts to the three hundred Indians present.

Preparations for the event were made yesterday, when a fine new flag pole, on the making of which many Indians had labored for several days, was reared at the corner of the first big potlatch house near the bridge. At least two hundred representatives of Cowichan, Valdez Island, Quamichan, Kuper Island, Duncan and West Coast tribes gathered about the flag pole which, resplendent in its white paint and brightly gilded carvings, was reared with impressive ceremony.

Willie Jack, the only direct descendant of the original chief, announced, through his spokesman, David Lutess, that he would to-day produce his long-treasured photographs of his grandfather and another Indian relative who had passed into the happy hunting grounds; that the flag given by former Governor Sir James Douglas to the tribe would fly on a new flag pole, and that a grand potlatch in memory of his dead relatives would be commenced.

This morning, between 9 and 10 o'clock, a motley throng of [Indians] and their [women] assembled near the potlatch house, lining the roadway on either side. The fact that the event was likely to be the last on the reserve had been conveyed to the visitors by the local Indians, who have decided to discontinue the practice of this old custom. Under the circumstances the affair held much of pathos to the few white men who watched it and understood its significance. The grizzled faces of the old Indians within whose memory the days of the red man's untrammelled possession were still bright, contrasted in their rugged pride with the plump features of the later generations on which the white man's customs have placed their stamp.

For the greater part the Indians wore modern clothes without native dress of any kind, but here and there a flaming blanket of red marked the presence of an old-timer. To the latter the potlatch, especially, appealed as a relic of halcyon days. The younger Indians are yearly taking less interest in the preservation of such ceremonies.

David Lutess, he of the dramatic gesture and the sonorous voice, made the preliminary announcement concerning the reason of the potlatch, his words evoking an occasional grunt of approval from the squatting Indians along the roadside. In front of the flag pole, from which the carefully preserved red ensign flew in the breeze, lay three canoes and a small boat which are now in the possession of Willie Jack's chosen friends. In them was piled a great variety of new blankets, and on top of these lay the photographs of Willie's lost ones.

After David had addressed the Indians and pointed to the pictures, the flag pole and the flag which it flaunted, a wave of his arm brought the attendant throng to its feet. Two [Indians] lifted the old chief's photograph and carried it slowly along

⁴³⁰ From INDIANS HOLD LAST POTLATCH. (1910, May 21). *Victoria Daily Times*, p. 2.

the lines, displaying it to those present. Following them came Willie Jack bearing a hat filled with half-dollar pieces, one of which he gave to everyone present. As soon as the rounds had been completed, the other picture was carried around and a further presentation of half-a-dollar was made to each Indian.

David then commenced the distribution of blankets and other gifts, which occupied a couple of hours, after which a meal was eaten. The Indians this afternoon are continuing the potlatch, which will probably not end until Monday, when the visitors will leave the reserve for their homes.

During the past few days several small potlatches have been held, one being confined to the women of the reserve and their guests. Altogether there are over three hundred Indians now quartered in four of the big potlatch houses and in tents about them. Four hundred loaves of bread have been supplied to them every day, and the cost of the entertainment, which will fall on Willie Jack and the other local Songhees, will be heavy.

The potlatch is not being carried out along the lines of its predecessors on the reserve, which were more or less noisy and were marked by many dances and other amusements. With the settlement of the reserve question now appearing more and more likely, and the decision of the local Indians to hold no more potlatches after this one, it is only natural that considerable repression of enthusiasm is noticeable among the guests.

“The Last Great Potlatch” of the Songhees⁴³¹ (May, 1910)

A grand potlatch is at present taking place on the Songhees reserve and to it there have gathered four hundred Indians, representatives of the coast tribes. That the present will be the last great potlatch ever to be held is the statement of Willie Jack and Alex Peter of the Saanich tribe who are leaders in the affair. The government frowns upon the practice, with the Indians themselves it is not as popular as it once was and the spirit which prompts it is dying out. But the present one promises to assume grand proportions. For four years it has been brewing and latterly for the past few weeks, the Indians have been busy buying blankets, pots and kettles in readiness for it.

A large number of blankets were potlatched yesterday afternoon and one chief from Saanich “went the altogether” by distributing a considerable sum of money, chiefly in dollar bills.

The last big potlatch here took place eighteen years ago and as in the present case, Indians from the four tribes of Saanich, those of Beecher Bay, Chemainus river, Nanaimo, Sooke, Valdez, Kuiper island and elsewhere are represented. Most of these will remain until the conclusion of the affair on Monday or Tuesday night.

At the close of the potlatch Willie Jack promises to spring a sensation. He will formally state that he is the lawful heir to the chieftainship of the Songhees tribe.

⁴³¹ From GRAND POTLACH ON THE RESERVE. (1910, May 18). *Daily Colonist*, p. 3.

This he intends to prove on Tuesday next when he will bring out the picture and flag of his grandfather, the first chief of the Songhees.

He states that he has no intention of attempting to usurp the position of Chief Cooper, nor of stirring up animosity against him. He only wishes to make use of this occasion, the last potlatch, to bring before the members of the tribe his true ancestry.

“They have passed beyond the stage”⁴³² (May, 1910)

The Songhees had their last potlatch yesterday. It is the last because the Indians have decided that they have passed beyond the stage when this ancient custom ought to be observed. A visit to the Reserve yesterday furnished plenty of proof that this reason was applicable not only to the Songhees, but to all the younger men among the visitors. These spoke good English as a rule, and dressed as white men in a corresponding station in life dressed. The women exhibited a strong survival of a barbaric love of color, but even some of them would, except for their features and complexion, pass hasty inspection as white girls.

“Carried out in the most exemplary fashion”⁴³³ (May, 1910)

The conduct of the Indians who have taken part in the big potlatch on the Songhees Reserve has been extremely good, according to Mr. Thomas O’Connell, Chief Dominion Constable of the Indian Department in British Columbia, who is in Victoria in connection with the ceremony. The affair, he says, has been marked by no arrests and has been carried out in the most exemplary fashion. [...]

The potlatch now in progress at the Indian Reserve will be concluded at noon on Monday. All the gifts have been given away by Willie Jack, who is the presiding genius at the ceremony. These include rifles, blankets, and a considerable sum of money. Today a large feast will be held. A number of the Indians who came from Cowichan, Saanich, Bonsell Creek and Nanaimo have already left for their homes. In all, 400 of the natives took part in the potlatch.

“May vanish with end of potlatch here”⁴³⁴ (December, 1953)

The unfamiliar wail of the potlatch songs, the thud of clubs on beaten earth and the rhythm of Indian rattles stopped pedestrians near Thunderbird Park today, as a colorful, three-day, centuries-old ceremony marked the opening of Kwakiutl House.

The voices came from the inside of a newly-constructed house, where over 200 Indian chiefs and representatives of 30 coastal tribes gathered to receive gifts, to make speeches and to watch ceremonial dances.

⁴³² From THE LAST POTLATCH. (1910. May 20). *Daily Colonist*, p. 4.

⁴³³ From INDIANS GIVING UP USE OF LIQUOR. (1910, May 22). *Daily Colonist*, p. 16.

⁴³⁴ From

The potlatch is being given by 74-year-old Chief Mungo Martin, the last genuine Indian totem pole carver, who built the house with the aid of his son, David. The potlatch, a gift-giving festival, is being held by the chief to mark completion of the house.

The festival started with the singing of "mourning songs," led by Chief Tom Omhid, Hope Island, who knows from memory all the songs of his people. He represents, in a sense, a troubadour.

The Indians sat around the house. In the center a bonfire crackled merrily. The scene resembled a good, old-fashioned campfire party. Everyone was relaxed, joked and listened to speeches from their elders.

Suddenly, from behind a screen emerged some dancers, attired in colorful robes and wearing weird, carved wooden masks, representing birds and animals.

To the beat of sticks, the dancers gyrated around the floor. Their long, dark shadows were reflected on the wooden walls of the dwelling and created an eerie atmosphere.

To the Indians the dances told the legends of people. Some of the more serious dances expressed such complexities as life and death, "the resurrection" and mysteries which man has been only able to explain through symbols.

Attending the festival were several anthropologists from the United States and Canada. These include Dr. Viola Garfield and Dr. Erna Gunther, both of the University of Washington, Seattle.

Wilson Duff, provincial museum anthropologist, has installed a recording machine in the dwelling. He believes the potlatch may be the last such genuine festival, as many of the elderly Indians are dying and the new generation is not taking as great an interest in the native culture.

APPENDIX I: THE CHINOOK TRADE JARGON

“Chinook versus Greek”⁴³⁵ (1890)

Though called a jargon, the Chinook trade language is not so insignificant as might at first sight appear. [...] The Northwest coast has always been noted for the remarkable diversity of languages spoken by its inhabitants, and this diversity formed a serious hindrance to their intercourse with each other. As all these languages were harsh in sound and difficult to acquire, the sailors and traders of the vessels that visited the coast took no trouble to learn them. Nootka was the chief emporium of the traffic and the Indians there gradually became familiar with a few English words, and the strangers, in turn, gained a slight knowledge of the Nootka dialect. When, later on, the same traders began to frequent the Columbia river, they used the words they had learned at Nootka in communicating with the natives; and the Chinooks, being quick in catching sounds, added both Nootka and English words to their own vocabulary. In 1804, when Lewis and Clark reached the Columbia, they found the *lingua franca* thus resulting in common use. The Astor and Hudson’s Bay companies arriving subsequently and permanent trading settlements being formed, an attempt was made to enlarge the common tongue by a selection of certain Chinook words and, in the course of time, the new language, having received additions from the French-Canadian *voyageurs*, assumed something like regular shape. A few words were invented by onomatopoeia or sound imitation, such as *lip-lip*, for boiling water; *ting ting*, for a bell; *tik-tik*, for a watch; *tum-tum*, for heart (from the beating), and *po*, for a gun (from the report). [...] In 1863, when the Smithsonian institution published its dictionary, the jargon comprised nearly 500 words. Of these 221 were set down as Chinook, ninety-four as French, sixty-seven as English, while the Salish or Flathead Indians had furnished thirty-nine.

Some of the English words had a singular origin. All Americans are called Boston – the United States being *Boston illahee* (Boston land); all Englishmen or British-Canadians, *Kinchotsch* (King George); while the French-Canadians are called *Pasaiuks-Pasai*, being a corruption of “Français” and *uks*, a Chinook termination. The term of salutation, which Sir Daniël Wilson writes *Clak-oh-ah-yah*, [...] traces to the presence of Clark and the fact of the Indians hearing him thus addressed by his friends (“Clark, how are you?”) is assigned a Chinook origin by Mr. Hale, who writes it *Klakhowya*. Mr. Hale, however, derives the word *pelton* (foolish) from a man named Archibald Pelton, who had gone deranged. *Kole-sick-waum-sick* is the expressive term of evident origin for “fever and ague.” *Oleman* is applied to anything old or worn out; *stik* is used for tree, wood, or anything made of wood; *wata* is water; *tumwata*, a waterfall (*tum* representing any regular or continuous sound), *pos* (suppose) is “if” or “granted that;” *pe* (French, *plus*) is used for “and;” *lum* (rum) is any strong liquor; *lamestin* (*la medicine*) is medicine; *pia* or *paid* means fire and also cooked or ripe; *sun* is a day; *skin* is bark as well as skin; *trakatshum* is handkerchief; *potlatch* (a Nootka

⁴³⁵ From CHINOOK VERSUS GREEK. (1890, October 6). *The Montreal Gazette*, p. 4.

word) is a gift and is also used (as most of the nouns are) as a verb. The letter *r* does not occur, *b* being substituted for it where it is found in the adopted English or French word, as *lakles* (*la graisse*); *polalie* (*poudre*); *kooley* or *kuli* (courier); *cly* (cry – to weep). [...] *Kweh-kweh* (a mallrd duck) [...] is apparently imitative.

The grammar of the language is extremely simple. [...] *Muckamuck*, for instance (which seems to be formed from the noise made in the process), means to eat, or drink, as well as anything put into the mouth. *Muckamuck sahmun* is to eat salmon; *chuck*, to drink water; *kinootl*, to chew tobacco. The word *mamook* (said to be Nootka) signifying to make, is used in all sorts of ways, as *chaco* (to come), *mamook chaco* (to make to come, to bring), *poh* (a puff), *mamook poh* to fire off (a gun); *keekwilee* (low), *mamook keekwilee* (to lower, to bury), and so on. The word *saghalie* means up, above, high, etc.; the word *tyee* means chief; *Saghalie-Tyee* is God, the chief or ruler of the high place, heaven. There are also compound words of English fabrication, as *stikskin*, bark; *stikstone*, petrified wood. The pronouns and numerals are of native origin.

The Chinook jargon has had a beneficent result in bringing different tribes into peaceful intercourse. [...] It has changed suspicion and ill-feeling into friendliness and good-will. It has also served for nearly a century as the prevailing medium of intercourse between whites and natives, but during the last fifty years it has been moving northwards. At Fort Vancouver (on the Columbia), once its centre of strength, it is now hardly heard at all, but on the reservations of the northern interior and the deep friths along the coast it is still the language of trade among the hunters, trappers, and fishermen.

“Chinook jargon born on lower Columbia”⁴³⁶ (1916)

What is Chinook jargon? An answer to that question should give a good idea of its constitution and character, and may be summarized in the following sentence: The Chinook jargon is the language of a tribe of Indians who lived in the region of the lower Columbia River, but interspersed with words supplied by the servants of the Nor'-West and Hudson's Bay companies when they were either ignorant of the Chinook word, or the language did not possess a word to express the meaning they wished to convey. As to its place of birth, it was certainly not Nootka Sound. The jargon does not contain more than half a dozen words of the Nootka language.

Again, if it had been of Nootka origin, it would never have been called after a tribe of Indians living many hundreds of miles to the south of that body of water. In the composition of the Chinook jargon, the majority of the auxiliary words are French or of French origin, changed in their pronunciation by the inability of the Chinook Indians to articulate them.

THE FUR TRADERS

The Chinook Indians inhabited the shores of the Pacific Coast for some distance north and south of the Columbia River. The language which they spoke was

⁴³⁶ From Walkem, W. W. (1916, July 29). CHINOOK JARGON BORN ON LOWER COLUMBIA. *The Province*, p. 13. By Dr. William Wymond Walkem (1850 – 1919).

common to that part of the coast, and was also the tongue of the Indians who dwelt on the banks of the Columbia between the old Fort Vancouver (a Hudson's Bay post) and the mouth or point of discharge of its waters into the Pacific Ocean. It was always the duty of the Nor'-West officials and their successors in the fur trade on the Pacific Coast to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language spoken by the Indians with whom they had trade or business dealings. By doing so, they became better armed to do a sharp but honest trade in which a knowledge of the language struck out many chances of disputes. When the Hudson's Bay Company amalgamated with the Nor'-West Company, the officials of the latter company were already using the language of the Chinook Indians.

In 1902, David McLoughlin, son of the first Hudson's Bay chief factor on the Columbia River, explained the Chinook jargon and its origin in what I thought was a most satisfactory statement. It happened that the very day we had this conversation, I had received a paper in which some comments were made as to the origin of the Chinook jargon, and Nootka was given the credit of its birthplace.

McLOUGHLIN'S OPINION

"Pure rubbish!" McLoughlin remarked after I had read the short article to him; "nothing else. From the time that my father took over Astoria or Fort George, for the amalgamated companies, he, James Douglas and some of the later officials such as Dr. Tolmie, used the pure Chinook when conversing with the natives. In fact, my father's knowledge of the Chinook language proved extremely useful to him as he overheard and understood many conversations between the Indians. [...] The engages were mostly French-Canadians of an illiterate type. It is not incumbent on them to acquire a thorough knowledge of the Chinook language, but they picked up a sufficient number of Chinook words to allow of their carrying on a conversation, and when they were ignorant of the Chinook word to express what they meant, they interjected or used a French word. This very often happened also when the Chinook did not possess a word to represent the one he wished to translate. The Indian stowed this word away in his memory, and when occasion required, used it instead of his own Chinook, but with a defect in the articulation of all words containing the letters f, v, r, and several others which are not articulated in the Chinook language. Some words, however, are pronounced with a thick guttural lisp which imitates the sound of the "r". The combinations thl, tl and lt occur frequently and are pronounced with the lips and tongue in a manner peculiarly their own. Where the French-Canadians used an "r" as in *la carrotte*, the Indian used an "l" and pronounced it *calotte*. Another French word was *la carabine*, which the native Chinook pronounced *calipeene*. The French-Canadians adopted the Indian pronunciation thinking the native would better understand what he wished to say. From a very small beginning, this Chinook jargon was gradually enlarged and to such a degree that many of the Chinook words which were formerly in use have been displaced by many, according to the fancy of the man who was attempting to hold a conversation in the then current Chinook jargon. These French-Canadian employees of the Hudson's Bay Company had more to do with the construction of the Chinook jargon than any other civilized race.

SPREAD OF THE JARGON

Frequently transferred as these engages were from one post to another, they carried their knowledge of the Chinook jargon with them, and under the impression that all the western tribes from New Caledonia to the Columbia River spoke the Chinook language, employed the jargon as they knew it wherever their duties called them. Some of the northern tribes obtained a smattering of the new language, but it was limited.

At the head waters of the Columbia the Snakes and Nez Percez Indians had no knowledge of the new jargon, as very few of the French-Canadians employed by the company on the lower Columbia accompanied the courageous explorers of the early days. Most of the engages came directly from the east, and even if they had been from the lower Columbia, the tribes of Eastern Oregon had no knowledge of the parent language, Chinook, and as their trade was carried on with officials who had learned the Nez Percez and Snake language, they were indifferent as to any knowledge of a language which might be only known by a limited number of the underlings.

“As for the claim made in that newspaper that the Chinook jargon was compelled and first employed at Nootka, that is perfectly absurd,” continued old David with some emphasis, “for from what I have heard and read, the early traders at Nootka were Spanish and English, and I have never yet met a ship captain who knew sufficient of the Chinook jargon to make an intelligent use of it. I have met many Nootka Indians and not one of them knew anything of the Chinook language or the Chinook jargon. The Nootka language is totally different from any Indian language spoken by tribes on the mainland of the Pacific coast.”

SOME COMPARISONS

In confirmation of what McLoughlin said, let me compare the pure Chinook forming an integral part of the jargon with the Nootka as spoken there, over forty years ago. It is as well to know and remember that the spelling and pronunciation of some of the words of the jargon, more especially those of French origin, depend altogether, as Sam Weller observed, on the fancy of the speller.

In support of my contention that the Chinook jargon has no connection with the Nootka language, I will tabulate a few words for the purpose of comparison.

English	Chinook	Nootka	Chinook Jargon
One	Ik-t	Sau-wauk	Ik-t
Two	Mauk'st	At-la	Maukst or Moxt
Three	Thlune	At-la	Thlune or Klune
Four	Law-kut	Moo-a	Law-kit
Five	Quannum	See-chaw	Quannum or quinnem
Six	Taw-kut	Noo-poo	Taw-kut or Taw-gum
Whale	Quannis	Mah-hack	Quannice
Deer	Mowich	Moolak	Mowich
Bear (black)	Thet-woot	Moo-watch	Shait-woot

I have not space enough at my disposal to give many more words, but to point out the number of French words which are so frequently used to make up the jargon. In giving these words allowance must be made for the articulation by the Indian who pronounces his French additions by a rough phonetic estimate of his own.

English	French	Chinook Jargon
Canoe	Le canot	Canim
Thin or small	Petit	P'chie
Tongue	Le langue	Lalon-g
Wolf	Le loup	Leloo
Sheep	Le Mouton	La Mooton or Mooto
Rifle	La caribine	La calipeene
Ribbon	La ruban	Le loban or loba
Mountain	La montagne	La montie
To marry	Se marier	Maleeya
Plough	La charue	La shalloo
Pipe	La pipe	La peep
Hammer	Le Marteau	Le mat-to
Cloak (with a hood)	La capote	La cap-poo
Plank	La planchet	La plawsh
Candle	La chandelle	La shondelle

In these words which I have given and which contain the letter “r” the reader will notice how the sound of “r” disappears and is taken by the sound of the letter “l”, for it must be understood that the spelling of a Chinook jargon word is purely phonetic. A good example of this is the French word *charue*, which is changed phonetically to a sound represented by the seven letters *shal-loo*. I have been careful to call this combination of letters a sound, not a word.

NOT A CHILD OF THE MISSION

The missionaries have been given the credit of being the parents of the Chinook jargon, but this is a mistake. There were some parts of this western province where the Chinook jargon was understood by some of the tribes, but the missionaries, if recently arrived, were not familiar with the Chinook jargon and it was better policy for them to learn the language of the tribe where their mission was located. The tribal language was more suited to their mission, and better calculated to ensure success in a very difficult and wearisome work.

I think it will be found that a knowledge of the Chinook jargon is confined to those tribes who have been at one time or another under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company. In conversation with several tribes from the west coast of Vancouver Island, who had articles for sale last year on Granville street, by the Bank of Montreal, I found that not one of them could either understand or speak Chinook. On a visit to the Hesquiat Indians who have lived for generations in close proximity to the Nootkas, I was unable to obtain a Chinook interpreter.

The Kootenay Indians have a smattering of Chinook, but many of the Indian tribes living on the Fraser River and some parts of the interior can hold a very fair conversation in what Fenimore Cooper would call the lingo.

Some of the Squamish Indians speak Chinook very fluently, but if one is in search of information as to the history of the tribe or the names of places, the employment of an English-Squamish interpreter becomes a necessity.

Upon what evidence some writers have founded the statement that the Chinook jargon was first spoken at Nootka, I have never been able to ascertain.

“They might be included in an English dictionary”⁴³⁷ (1920)

Speaking of the Chinook jargon, it would be interesting to compute its contributions to the vernacular English of this coast. A score or more of Chinook words are now in such common use that they might be included in an English dictionary. I suggest the following words as among those frequently heard on the street and used in English speech:

Olalie and sallal, names of berries.
Siwash, Indian.
Kloutchman, woman, usually Indian woman.
Muck-a-muck, to eat; something to eat.
Potlatch, a gift; a free feast.
Mesatchie; bad.
Kumtux, to know; knowledge.
Skookum, strong.
Skookum chuck, a waterfall.
Chuck, water; salt chuck, the sea.
Tillicum, people; friends.
Tum-tum, opinion; mind; thought; [heart.]
Tyee, chief; e.g. tyee salmon.
Wawa, to talk; talk.
Hyas, large.
Eheechako, newcomer (Chaco, to come).
Bit, as money. [Chicamin also means money, especially cash.]
Kloosh [or Kloshe], good.
Iktas, goods; clothes.
Kelapie, upset; change.
Klahowya, greeting.
Klap, to find.
There are others.

⁴³⁷ From LUCIAN. (1920, August 7). THE WEE-END. *The Province*, p. 16.

A news article in Chinook and English⁴³⁸ (1899)

Jeremiah, Delate patlum, yaka hy-ou wa-wa kopa il-la-hie. Hally yaka chaco, pe yaka wa-wa. Yaka tikegh nika chaco koopa Skookum house, pe wake kata nika skookum, halo nika tigegeh coollie, pe Hally klap chic-chic koopa lulu nika.

Kook tenas sun tyee Hilbert pe Shakespeare chaco koopa Court House pe yaka wawa hyas closhe nika potlatch tatlum pe kwinnum dollar koopa Queen, mox dollar koopa tyees, pe ict dollar koopa chic-chic; sponse nika halo potlatch okook chickamin koopa Queen nika klap klun moon koopa Stewart Skookum House.

Robert Grosser, for causing all of the above troubles, was fined \$75, or 3 months in gaol with hard labor.

A political report in Chinook⁴³⁹ (1916)

Now, understand this. It is the true, inside story of the Kitsilano reserve deal. Characters – Bowser, as acting premier; Hamilton Read, barrister, etc.; Cole, a [Métis] with a good money sense, and a handful of Indians who owned a great and wealthy tract of land upon which they lived and propagated. One of the natives told your correspondent in strict confidence as follows:

Hyas Tyhee Bowser wahwah, “Closhe Siwash hyiu chickamin.”

Siwash wahwah, “Nanitch nika. Siwash halo iktas.”

Cole chahko wahwah okook tenas cultus potlatch. Nika Bowser nanitch.
(Cole klatawa, Read chahko.)

Siwash to Read: “Klahowya tillicum? Mitlite hyiu salmon kopa.”

Read: “Mamook illahie mah-kook. Hy-iu chickamin.”

Siwash: “Nawitka nika mamook.”

(Six moons Siwash halo chickamin, halo illahie, halo iktas.)

⁴³⁸ From BRIEF MENTION. (1899, June 27). *Nanaimo Free Press*, p. 2.

⁴³⁹ J. S. (1916, March 13). On the Inside at Victoria. *The Sun* (Vancouver), p. 4.

“A salmon deal” conducted in Chinook⁴⁴⁰ (1900)

“Mika tikki salmon?”⁴⁴¹

I fancied I had heard the voice before, or something very like it. I strolled across to the place where it came from, and found, outside the gate, two klootchmen, a dilapidated rig with hay-rope attachments – well, no, not a horse; the quadruped that languished between the shafts might, under favorable circumstances, have blossomed into a horse; but a blight had fallen upon its early ambition, and left it the wreck I saw. Its head was a decided misfit, having evidently been intended to go with a much larger animal. Someone with a mistaken idea of improving its appearance, had tied its hay-colored mane into knots; and the acute angles of its back-bone were fastened down with pieces of sheep-hide to give a purchase to the breeching straps. But it was the coloring that riveted the attention of the casual observer; a background of red-raddle, picked out in splashes of chocolate and yellow, with a daub of white down the nose. It looked like someone’s first attempt at sign-painting.

While my attention was engaged with the turn-out, the ladies had climbed down, and the elder hooked a gunny-sack containing salmon from under the seat; she was a shrewd-looking old party in a much-colored petticoat and shawl, topped by a jaded purple handkerchief tied over her head. Like a sensible woman, she had kept the family jewelry – a pair of silver bangles – for herself, her daughter having perforce to be content with the old adage: “Beauty unadorned, adorned the most,” eked out with such trifles as a magenta-hued skirt, and blue and white striped blazer, the latter having probably come into her possession, when the attention of the original owner was directed elsewhere. While they settled themselves comfortably on the grass, I collected the family from all over the house and ranch, knowing that it would take our united ignorance of Chinook to cope with the situation. I forgot Tom; Tom had a local reputation as an authority on the language, founded on his having been employed for two months on a ranch adjoining the reservation; [sic.] it was in vain he protested that he had only spoken to a Siwash twice during the whole time; our confidence remained unshaken, and it was to Tom therefore that we entrusted our interests on the present occasion.

“Clahowyah?”⁴⁴² he began, advancing to the attack, while the rest of us lined up behind in a semicircle, by way of moral support. The elder klootchman responded affably, but her daughter, after looking us up and down with discerning hauteur, turned her attention to a study of the landscape and the chewing of a blade of timothy grass. “Hyas klush salmon?”⁴⁴³ pursued our linguist. The old lady responded from the middle of her esophagus, that it was “hyas-klush,” and forthwith produced one, weighing about eight pounds.

“How much chickamin,⁴⁴⁴ him?” inquired Tom.

⁴⁴⁰ From HAIDA. (1900, June 22). A SALMON DEAL. *Vancouver Daily World*, p. 4.

⁴⁴¹ Chinook for “You want salmon?”

⁴⁴² The standard Chinook greeting.

⁴⁴³ “Very good salmon?”

⁴⁴⁴ Cash.

“Sitkum dollah,”⁴⁴⁵ answered the dame. Now, our more experienced neighbors had given us to understand that half a dollar was never given for a fish under fifteen pounds, and that to yield to the demands of our old nobility was only to put a premium upon extortion; Tom’s indignation was therefore excusable.

“Sitkum your aunt; I wasn’t pricing the rig! Halo sitkum, nika potlatch quarter, him.”⁴⁴⁶

But the old lady shook her head and started to put the salmon back.

“Ask if she has any more,” suggested Amy at this point. The inquiry elicited a grunt and another salmon, a size or two smaller.

“Nika potlatch six bits⁴⁴⁷ those two, and you’ll be doing well to get it,” said Tom, producing the silver. “Newitka?”⁴⁴⁸ She looked at the money longingly, spoke aside to her daughter and finally grunted “Halo!”⁴⁴⁹ and put the second salmon back. This was discouraging; the price was outrageous, as salmon went then, but we wanted it. After the silence had lasted a few minutes, the old lady began to say something; it was a string of grunts and clucks addressed to me. I waited until she had finished and then said: “I beg your pardon?” She looked at me thoughtfully for a while, and then began to say it all over again until Tom stopped her by growling “Halo kumtux Chinook,”⁴⁵⁰ after which another gloomy pause ensued; then I suggested that Tom should make another attempt to get the fish at a reasonable figure before it became necessary to hire the klotchmen to remove it on their own terms.

“Nika halo potlatch sitkum dollar one!”⁴⁵¹ began Tom with a rush, and we felt that he was doing credit to his reputation, when he came to an abrupt stop, rubbed his ear, frowned, and recommenced as before: “Nika halo potlatch sitkum dollar one! Him price halo hyas klush! You halo conscience;⁴⁵² nika potlatch quarter one, or six bits two, but one – what the deuce is Chinook for little?”⁴⁵³ he broke off to inquire in an agitated aside.

“Try ‘em with ‘cultus,’⁴⁵⁴ and let it go at that,” I said wearily.

“One too cultus for sitkum dollar; six bits for two, but halo sitkum one and that’s flat! Kumtux?”⁴⁵⁵

Apparently not. The old lady’s face was as blank as a boarding when Tom had concluded his lucid explanation, but presently a gleam of intelligence returned.

⁴⁴⁵ “Half a dollar.”

⁴⁴⁶ “Not half, I’ll give you a quarter”.

⁴⁴⁷ “Two bits” are twenty-five cents, so Tom offered seventy-five cents for the two fish.

⁴⁴⁸ “Certainly?”

⁴⁴⁹ “No!”

⁴⁵⁰ “Doesn’t know Chinook.”

⁴⁵¹ “I won’t give you half a dollar for one!”

⁴⁵² The mixture of Chinook and English translates to “I won’t pay you half a dollar for one! That price is not very good! You have no conscience.”

⁴⁵³ The Chinook word for “little” is “tenas”.

⁴⁵⁴ Chinook for “worthless” or “nothing”. Hence “cultus potlatch,” a free gift given with no expectation of return.

⁴⁵⁵ “One is too worthless for half a dollar; seventy-five cents for two, but not half a dollar for one and that’s flat! Understood?”

“Clothes?” she said tentatively fingering a fold of her skirt. Amy dived indoors, and after an interval emerged with a nondescript bundle of garments. The first item was a waistcoat which one of the youngsters had out-grown. This was laid on one side with an approving grunt; a shirt followed and then an old blouse of Amy’s, the pearl buttons on which brought a gleam of interest to the face of the damsel. Then the matron was understood to inquire for pants. Amy turned over the heap and produced a pair of trousers in which Tom had done a little prospecting in the hills that spring. They had been good trousers originally, but judging by their present appearance, Tom had sat down and let himself slide for the last ten miles or so. The old lady looked them over smilingly, till she came to the place where the cloth ended and the vacancy began. Then she gave us a reproachful glance.

“That’s all right!” said Tom cheerfully. “Plenty gunny-sack, make skookum⁴⁵⁶ patch! Him hyas klush⁴⁵⁷ pants and don’t you forget it!”

But she still looked troubled; I fancy she was wondering how gunny sacking and navy-blue cloth would harmonize. However, the trousers were put with the rest, and then Tom offered the six bits again, and inquired if that was O.K. But no, she shook her head and laid a restraining hand on the salmon as if fearing that it might be taken by force.

“By Jove! They intend to get their summer outfits while they’re about it!” I said. “Haven’t you got anything in sunset effects that’ll take their fancy? How will this do? Neat, but not gaudy!” and I pulled out a four-in-hand tie, a chaste affair in red and orange-crimson horseshoes on a yellow ground, that an enterprising storekeeper had forced on Tom along with a new brand of tobacco that he was trying to make a sale for. It had been thrown into my collar box, but when I complained that it broke my rest, somebody had considerately placed it at the bottom of the old clothes box where it would make less noise, and Amy had brought it out with the other things.

The old lady’s eyes lit up at [the] sight of it; she was actually pushing the salmon towards me, and we thought the victory won, when a grunt from her daughter dashed our hopes. This young lady had the perspicacity to perceive that the tie was destined to accompany the waistcoat and trousers, and that any glory she might derive therefrom would be merely a reflected lustre. She pointed out this view of the case to her mamma in the deep rich tones peculiar to her people, her gestures helping us to understand it. The joy died out of the matron’s eyes, and she resumed her affectionate grip on the salmon’s tail. It was then that Amy played her trump card; she produced from goodness only knows where, a mauve-colored antimacassar, tied up at the corners with bunches of lilac ribbon. That did it! The girl almost snatched it from Amy’s hand and threw it over her own head, where it made a tasteful finish to the magenta skirt and striped blazer. Her mother gazed at her the while, with maternal pride, doubtless foreseeing in her mind’s eye a long series of triumphs at the coming social events of the rancherie. Then, suddenly recollecting our end of the business, she tumbled the remaining salmon out on Tom’s boots, stowed her newly acquired wardrobe into the gunny-sack, and pocketed the silver.

⁴⁵⁶ Strong.

⁴⁵⁷ Very good.

This being satisfactorily settled, Amy suggested that they should come into the kitchen and partake refreshments, and they accepted the invitation like one klotch. Tom requested me to place chairs for the ladies while he hung up the salmon, but they sat down on the floor with their backs against the wall and criticized our culinary department while Amy got some tea and bread and butter ready. She was much interested in them, and referred to them as “poor children of the forest,” and asked if she shouldn’t spread some jam on the slices, but I rather fancy jam myself and I said no, and advised her not to pity them too loudly, or we would never get rid of them; for I had heard that they frequently understood more English than they allowed. I think this must arise from a morbid suspicion on their peculiar style of beauty. In about an hour they took their departure, Tom bowing them out with great ceremony, while Amy probed the conscience of the larger salmon with her sharpest knife. But it is an evil thing to establish a precedent without thought of what may follow.

After that, those klotchmen took to coming on an average of every three weeks, and they expected tea to be provided every time; also, they did not wait to be invited in, but walked in and took chairs by the stove, and stuck there like mucilage until they had got away with a pile of bread and butter a foot high, and two pots of tea. After a while they lengthened out their calls until it threatened to be necessary to ask them to stay to dinner. And they generally selected those afternoons when we were expecting company with whom they were not the least likely to get on. As their awe of us diminished, their curiosity grew, and they would stroll round the kitchen, picking up things and keeping Amy on the alert to prevent them annexing any trifle that took their fancy. She had quite got over her predilection for the noble siwash by this time, and we heard no more about the “poor children of the forest.”

Nature designed Amy for a sanitary inspector, and she soon discovered that the smell of clams, smoked salmon and musty blankets was much more overpowering indoors than out in the breezes of heaven; she was fastidious to a fault, and found it necessary to her peace of mind to boil – with soda – everything the klotchmen had touched, and when one day the old lady collared the kitten and stowed it away under her blanket – she oscillated between a piece of horse-blanket and the shawl in which she had first crossed our horizon – Amy simply sat down and cried.

“If only they would go quietly into a corner and stay there,” she wailed; “but they won’t; the door into the parlor got left open a little while ago, and if Charley hadn’t kicked a bucket of hot water over right in their way, they would have been in and from there into the bed-rooms, and you know they have such a – such a—”

“Such varied and extensive entomological collections,” Tom suggested as she hesitated. “Quite so. Well, I vote that we choke them off before they get to think they quite own the place.” So we held a council of war there and then, and mapped out a plan for putting an end to the infliction. It was five weeks before they put in an appearance again, but any softening of the heart we might have had in the interval was promptly counteracted when we saw that they had brought the rest of the family to visit us, the husband and father and two little boys. We had always transacted the bargaining outside, fortunately, and we did so on this occasion, and then at a pre-concerted signal, retreated swiftly indoors, raising the drawbridge and dropping the

portcullis as we went. The astonishment on the faces of that family party was worth seeing; they evidently thought there was a mistake somewhere, and after talking it over among themselves, they sat down in a row along the bottom of the garden fence to wait developments. The morning wore away – they had arranged to come to lunch that day – but still they sat there, a mute reproach.

“It’s a patient race,” said Tom, watching them through the window, about the middle of the afternoon; “but I wish the patriarch had had better taste than to come here in my old bags; his good lady’s made a very decent job of them considering; shall I cool ‘em off with the hose, Amy?” But Amy said she would have no cruelty, and we must wait till they chose to go. So we waited. It was about sunset when those people finally realized that there was no tea forthcoming. What they thought of it, I do not know, but I fear they were deeply wounded in their tenderest part – the gastric region. After exchanging a few indignant gutturals, they filed out to the gate, unhitched their prehistoric fossil and drifted away down the road, and from that day to this they have never returned.

APPENDIX II: THE OOLICHAN, OR CANDLEFISH

Food and Light⁴⁵⁸ (1893)

A fish frequently seen in the district around Vancouver is the candle fish. Technically the name is *Thaleichthys Pacifiens*, a remarkable species of the family *Salmonidae*, strictly a sea fish approaching the coast to spawn, but never entering rivers. [...] The specimens measure a foot in length, and have somewhat the appearance of an eel, except the head, which is pointed and conical. It has a large mouth. The color is greenish on the back, passing into silvery white on the sides and belly, which is sparsely spotted with dirty yellow.

The Indians of Vancouver Island and vicinity use the fish both for food and light. It is the fattest or most oleaginous of all fishes and, it is said, of all animals. It is impossible to either boil or fry it, for the moment it is subjected to heat it turns to oil.

The Indians who use the fish for food, take them, and, without cleaning them, run a skewer through the eyes and suspend them in the thick smoke that arises from wood fires. The fish acquires the flavor of the wood, and the smoke helps to preserve it. When the Indians want to make a meal of the fish, they heat them, reduce them to oil and drink the oil.

When they want a light, they take a dried fish, draw through it a piece of rush pitch or a strip from the upper bark of the cypress tree, a species of *arbor vitae*, as a wick, a needle of hard wood being used for the purpose. The fish is then lighted at one end and burns steadily until consumed.

“A marine candle”⁴⁵⁹ (1869)

There is found on the coasts of British Columbia, Russian America and Vancouver Island, a little fish not larger than a smelt, clad in glittering armor, which is fat almost beyond conception. It is popularly known as the candlefish, but its scientific name is *Salmo Pacificus*. Mr. Lord has carefully studied the habits and manners of this fish, and the uses to which it might be applied. Living with the Indians, he joined their excursions after the candlefish which, sporting in the moonlight of the surface gave to the waters the resemblance of a vast sheet of pearly waves. To catch them the Indians use a monster comb or rake, six or eight feet long, composed of a piece of pine wood with teeth made of bone, if sharp-pointed nails are not to be procured. The canoe being paddled by one Indian close to the shoal, the other sweeps the surface with usually one and sometimes three or four fish impaled on each tooth. By the repetition of this process many canoes are soon filled.

The cargoes being landed, the further charge devolves upon the [women], who have to do the curing, drying and oil-making. They do not in any way clean the fish,

⁴⁵⁸ From Cheap Candle Light. (1893, March 9) *The Brandon Mail*, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁹ From THE OOLACHAN – A MARINE CANDLE. (1869, October 5). *The British Colonist*, p. 3.

but simply pass long smooth sticks through their eyes, skewering as many on each stick as it will hold, and then lashing another piece transversely at the ends to prevent them from slipping off the skewer. The fish are then dried and smoked by being suspended in the thick atmosphere at the top of the sheds, and this smoke is sufficient to preserve them fresh without salting – a process which the Indians never apply to fish. When dry they are packed in cases of bark or rushes and are stowed away out of the reach of children or dogs till the winter.

“I have never,” says Mr. Lord, “seen any fish half so fat and as good for Arctic winter food as these little candlefish. It is next to impossible to broil or fry them, for they melt completely into oil.” They are so marvellously fat that the natives use them as lamps for lighting their lodges. For this purpose the dry fish is perforated from head to tail by a piece of rush pith, by means of a long needle made of hard wood. The wick is then lighted and the fish burns steadily with a sufficiently good light to read by. The candlestick is a bit of wood split at one end, with the fish inverted in the cleft.

When by heat and pressure these little fishes are transformed into a liquid oil, and the Indian drinks them instead of burning them, he supplies his body with a highly carbonaceous fuel, which is burned slowly in his lungs and keeps up his animal heat. Without a full supply of some such food, he would perish in the cold of a long northern winter.

When a sufficient supply of fish has been dried and put up for the winter’s food, the remainder is piled in heaps till the fishes are partly decomposed, for the purpose of being converted into oil. The method of extracting the oil is very primitive. Five or six large fires are made, and in each fire are a number of large round pebbles, to be made very hot. By each fire are four large square boxes made of the wood of the pine. A [woman] piles in each box a layer of fish, covers them with cold water, and adds five or six of the heated stones. When the steam has cleared away, small pieces of wood are laid on the stones; then more fish, more water, more stones, and more layers of wood, and so on till the box is filled. The oil-maker now takes all the liquid from this box, using the oily liquid for the second box instead of water. From the surface of the contents of this box, the floating oil is skimmed off.

One very small tribe often makes as much as seven hundredweight of oil. Not only is an abundance of oil supplied by nature, but the bottles to store it away are actually provided. The great sea wrack grows to an enormous size in these northern seas, and has a hollow stalk, expanded at the root end into a complete flask. These hollow stalks are cut at a length about three feet from the terminal bulb and are kept wet and flexible till required. The oil as it is obtained is stored away in the natural bottles, which hold from a quarter to three pints.

It is to be regretted that our steamers are causing the candle-fish to disappear from the Columbia river and other parts where they formerly abounded. They are now seldom found south of latitude 50 deg. N.

“Using a fish as a candle”⁴⁶⁰ (1884)

“Turn out the gas,” said a naturalist, “and I will show you the latest thing in light; that is,” he added, “the latest thing in that line in British Columbia.”

As the gas went out the speaker unrolled several objects that had an “ancient and fish-like smell,” and striking a match touched one. A moment later a clear, yellow light appeared, issuing from what looked like the mouth of a fish, the caudal end of which was thrust into a large bronze candlestick.

“Yes,” said the naturalist, “it is a fish, and nothing else, no tube or oil within, only the fish just as it came from the water. Take this paper and read a line, and become one of the very few who can boast that they have read by the light of a dead herring.”

The light was found equal to that of a candle, and reading by fish light was an easy matter.

“It is curious,” resumed the student of nature, “but I have got so that if I should see a man use himself as a candle, I shouldn’t be much surprised. The use of a fish as a candle I first observed when in the North of British Columbia. I made a trip all through the country for the purpose of obtaining a skeleton of the rare rhytina, that was killed off about 100 years ago, and I ran across some other curious things well worth knowing. I had lived in an Indian village nearly a week before I heard anything about the candlefish, and one beautiful moonlight night I was standing on the beach when I saw something that appeared exactly like the reflection of the moon, only it was in the wrong direction. I called the attention of a native to it and it seemed to throw him into the greatest excitement. He cried out ‘*Eulachon!*’ as hard as he could, and in a few minutes fifteen men were on the shore launching their canoes.

“There was so much confusion that I couldn’t learn what was the matter; so I jumped into one of the boats and off we went. There were two men in each of the canoes but ours. One sat in the stern and paddled, while the other stood in the bow with a curious looking instrument in his hand that I had not seen before. It looked like an enormous rake or comb, made of a piece of pine at least eight feet long, with a hole for a hand grip at the top, the lower part thinning off to an edge, into which were driven sharp iron or bone teeth from three to four inches apart. The use was evident; it was an arrangement for fishing. The ripple I had noticed on the water was an enormous school of fish, called by the natives ‘*Eulachon,*’ and to surround them now seemed to be the chief object.

“The canoes were quickly paddled out – until they were all upon the outside of the fish – and then they rushed at them full speed, each man wielding his comb like a scoop; dashing it into the sparkling mass of fish that gleamed like silver, and at every stroke, so thick were they, that the teeth of the comb came up covered in impaled fishes. These were quickly jerked into the boats and another dash made, and so on, until finally the school was driven in shore, and the excited natives into the

⁴⁶⁰ From USING A FISH AS A CANDLE. (1884, November 16). *New York Tribune*, p. 11.

water and fairly scooping them into their canoes, where their vivid phosphorescence made them look like molten silver. The fish seemed so terrified and demoralized that they hugged the shore, and if the men had had a net instead of those outlandish combs, they could have captured millions where they only took thousands. The boats were rapidly filled, however, and in an hour the excitement was over, and the catch was handed over to the [women], who took the entire matter of curing in hand.

“They seated themselves about their respective piles, and taking sticks pointed at the ends, rapidly strung the fish upon them by piercing them through the eyes. Then they were taken by children and placed in the smoke at the top of their sheds. There was no cleaning or scaling. When thoroughly dried, the fish have the flavor of wood smoke. They are packed in large [pails]⁴⁶¹ made of cedar bark and rushes of various kinds. They are then stowed away on a scaffolding made of high poles, and are not touched until cold weather.

“The natives call them in our tongue candlefish, as they not only eat them but use them to burn, as I have shown you. Previous to this catch I had no light, but afterward I luxuriated in a candle every night, and wrote my reports and took my notes all by the light of the ‘Eulachon’. The little fish seems fairly bubbling with oil; so much so that I tried to fry one, and turning away for a few moments I returned to find the back and other bones jumping around in a lot of fat; the flesh had melted.

“The oil is used as a medicine; it keeps them warm as fuel, gives them light, and the flesh is rich food in its dried state. When the fish are eaten the bones are swallowed. When they burn them they take a pointed stick, insert it in the ground and make a slit in the other end, into which they stick the fish and light it. There is no trimming or smoking, and when the light is no longer needed it is blown out and the remainder of the fish eaten.

“Sometimes the fish are very abundant, and the surplus is all made into oil that is used for a variety of purposes by the natives. What do they stow it in? Well, Nature again comes to the rescue, and they go to the ocean for their bottles as well as their oil. One of the great seaweeds that grows off the coast has a hollow stalk that is about as large as a champagne bottle; these are cut in lengths holding three pints or more and filled with oil.

“The candlefish is allied to the smelt, and is known scientifically as the *Mallotus Pacificus*, and in former days was found in the vicinity of British Columbia in vast numbers. The mouth of the Columbia River is said to have been a famous place for them, but the great factories and the steamers have gradually driven them off, so that there are only a few places, comparatively speaking, where great numbers can be found.”

⁴⁶¹ The original reads ‘flails’.