

LAND OTTER-MAN

THE title of this article is not that of a myth, but a name of a war canoe. The canoe which bore this symbolic name was never used in battle, but its name was an outcome of afterwit, the thought which comes to a warrior after fierce warfare.

The canoe no longer exists but the figurehead rests in the University Museum and was obtained by me in the year 1918 at Sitka in Alaska when I was working for the Museum among the people of my own tribe. It is dark with age and like other objects inherited from the past has its origin preserved in oral tradition.

The effigy is carved from one piece red cedar wood, measuring about thirty eight inches in length. Its eyes are inlaid with the blue abalone shell; and on the head are fastened locks of human hair. Whether this hair had been that of a slain enemy or that of a slave is not known. If it had been that of the former the account of its taking, and the reason for its use, on such occasion as the one for which the canoe head was made, would never have been made known, because such account, and reason would have only tended to renew the feeling of enmity. It was possible, however, that most warriors would have assumed much pride in ownership of an object bearing such ornamentation as had been acquired through a great danger, but if such had been in the case stated, the idea must have been strictly personal.

The carving is by no means artistic or beautiful. To some of the visitors to the University Museum, where it has now taken its final place, it may appear hideous, but even among the women folks and some children at its own native home, it had often excited an unpleasant feeling. But it is a representation of a man's position in war, and never intended to serve any other purpose. In truth, there is nothing relating to war which can be very pleasing or beautiful, except, perhaps, a picturesque battle viewed from a safe distance. Therefore, only a man of war in whose way had wandered a remnant of good fortune which enabled him to escape a great danger, can recognize in this old piece of carving one of the characters which appeared in the lasting nightmare of his experiences in war.

The geographical divisions of the Tlingit tribe appear to have created more rivalry than the social divisions in warfare and feeling

would often incite the wrath of a man of one locality enough to take arms against his own kin of another. This led to war between the two leading clans of the same nation, a war that is still recalled in stories handed down. One of these clans resided at Chilkat and the other at Sitka.

After that great war which for a time convulsed the two clans, the strain became relaxed in Chilkat and in Sitka; conditions were unlike what they had been during the grim years that had passed, and once more a common man, like a marmot after severe winter



Figurehead of the Ancient War Canoe, Land Otter-Man.

FIG. 23.

weather went about in calmness, for danger from a rival was no longer imminent, and only peace was in view.

With them now remained the task of adjusting mutual obligations; negotiations were in progress and in both parties were led about men who had been given as hostages. Meanwhile, the bereaved consoled themselves for their great losses, each with an assumed feeling of pride for sacrifice in a great cause. For nearly thirty years the progress of life in general had been halted and compelled to remain at a standstill by the war, but now the rebuild-

ing of family houses, and erecting of the customary memorials were resumed.

Amid the Klooknah-adi peace negotiations there came a courier from Chilkat to Sitka, conveying an invitation from the Kaguan-tan clan of the Shungoo-kaedi nation, to participate in the dedication of the Killer whale House, in Kluckwan. They were to be opposite guests to the Ganah-taedi, their rival at war. This invitation came in at an appropriate time. It offered a good chance of meeting long missed relatives and there was also a natural desire in a warrior to satisfy his personal curiosity of seeing in a good humor his erstwhile furious opponent. Hence, the invitation received a unanimous acceptance, and an envoy was immediately dispatched to Chilkat with a request to postpone the completion of the peace making. As soon as the Ganah-taedi acceptance reached Sitka, preparation for the great festival was put forward.

At the first council, an elder had recited some legends and precedents relating to the choice of a name for the party, and other important matter that had to be adjusted. Amid other suggestions which were offered, one of the leading men spoke up thus:

"It has been said that priority, other things being equal, should govern in naming the important divisions of our party. The names bestowed by our predecessors, we know, have the merit of priority and are characteristic of their time. I have asked myself, why should we, in our time not be justified in handing down a memorial of our own achievements in a similar manner. The parts which some of you have played in our affairs are the things which our successors will look to as we now look to those which have been acquired before our time.

"We are now about to appear before the public, each household adorned with things which it has inherited. But what have we created in behalf of those who will succeed us? This, I say, is the time to add some acquirements, if there are any, to those which constitute our pride.

"There is one thing I have in mind, and it is this: There are names of our canoes, the names bestowed by men of the past, and we are now about to put these to use. We cannot walk to Chilkat, therefore canoes, being the most important means of our formal appearance there, must each bear a name. The number of established names is not equal to the number of important persons among us. There sits Jinsatiyi who now approaches the age where he

must have recognition. And what is the name of his canoe? Surely, we will not allow him to go with only a bailer in hand, in someone else's canoe."

When the speaker resumed his seat all young heads were lowered, not as a sign of disapproval to the motion at hand, but the presence of the modest man in question must not be embarrassed. The silence which followed the motion was finally broken by the voice of another leading elder, who spoke up thus:

"It is good that these things are not overlooked, for our appearance in Chilkat will prove a critical moment, because we have not appeared there in a long while and the eyes of the public will therefore center upon our party, and because we have proved such a worthy rival at war for the noble men who formed our opposite party will only add more to the criticism of our general appearance in that ancient town.

"It is indeed proper that Jinsatiyi should appear in a canoe bearing a name which will symbolize his position in life. At this moment we are not lacking the things which could be applied. We will suggest this thing, and we will suggest that, but let me make my suggestion first.

"When I hear about his feats, in some of our battles on water, I often in my thoughts likened Jinsatiyi to a land otter. When the jaws of death were about to close on him, there seemed to be always a mysterious power at hand to snatch him from those jaws. Therefore I say Land Otter-man. How does this sound to your ears? I say this name is fitting because it will symbolize boldness and dexterity and because the Land Otter House inmates are the paternal grandfathers of him who would be master of that canoe."

The suggestion received unanimous favor, and a figurehead for the new canoe was ordered to symbolize the chosen name.

The excitement attending the arrival of the Sheetika-quan (Sitka-people) at Kluckwan was at its height. On the bank of the river, in front of the town, sat a group of old men and as the canoes, one by one, were piloted upstream they spoke to each other.

"This is the Sealion Canoe, the master is surely Jisniya who inherits the canoe name; and this next one,—it is the Frog Canoe of the Kiks-adi clan; and here is the Coho Canoe of the Khatka-ayi clan. Indeed, their emblems are well represented. But what might be this fourth one, bearing the undistinguishable figure? Can someone tell us what does this unfamiliar object represent?"

"It is Jinsatiyi's canoe, the Land Otter-man."

"Then it is well named, for the feats of that warrior resemble those of that animal upon the water."

Thus, the first success of the name was that its symbolic effigy was immediately seized upon and the foundation for its fame in later generations was firmly laid.

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