

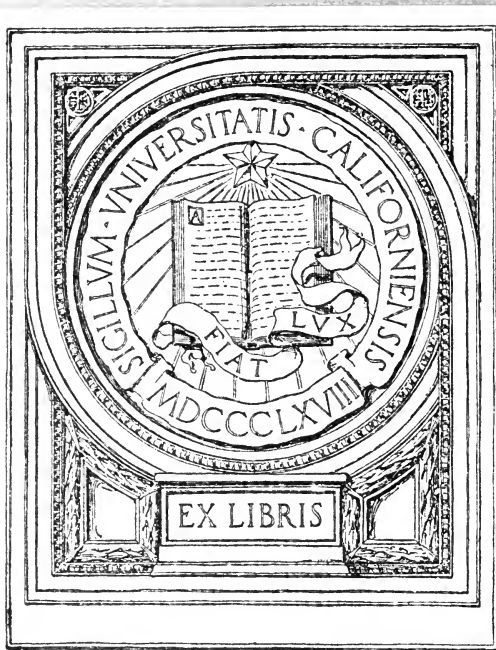


INDIAN LIFE AND INDIAN LORE

**IN THE LAND
OF THE
HEAD-HUNTERS**

Edward S. Curtis





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The Eclipse Dance





INDIAN LIFE AND INDIAN LORE

IN THE LAND
OF THE
HEAD-HUNTERS

By Edward S. Curtis

Author of "The North American Indian"

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS
BY THE AUTHOR



YONKERS-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK
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FOREWORD

THIS book had its inception in an outline or scenario for a motion picture drama dealing with the hardy Indians inhabiting northern British Columbia. I submitted the scenario to my friend Robert Stuart Pigott, who urged that it be put into book form and that the declamatory style of the tribal bards be followed. Pigott is responsible for the suggestion; I am guilty of its execution; and we mutually have a deep affection for the little book. It is the outcome of one of those rare friendships which tend to make life worth living.

In the working out of the photo drama and the book, there came to be slight differences between the two; but in the main they are the same, and both give a glimpse of the primitive Americans as they lived in the Stone Age and as they were still living when the hardy explorers Perez, Heceta, Quadra, Cook, Meares, and Vancouver touched the shores of the Pacific between 1774 and 1791.

Astonishment has been expressed that head-hunting existed among the North American Indians, notwithstanding the fact that every explorer of the North Coast region mentioned this custom. The taking of heads was a common

practice along the Pacific Coast from the Columbia River to the Arctic. Much material bearing upon this subject will be found in Volumes IX and X of *The North American Indian*.

The Author

Edward S Curtis



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IN THE LAND OF THE HEAD-HUNTERS



A somber, gloomy forest meets a forbidding sea

IN THE LAND OF THE HEAD-HUNTERS

PROLOGUE

FROM the wind-swept Straits of Fuca far to the North, a somber, gloomy forest meets a forbidding sea. Gnarled, twisted, and low-bent are the fir, cedar, and spruce which first breast the angry ocean winds, and worn the cliffs which throw back the ever-beating, roaring surf. Countless small islands stand sentinel-like off those shores, forever meeting the dashing waves which cast their spray across them. Near and far, snow-capped peaks thrust their rugged, cloud-wrapt forms from the forest green to the sky. Here and there gulfs and straits break through this outer bulwark of rock and forest. From these spring innumerable waterways,—bays, fiords, and sounds,—reaching north, east, south, and west, through some of which the flooding, ebbing tide sweeps with sullen, devouring roar. Almost everywhere on these inland waterways the mountain forest reaches the water's edge, and at flood tide the branches touch the water.

The winters are long, gloomy seasons of wild, lashing winds and ceaseless rains.

Snow comes for but a short time to give this land a coat of white. The months of May, June, July, and August are summer, and afford days of such delight, with forest and snow-peak mirrored in the calm sea, that one is prone to believe the summer is for always, and that such scenes of quiet beauty cannot so soon change to violent storm.

The forests and mountains possess their share of wild life. In the high mountain meadows graze the elk, and in mountain meadow, in forest marsh, and by the sea's edge are the feeding deer. Among the serrated crags of the snow-covered peaks the mountain goats feed in numbers scarcely found elsewhere. On the mainland the great brown bear wanders, leaving tracks so large that one can scarcely believe one's eyes. On the islands, as well as on the mainland, the black bear is everywhere about, and through the forest, by land and stream, along the endless shores of the inner seas, play, hunt, and prowl the cougar, wolf, lynx, marten, mink, otter, beaver, and raccoon. In the air, from sea to mountain-peak the great bald eagle soars in watch for prey. Of song birds there are few. It is as if these forests were too vast and gloomy for their liking. The crow, the raven, the hawk,



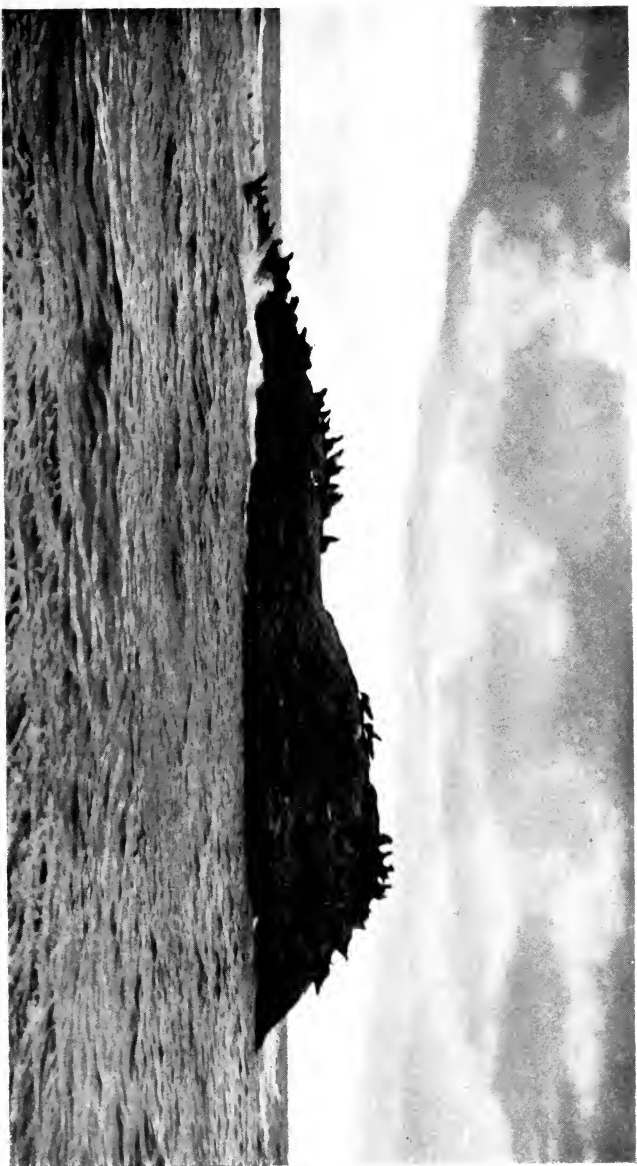
The sea itself teems with life

the owl are everywhere about. Of water birds there is no end. Geese, swan, and brant are seen largely on their northward and southward migrations. For the smaller birds the rocky islands are nesting places, and there the birds in flight are like clouds. The sea itself fairly teems with life: whale, sea-lion, seal, porpoise, halibut, salmon, cod, herring. The sands and rocks abound with shell-fish. The sea bed is so covered with plants and sea anemones, that to look into the crystal depths is to glance into fairyland.

The native dwellers in this land are sea-going people whose character seems in harmony with their gloomy, forbidding homeland. In warfare they are head-hunters with small regard for life, and ceremonial cannibalism is not unknown. Their mentality is to the Caucasian difficult of comprehension, and their conclusions are seemingly inverse. Pride of caste, position,—“highness,” as they term it,—is the foremost tribal thought, and the ways of maintaining, increasing, or losing such highness form the story of their lives. Success or failure in every effort is dependent on the spirits, good or evil. It matters not whether it be the taking of small fish, the capture of the largest whale, or success in war,—spirits govern all.

During the summer months these people attend well to the gathering of food, largely from the sea, going from place to place where food is abundant. During the winter months of dark rain and wind they gather in their fixed villages, where occur the winter ceremonies or dances. These great ceremonies are quite different from any seen among other Indians of North America. They afford the entertainment which helps to pass the long winter months, and serve to increase the position of the giver. Striking and often fearful are the scenes of these winter revels.

Such was the country, thus lived the people, when the white man first touched these shores.



To rocky, surf-beat islets my canoe has borne me

CHAPTER ONE

THE VIGIL

“SOME strange evil, like an angry, winged monster, hangs above me! I feel the gloomy clouds gather close about me, and a hand like icy Death grips my heart. I drive my canoe through the boiling surf, and the voice of the angry ocean mocks me.

“For half one moon’s life I have fasted—I have wandered. To rocky, surf-beat islets my canoe has borne me. To dizzy peaks of farthest mountains I have climbed. Four times each day have I bathed my body. The cougar and the bear have I met and with them counseled. By my grandfather’s grave, with skulls and bones about me, I have watched the stars and prayed. I have prayed to the Spirits of the Ocean; to the Spirits of the Mountain; to the Spirits of the Wind; I have prayed to the Spirits of the Dead: still my heart has had no answer. Yet, worse than that, tomorrow woe comes upon the land.

“Halfway on his journey the Sun will meet an all-devouring monster. Midday will be like night. With scream and croak the eagle and the raven will find perches in the gloomy forest. The owl, companion of evil and darkness, will sweep the air with hoot and jeer.

“Every law but one have I followed in my vigil, and now in the final plea I will build the sacred fire. Through the day and through the

darkness I will keep it burning and to the spirits make my invocation. Then will my fasting cease, and to my mind will come the thought of food and earthly life.

“Flame and Smoke! Flame and Smoke! Climb
ye higher! Reach and hold the angry monster who would our Sun devour!

Spirit creatures of the East Wind!

Spirit creatures of the West Wind!

Spirits of the South and of the North!

Come close and give me strength.

Spirits of the Ocean! of the Earth! of the Sky!

Bring me strength! Through long fasting my legs are weak.

“Strange sounds are in my ears. The stars dance madly! What weird figures weave themselves in the curling flames? What vague faces in the waving smoke? The smile of a maiden? Has my mind wandered for an instant from the vigil? I hear the far-off voices of the ocean. 'Tis like the maiden's chant. Ah! My eyes are heavy. They close in sleep.

“The night is past. The fire is dead, my vigil ended. Have peace and strength reached my heart? No! No! The spirits did not come, for in that final hour my mind broke the foremost law. I thought of a maid, and in the flame and smoke I saw her face!



I have prayed to the Spirits of the Wind

“Once more I must fast and languish ere peace can fill my heart.

“Listen!

“Is my brain still in trance? Truly no, for on the crest comes swiftly a canoe of cedar. Stately sits Naida, the proud chief’s daughter. Closer now, and now passing, is the canoe of the chieftain’s daughter. To my ear is borne her song of pride, of love and longing. It is the daughter of the great War Chief Waket, and hers was the face in the waving smoke!

“That picture was a dream, and ever do dreams our footsteps lead. My father knows no victor! His son can let his heart go where it will! With rapid stroke of paddle I will overtake the maid, the War Chief’s daughter, and with songs of love and wealth will woo her.”

CHAPTER TWO

MOTANA MEETS THE PRINCESS

“PROUD Prince, pursue me not with words of your father’s wealth. Sing not to me songs of love and longing. It is not seemly that prince and princess should woo like beasts or slaves! Let Kenada send his clansmen bearing gifts with song and declaration. It is in council long and serious that the Princess’ hand is pledged.”

“Your words of law and logic are very true, but in my fasting, in my hours with the spirits, our souls have met. When laws of Earth and Spirits meet in conflict, Earth rules must surrender in defeat. Let us sit by the brook and watch the rushing water. Perhaps its words will give us wisdom.

“You say that skulking in the shadows you saw the face of the Sorcerer Chief? Do not tell me that grizzled monster wants you for his wife! Truly it is not fit that gentle Spring and ugly Winter wed. The Sorcerer’s songs are few and evil,—his deeds of valor less. How can the great War Chief of countless coppers¹ give heed to one so poor, so ugly, so old? It cannot be that his songs of dark and evil magic fill your father’s heart with fear. You say for many moons this Sorcerer has in darkness chanted

¹ A “copper” is an oblong plaque made from native copper, decorated with heraldic design in low relief. Each plaque bears a name, and doubles in value with every change of owner until it reaches a value of many thousand dollars. Thus it is both a crest and visible evidence of wealth.

I will overtake the maid, and with words of love and wealth will woo her



prayers of evil incantations. Yes, I know it is common rumor that lives of men, like autumn leaves, fall before his incantations; but war clubs, spears, and slings can easily defeat his songs of evil magic.

“My people’s village, Awati, is the largest of the nation. Four days more I will fast and pray; then homeward across the raging surf I will make my way. To my father I will bare my heart and plead to take for wife the daughter of Waket. And when the Awati clansmen go to beg for Waket’s daughter, they will be spokesmen for my father and his many warriors. In smooth and oily words will our clansmen beg her hand; but should Waket, fearful of the Sorcerer’s evil magic, refuse their presents and decline to give his daughter, the clansmen then will show their claws and say: ‘We come not here with empty hands or with feeble words, for in the darkness of the night Kenada’s war canoes have drawn close, and resting on the quiet waters just beyond the headland, are all the war canoes of his nation. Play not with words of fear or greed, but quickly tie your strength with Kenada, richest, bravest chief of all.’

“Well will your father know that to refuse the Raven Chief will mean war and slaughter.

“I look into your eyes. I touch your lips. Go now, Naida, to your father’s home and say to him, ‘I have dreamed of love. In eight sleeps will come a great chief to claim me for his son.’

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“Go now, beloved!

O that I might go, beloved, to sit beside thee,
love of mine!

O that we might go, beloved, walking hand in
hand along the misty path of copper!”



Along the misty path of copper

CHAPTER THREE

MOTANA JOURNEYS TO THE ISLAND OF THE DEAD

“AGAIN I turn my thoughts from maids, from food, from worldly things, and think of songs and magic. To yonder gloomy Island of the Dead my canoe will take me. Through the tangled, gruesome jungle I will make my way. In tree above me, in cave beside me, in box, canoe and bundle, are the Dead!

“Once more I feel the weakness of my fasting, and the singing in my ear.

“This singing! Is it the voice of the Dead?

“My footsteps lead me on through ever-deepening gloom. Tonight I sleep upon the bed of Skulls.

“I start! I tremble! What was that?

“I hear the rattle in the tree-tops far above me! Do the Ghosts walk and mock me?

“With whir and thud a bleached and broken skeleton strikes the earth beside me.

“Ha! The Spirits try my courage by dropping bones upon me.

“Darkness gathers in the somber forest.

“On I hurry over rocks and through the tangle. A lakelet stands before me. On its placid surface I see the dancing new-born Moon.

“Now I bathe my body and with strokes slow and sure I cross the water, for on the other shore is the House of Skulls. Great is the magic of

that fearsome House of the Dead. Rare is the youth who braves a night of vigil there. Its floor is a solid pack of mouldering skulls; its roof-supporting posts are festooned from ground to eaves with scores of others; beneath its rafters swing leering mummies and grinning heads!

“If all were brave enough to spend a night in vigil here, small pride would the heart possess. I put my foot upon a skull:—

“What matters it that you were once the greatest chief of all?

“And you beneath my other foot:—

“Perhaps you were once a singer of songs? a maker of magic? a talker with the Spirits?

“What is the answer now?

“If I sleep here, perhaps these Ghosts will draw about and give the answer.

“Darkness, full and somber, creeps across the land. With the passing of the light is born the ghostly spirit of the Night.

“The unseen ones of fiery eyes hurtle here and there amid the ghostly shadows.

“The breeze-blown trees sway! whisper! almost groan!

“Bats squeak! Birds scream!

“The very air seems filled with ghostly things.

“Snakes and crawling lizards! Toads, omen of death, hop from skull to skull, and blink their sleepy eyes.

“He who from the House of Skulls would win supernatural power must keep its laws. Stand-



I will bathe my body—I will cleanse it of the foulsome thing

ing here, well do I remember the words of the Ancient FASTER: 'My son, when your footsteps take you there, be brave. Untie the mummy from its scaffold and place it well upon your back; fasten its bony arms well around your neck and let them grip fast; then plunge four times beneath the water. Now make your couch upon the skulls and close your eyes in thought or sleep.'

"Is my heart brave enough to spend the night's long hours with that most hideous thing clasped about my neck? Surely the son of the great chief whose totem is the Raven, does not fear darkness or the dead!

"I am faint. I am weak from days of fasting. Let me close my eyes and rest.

"What strange things see I in my fearful night of dreams?

"Weird creatures dance before my eyes. Birds, beasts and supernatural monsters of the deep rush at me. A hundred skeletons take flesh and clamor for my life!

"Ah!

"The fearful, gruesome night is past. I will bathe my body. I will cleanse it of the foul-some thing.

"Then with the sun I journey, and far upon the distant highest peak of Stony Mountain I will build my sacred fire."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VISION

“LONG does my sturdy craft breast wave and tide. On Stony Island’s snow-white, shell-strewn beach I land. Through the jungle, through the swamp, I take my way to the very topmost peak. Now, I build again the sacred fire. Four times each day ten songs I sing, and every song will be for supernatural power.

“That his first son might be a hunter and a warrior was my father’s constant prayer. While I was yet in my mother’s arms, he with his spear in deadly struggle met the grizzly bear. With pride he brought me to the monarch slain and placed my hands upon his paws, and cried, ‘Ho, strong one of the forest! Now you are dead we beg your power, we beg the great strength of your claws. Ho, slain one! This my son will eat the fragments of your heart that he may have endurance and ferocity.’

“Then, that I might know stealth in war, a wolf was brought, and placing my hands upon its forefeet, he, my father, prayed, ‘O sly one of the wilderness! We come to beg the slyness of your paws. We eat your heart for stealth and courage.’

“Then prayers and songs were offered to the squirrel, that fleetness likewise to my feet might come. And last of all, the eagle was begged for power to see afar and strike with quickness.



Long does my sturdy craft breast wave and tide

“I sing my songs and pray far into the starry night, while through my memory all these teachings flow. Song and words leap back from glen to peak, and then the Echo Spirits hover everywhere about.

“I sing:

“O Echo Ones! Protect and guard me!
Bring your baskets filled with plenty, filled with
good health and cheer.

“A strange note in the Echo call comes from afar. It is a song of love. The Echoes sing of smiles, of laughter and content, but not of earthly love. The voice draws nearer.

“It is not a spirit, black or fair, but a maid to tempt me from my vigil.

“Begone, you with your caressing words! Do you not know the law—that in the vigil one may give no thought to women?”

“Do not spurn me. You believe in dreams and visions. While sleeping in my father’s house, I dreamed that the proud son of Kenada returned my love. I saw our hearts bound in the sacred hoop of cedar.”

“Away, shameful thing! Your thoughts, your words, are born of evil not in maiden’s dreams. With every word I see a serpent in the flame.”

“You dare to spurn my love, and I the daughter of the great Sorcerer? Short life to you, O foolish youth!”

“Away, you bold and evil one! These are my days of songs and prayers.

“With this long fasting, how clear has grown my brain! I walk with the lightness of a feather. My body almost floats upon the air. The drifting clouds grow rosy with color of dawn, golden with the tints of dying day. The breeze from mountain dale fans my brow with perfume of springtime. The whispering pines and droning bees now lull my brain to rest.

“Long have I slept.

“What strange and fanciful dreams!

“How great the journey of my shadow!

“I sat alone beside my fire. I wept, for I was far away in No Man’s Land. Again I wept. An evil something crept upon me. I tried to move, but could not. The touch of a hand was on my face. Then the serpent creature crept away, and all was peace. I heard a mighty whistling through the air. Filled with terror, I could scarcely lift my eyes. Before me stood a great white bird, gazing at me. The spell of its eye held me, controlling thought and action. I laid myself upon its back, my arms around its neck. The mighty bird rushed forward on the ground, then rose slowly, heavily, higher and higher, in a great ascending spiral, through clouds, through mists, with onward rush till all



Motana, son of the Raven Chief

the earth was lost to view. At last it perched upon the topmost crag of a strange and ghostly world. There was no sun, there was no moon, there was neither heat nor cold. Day was night and night was day.

“The monster bird took flight, circled and circled until it passed from sight. Alone, I looked about and wept. While yet I wept, I heard again the whistling roar of its flight. With a rush of air it came to rest. Again I climbed upon its back, and in a great encircling glide it soared and soared through mist and cloud.

“At last it left me on the lower plains of the uncanny Shadow World. Here was a stream, beautiful, murmuring, soothing, lulling. Its course lay straight before me. Entwining, ghostly trees arched its way, swaying, drooping heavy with owls, the Spirits of the Dead.

“Away with this hour of dreams!

“What strange thoughts oppress me?

“The spirits have been close, and supernatural power is mine, I know. My heart should sing with joy.

“Yet some vague voice warns me of disaster—
I touch my throat!

“Ha!

“My necklace stolen!

“Locks of my hair have been cut!

“It was that spurned messenger of the black and evil Sorcerer who has stolen my hair, my necklace of teeth and claws. No doubt the very

breath of my body has been taken. Even now they are chanting their songs of short life for me. Could I but close my eyes and see as Spirits see!

“There in a somber glade three men sit by a smouldering fire, their faces black. Their words are low and hushed. Their leader is the Sorcerer who would wed my sweetheart. To win her hand he would take my life with evil magic.

“Now comes that vicious maid whom late I spurned, and in her hands are my hair, my necklace!

“Yes, and in a ball of springy softness, my very breath!

“The Sorcerer smiles his glee, murmuring, ‘Well done, my daughter. Bring the grave box, bring the toads.’ Chants the one of evil magic, ‘Within these withering toads we place his life, and as they wither and decay, so shall he!’

“Before my flesh can wither through their evil incantations, Awati’s war canoes shall sweep upon the village and quickly prove the real ‘short-life bringer’ to be club and spear.

“My vigil now is ended. Westward I will take my way to my father’s village. Above me spreads a dome of gold, flecked with feathery tufts of drifting crimson. Before me lies a dancing path of gold and copper.

“There where the sky and dancing trail meet, sinks the wondrous globe of fire.

“O Thou, the great Life-Giver!

“Grant me strength for all Life’s trails.



Naida, the proud princess

“One by one the stars come blinking out, and there above me stretches the flickering Milky Way from sea to sea. The sea itself is molten stars, through which ten thousand denizens of the deep rush onward, leaving their trails of liquid fire. Close by, with spout and plunge, sports the great blue whale. Seals lift their glistening, dog-like heads from the phosphorescent sea. A school of porpoise, like wheels of gleaming silver, flash before me.”

CHAPTER FIVE

MOTANA'S RETURN

AT the gray coming of day Motana reached his father's village, and great was his welcome there. So long had he wandered, his mother had dreamed of disaster and wept with fear. Straightway he begged his father to call in council all the head men, that they might hear the story of his vigil.

"My father will tell you that, as is the way of the Kwakiutl, he sent me on this journey, to fast, to pray, to talk with the Spirit Ones of the Earth, of the Sky, of the Air and the world of the Dead. All these laws have I followed, and have found much knowledge.

"Now, as it is with men, I have met a maid. Her words are soft, her eyes are deep. She is the daughter of the Chief Waket. The Sorcerer, whose evil magic is known throughout the land, would wed her. Even now he is singing songs to take my life. Will my father's warriors go tonight to demand this princess for my wife?"

Loud rose the voice of Kenada, urging his warriors to prepare for battle. "We will go with presents and with honeyed words, our claws concealing. Should Waket and his people hesitate in answer, our battle cry will chill their blood."

"Away! Away for preparation!" they shout.

