

## CHAPTER XII

## CHIEF EDENSHAW

THIS worthy Haida chief died at Massett 16th November, 1894, and he was a personal and respected friend of the author. He did his utmost to promote a feeling of good fellowship between the Europeans and his people, and he was successful in his efforts. No description of the Haidas can be complete without a short account of this noteworthy man. It was through his untiring energy that the Haidas finally cast off heathenism, adopted a more civilized mode of life, and acquired a respect for the laws of the Empire. His name was pronounced E-din-so or It-in-so, which in the language of the Fort Wrangel Indians means a waterfall. This derivation, if correct, may be considered evidence that in early times, on their way from Asia, the ancestors of the Haidas had coasted down Alaska after crossing the Behring Straits. Dr. Kennedy, the chief factor of the Hudson Bay Company in the year 1851 wrote his name as E-din-soo; this in time became, among Europeans, changed to E-den-shaw, and by this name only he was known along the whole coast. He did not receive this name at his birth, but at the time he succeeded his uncle as the Chief of the Shongalth Lennas at Dadans, near North Island; his birth name was Gwai-gū-un-lthin, which means "the man who rests his head on an island." The village in which he was born has disappeared, but is said to have been situated near Cape Ball on the Eastern shore of Graham Island, some forty-five miles from Skidegate. As with all natives, the

year of his birth is uncertain. Edenshaw was an old man in the early eighties of last century and is judged to have then been about seventy years. On this basis the approximate year of his birth would be about 1812. The Haidas were then probably at the zenith of their prosperity, for they were the Vikings of the entire coast, and terrorized the other tribes from Fort Wrangel down to Seattle. He has often described the many wars against the Zimsheans that he had been engaged in, and claimed consistent victory, returning home after every affray with the canoes loaded with property and slaves.

Edenshaw had two elder brothers, and they were noted braves, so young Edenshaw did his utmost to emulate them. He was a handsome and well-built man, and cut a fine figure in his chief's robes. Skidegate became his headquarters, but he exercised authority as far as Moresby Island, and visited the villages in his domain from time to time. The uncle he succeeded was a powerful chief at Dadans and bore the same name. Each succeeding chief bore this name, but no son of the chief could take his place or name, for according to Haida custom the chieftainship descended to the chief's eldest sister's son, and he was trained by his uncle for the position he was to assume. Edenshaw's two eldest brothers died and he was then placed in command of his uncle's war canoes and led many an expedition as his uncle's representative. According to Haida tribal law he had to marry the chief's daughter, i.e., cousin, but his uncle had no daughter, so it was arranged that he should marry the daughter of a powerful chief in Alaska.

His uncle finally died, and Edenshaw succeeded to his property and chieftainship, and at his succession the grandest and largest distribution of goods and articles of great value, including slaves, took place that has ever

been recorded in the traditions of these islands. The young chief's property included twelve slaves, male and female, and upon the occasion of his marriage, his wife's father gave his daughter ten more slaves to accompany her to her new home.

In 1851 Dr. Kennedy, at that time the factor of the Hudson Bay Company at Fort Simpson, showed to Edenshaw some samples of gold quartz, and told him that for such stones he would be highly paid. Edenshaw, remembering that an old woman at Skidegate had shown him similar stones, inquired from the old dame their place of origin. She told him that they came from the West coast of Moresby Island. Edenshaw thereupon started with his wife, his little son Kā-hū, and the old guide. They all landed at the spot and proceeded to collect the lumps of the rich gold quartz. They filled a basket and deposited the rock in the canoe and returned to the shore for another load. Young Kā-hū, being bored, began to use the rocks as missiles to throw at fish playing round the canoe, and when the party returned with a second load they were amazed to find that the lad had thrown away the first collection, and his father's annoyance resulted in a sound beating.

Edenshaw, however, finally obtained a considerable quantity of this rich quartz and took it across to Fort Simpson, and exchanged it for bales of blankets. The late Dr. Dawson in his report on the islands stated that Edenshaw's specimens included a nugget of gold of considerable size. An early traveller to these islands alleged that the Haidas used gold bullets for their muskets, and that they were very delighted when he gave them lead bullets for their gold ones, and doubtless he shared in the delight. When the Hudson Bay Company had received Edenshaw's gold quartz, they

dispatched the schooner *Una* to Moresby Island with a party of miners. Flake gold from the Cape Fife district was also collected and traded to the Hudson Bay Company at the rate of a tobacco pipe full of gold for one blanket—some profit!

In Edenshaw's pagan days some remarkable dances could be seen at Massett, the Haidas being decked in all their old aboriginal splendour, their faces painted and their hair adorned with feathers. Chiefs An-ī-tlus, Captain John, Laig, Haltus, Wi-hā, the Shaman Kū-tē, and Edenshaw would all take part in these tribal functions. They are now abandoned and will never again take place on the islands, as the younger generation despise the old picturesque ceremonial. An interesting dance was once witnessed at the house of the old chief Wi-hā. The tribesmen had been dancing for about two hours, when several men, carrying in an upright position a fine old totem pole, entered the house. This valuable pole belonged to one of Edenshaw's ancestors. In front of this totem Chief Edenshaw danced a most strange and beautiful dance for about a quarter of an hour, and at its conclusion ordered the totem to be cast upon the fire and burnt, so that no other chief would ever be able to dance as he had done before this totem of a bygone ancestor.

He was always a very striking figure. At the funeral of one of his sub-chiefs it was his rôle to deliver the funeral oration, and the duty was carried out with great dignity. He set forth all the virtues and noble deeds of the dead man, and afterwards distributed all blankets and prints to those who were entitled to receive them. On the occasion of a potlatch or distribution of property at the grave of a chief the procedure is worthy of record. All the way from the house of the deceased to the graveyard the men stretched their blankets over their

shoulders and the women did the same with their prints. The first man started from the house with the corner of his blanket held in his hand and with the blanket thrown over his shoulder, so that the second man could catch hold of the other end, and keep it off the ground. This the second man did with one hand and held the corner of his own blanket thrown over his shoulder to the third man with his other hand, and so on. When the first man had reached the graveyard the last man had just started from the house of the deceased holding on to the blanket of the man who preceded him and with his own blanket rolled up on his arm. They then kept step and marched in this fashion to the grave, a chain of men and blankets. The first man deposited his blanket on the ground near the grave, the second did likewise, and so on until all were placed in heaps. The women, then, in the same fashion, brought all their prints and gingham to the grave. The chief was then buried, and all the goods were distributed by Edenshaw.

Another great event at which he figured prominently was the erection of the last totem pole that was ever erected at Massett. This totem pole was erected in front of the house of a chieftainess named Kit-kō-nē. Thousands of dollars' worth of blankets, crockery, guns, bracelets, coins and articles of all descriptions were given away as a testimony of the rank of this lady.

In addition to these potlatches at the grave and the erection of this totem pole, bounteous feasts were prepared, and hundreds of dollars' worth of sugar, pilot bread and other kinds of food were distributed. These potlatches were simply looked upon as a method of repayment of social obligations. Other well-known chiefs that formerly ruled over sections of this tribe were Wi-hā at Massett, Nā-tlan at Yen, Skideget at Skide-

gate, Spence at the Yā-koun, An-ī-tlus at Tou Hill, not forgetting Amos Russ and Tom Stevens. Like Edenshaw these men were all a good influence for peace on these islands, and their goodwill towards Europeans was a remarkable fact. Edenshaw used to travel in state in a dug-out canoe twelve fathoms in length, <sup>12x6 = 72 ft</sup> elaborately carved and painted at both ends, manned by a large number of slaves and dependents; by means of trading he accumulated considerable wealth, and in the course of his life made no less than seven great pot-latches, the biggest ever known on the islands. He had not long been a chief when he had a narrow escape in an encounter with some Zimsheans on the Naase river. He had gone over with a party of his followers to sell a slave and a copper, but the Naase people recognized the slave as one of themselves and claimed him. This led to a dispute, and eventually Edenshaw and a Zimshean chief engaged in a hand to hand encounter; a tribesman intervened and aimed his gun at Edenshaw, who quickly swung the Zimshean chief round so he received the charge and was killed. Edenshaw and his people then rushed for their canoe amid a volley from their opponents and the chief was wounded in two places, but managed to reach his canoe and escape.

The late Dr. Dawson, when visiting these islands in 1878, obtained from Edenshaw an account of these Indians' first meeting with the whites, and it is of some interest to quote his account. "On asking Chief Edenshaw if he knew the first white man the Haidas had seen, he gave me, after thinking a moment, the name of Douglas, very well pronounced. There is little doubt that the chief with whom Captain Douglas is said to have exchanged names was a predecessor of Edenshaw. This chief's name was Gunia, and it is due to the ceremonial exchange of names having taken place, that that

of Douglas has been handed down to the present Edenshaw, while those of Dixon and his people have been forgotten. Edenshaw admitted that he thought white men had appeared before Douglas, but he did not know their names. It was near Winter, a long time ago, he said, when a ship under sail appeared in the vicinity of North Island. The Indians were all very much afraid. The chief shared in their general panic, but feeling that it was necessary for the sake of his dignity to act a bold part, he dressed himself in all the finery worn in dancing, and on approaching the ship performed a dance. It would appear that at first the idea was vaguely entertained that the ship was a great bird of some kind unknown to them, but on approaching it the men were seen and likened from their dark clothing and the general sound and unintelligible character of their talk, to shags, which sometimes indeed look almost human as they sit on the rocks. It was observed that one man would speak, whereupon all the others would immediately go aloft, till, something more being said, they would as rapidly descend. He also related further stories of those who, in a former generation, first became acquainted with many things with which they are now familiar, and profess to look upon these, their immediate predecessors, with much contempt. He said that an axe having been given to one, it pleased his fancy on account of its metallic brightness, which he likened to a silver salmon. He did not know its use, but taking the handle out, hung it round his neck as an ornament. A biscuit being given to another, he supposed it to be made of wood, and being after some time induced to eat it, finds it too dry. Molasses, tasted for the first time by an adventurous Haida, was pronounced very bad, and he warned his friends against it."

In 1852 an American schooner, the *Susan Sturgess*,

Gunia  
Perry

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Perry

visited the islands for trade, and Edenshaw volunteered to pilot the ship from Skidegate to Massett, so he and his wife went on board with their children, and the *Susan Sturgess* sailed up the Straits towards Rose Spit. The day being calm, she did not make much progress, and before she rounded the Point three of the men from the Nē-kwun village came on board. Having rounded the Spit and when half-way between Tou Hill and Massett, a large number of Haida canoes were seen approaching the ship. All these canoes were manned by the Massett tribesmen under command of the late Chief Wi-hā. As soon as they reached the ship they swarmed aboard and took possession of everything; in fact, they captured the vessel. The captain and the crew went and locked themselves in one of the cabins, and were convinced that their last hour was near. Edenshaw, although supported only by three followers, intervened on their behalf. Wi-hā told him to stand on one side as the ship was now in his waters, and that he intended to do as he liked with his prize. Edenshaw maintained that as he had volunteered to act as pilot the ship was in his charge. Finally they came to blows, and for seven hours Edenshaw stood with his back against the cabin door in which the crew had sought refuge, and dared anyone to kill or injure them. By this time the schooner had grounded on the beach in front of the old village at Yen, the headquarters of the Stling Lennas. Eventually an arrangement was made by Edenshaw that Wi-hā should detain the crew on the understanding that they were not to be injured, otherwise they would be avenged by Edenshaw and his followers. Wi-hā agreed and the sailors were sent by canoe to Wi-hā's house at Massett, and were treated as slaves. A survivor of this party met in Victoria about thirty years ago testified to the plucky defence of his

mates by Edenshaw; but as for that other chief (referring to Wi-hā) the old scoundrel, if ever he saw him again he would shoot him down as a dog for the way he treated him and his mates whilst in his house at Massett. After the crew had been landed at Wi-hā's house, the Haidas in the vicinity of Yen pillaged the schooner, and then burnt her on the beach in front of the village. Thirty years after this episode, some of the Massett Indians still had in their possession the iron cables and an American spread eagle made of oak which measured six feet across the centre. The writer obtained possession of this trophy, presented it to a student of Harvard University that was visiting Massett on the condition that he would place it in the Museum of his University, and this, it is believed, has been done.

After the vessel had been destroyed Edenshaw had several conferences with Wi-hā regarding the release of the American sailors, and finally after Edenshaw offered to pay Wi-hā compensation, they were thereupon released, and Edenshaw took them across to Fort Simpson and handed them over to Dr. Kennedy, the factor of the Hudson Bay Company, without asking any reward. It should be realized that this incident occurred when the Haidas were still pagans. Before they parted Captain Rooney, master of the vessel, gave Edenshaw a document recounting how he had saved their lives. This document is still in the possession of his son. It runs as follows:

FORT SIMPSON,  
10th October, 1852.

The bearer of this, Edenshaw, is chief of the tribe of Indians residing on North Island. I have reason to know that he is a good man, for he has been the means of saving the lives of me and my crew, who were

attacked and taken prisoners by the Massett Indians off the harbour of that name. He and his wife and child were on board the vessel, coming from Skidegate harbour round to North Island, when on the 26th September, 1852, we were surprised by some canoes alongside. We were so overpowered by numbers, and so sudden the attack, that all resistance on our part was quite impossible; but after gaining the cabin, this man and his wife and two or three of his men who happened to be on board, protected us for seven hours, until he had made some terms with them for our safety. He saved my chronometer and several other things which he brought to Fort Simpson, and gave to me without asking for any remuneration. I hope, if this should ever be shown to any master of a ship, that he will treat him well, for he deserves well at the hand of every white man.

MATTHEW ROONEY,  
*Formerly Master of schooner  
Susan Sturgess.*

In 1853 H.M.S. *Trincomalee* visited these waters and Captain Houston testified that Edenshaw was a man of great influence in the neighbourhood, and advised that he be treated with the greatest consideration.

In the same year H.M.S. *Satellite* was cruising in these seas and Captain J. C. Prevost engaged Edenshaw as his pilot round the different bays and harbours of the coast. He gave him a glowing testimonial of his efficiency.

The first prominent Haida to become a Christian was Edenshaw's first-born son, Cowhoe or Kā-hū. One day he produced a small book saying it had been given to him years before by the captain of an English man-of-war. It proved to be a New Testament with this

inscription on the flyleaf: "From Captain Prevost, H.M.S. *Satellite*, trusting that the bread cast upon the waters may be found after many days." More than twenty years had passed before that prayer was answered, but at the end of that time this man was baptized by the name of George and became the first Haida Catechist, and eventually the first teacher of their own race in the school at Massett.

During middle age Edenshaw travelled a great deal between Sitka and Victoria, and these visits at times appear to have been rather embarrassing to the authorities, for we hear of the Governor supplying him rum and blankets in order to induce him to leave. A magistrate in 1860 writes that the chief was ordinarily well-disposed but dangerous when in liquor. About this time smallpox was prevalent in Victoria, the Governor therefore ordered one of the gun-boats to hurry Edenshaw and his followers back to their own country. The Haidas were therefore rounded up one morning and their canoes taken in tow. When opposite Nanaimo, Edenshaw, however, refused to be towed any further, seized an axe and severed the tow-line. The captain of the gun-boat therefore left them to their own devices, and apparently the Haidas returned and camped near Nanaimo for some time longer. Some were locked up in the old gaol, and their friends tried to rescue them, and fired several shots into the old bastion, and the marks of their shots can be seen to this day. Their friends being finally liberated, they moved a few miles up the coast, and in this camping ground smallpox broke out and decimated them. Edenshaw and his party then moved Northwards and finally reached their homes, carrying the disease with them to the islands, and many of his tribe succumbed.

After all this Edenshaw seems to have settled down

*C. Collier*

to a quiet life, and he and his family presently embraced Christianity, being baptized by the author and confirmed by Bishop Ridley.

Edenshaw's eldest son, Kā-hū, succeeded his uncle (his father's brother) to the chieftainship of a clan in Alaska, the principle of matrilineal succession thus being broken; his second son is known as Henry Edenshaw, and he became a civilized person, and is well known as one of the best business men on the coast.

Edenshaw died at Massett in 1894. In addition to a tombstone over his grave, a monument has been erected to his memory near his old house; it commemorates his rescue of the crew of the *Susan Sturgess* and records that he was the white man's friend. Thus must end a brief description of the life-story of one of the Haidas who did more than any other to promote a good feeling between the whites and his own people, and it is mainly due to his example that the Haidas are a law-abiding people to-day. *Requiescat in pace.*

NOTE.—Edenshaw frequently told the author that Sir James Douglas, the first Governor of British Columbia, was the best white man he had ever met, and that he had given him a lot of presents, therefore was a great chief like himself. On his return to his village at Kung, in Virago Sound, after this memorable trip, he caused his followers to erect another totem in front of his house, and the topmost figure was a splendid likeness of the Governor in his frock-coat and high silk hat. This totem is still to be seen, covered with moss and lichen, standing grimy and grey in front of the ruins of the old warrior's house.

Kung