

*Robinson*

## CHAPTER VIII

### ARRIVAL FROM THE QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS BY CANOE

“The red cross of our banner  
Shall float o'er every land,  
And claim in faith's obedience  
Earth's darkest, wildest strand.  
O labourers claim,  
In His dear name,  
The utmost isles at His command.”

—CLARA THWAITES.

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THE day following, Edenshew, an influential chief, arrived from Virago Sound, accompanied by a large number of his tribe in several war canoes. His own canoe was manned principally by his slaves. He and his men were received with honours, and a dance of peace was accorded them. There had been a quarrel between the two tribes, and Edenshew with his leading men had been invited, for the purpose of making peace. As their large canoes approached the shore the occupants chanted the brave deeds of the past, and were answered in a similar strain by the concourse on the shore. The chanting was accompanied by regular and graceful motions of the head and body and waving of the hands. The time was kept by a large drum formed like a chest, and made of red cedar wood, painted with grotesque figures, and covered with skin. This was beaten by a drummer seated in the bow of the leading canoe. Naked slaves with their bodies blackened, each bearing a large copper shield, now rushed into the water and cast the shields into the deep, in front

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## ARRIVAL FROM THE

of the canoes of the visitors. As these shields are made of native copper, and inscribed with their crestal signs, they are very highly valued amongst the Indians, consequently this was one of the highest marks of welcome and honour. Not that the copper shields were lost to the owners, as they were recovered afterwards on the ebb of the tide. On landing the visitors were preceded by a number of dancers, male and female, specially arrayed and with faces painted, who led the way to the lodge prepared for their reception. The central seat was given to the chief, and his leading men were seated around. A messenger now entered to announce the coming of his chief and party to welcome his guests. These at once entered, the chief preceding and followed by the sub-chiefs, and principal men in their dancing attire. The head-dress or shikid bore the crest of the tribe on the front inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and surmounted by a circlet or crown formed of the bristles of the sea-lion, standing closely together so as to form a receptacle. This was filled with swan or eagle's down, very fine and specially prepared. As the procession danced around in front of the guests chanting the song of peace, the chief bowed before each of his visitors, and as he did so a cloud of the swansdown descended in a shower over his guest. Passing on, this was repeated before each, and thus peace was made and sealed. This custom is recognised and followed by all the tribes of the north-west coast. The calumet or "pipe of peace" is never used as such, but the lthtanoa or scattering of the swansdown is held sacred, and as equally binding on those who perform the ceremony, and those who receive it. By it the tomahawk is buried effectually, and through it the pipe of peace is passed around in social harmony and true friendship. I have frequently, in preaching to the heathen, been enabled to make an effective use of this custom as illustrating how the Great Chief above, when we were at enmity with Him, made peace with us by the gift of His

## QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS

only Son, who sends down the blessing of peace through the Holy Ghost. This chief, Edenshew, who was thus received, was formerly the most powerful chief on the Queen Charlotte Islands. His name was known and feared by many of the tribes both north and south. When the American schooner, the *Susan Sturges*, was captured, pillaged, and burned by the northern Haidas, and her crew enslaved, Edenshew asserted that had he not been present the crew would all have been slaughtered. He informed me that the Haidas were about to shoot them when he interfered and took them under his protection. On the other hand, some members of the tribe informed me that it was by this chief's orders that the schooner was attacked and taken. It is probable that both statements are true. These white men who had formed the crew were divested of their own clothing, which was appropriated by their captors, and received blankets instead, and thus bare-foot, and with but scant clothing, they were enslaved by the chiefs, to whom they became hewers of wood and drawers of water. They were thus retained as slaves, until redeemed by the Hudson's Bay Company, who paid over to the chiefs a number of bales of blankets for their release.

Chief Edenshew understood Tsimshean, and could speak it fluently, consequently when he invited me to visit his nephew, a young man also in the last stage of consumption, I made it conditional that he should interpret for me, as I desired to address his people. This he engaged to do, and on our arrival we found his friend very weak and low. I conducted a service, Edenshew interpreting for me, as he had promised, but I saw that he hesitated and failed to convey much of what I said to his people. I found that he was averse to my proposed Mission, as he had a number of slaves, and feared that it might lead to their obtaining freedom, and his consequent loss. He had heard that those of the Tsimshean chiefs who had embraced Chris-



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## ARRIVAL FROM THE

tianity had freed their slaves or had adopted them into their families.

When quite a young man, the ship *Vancouver*, whilst on a voyage to the north of the Queen Charlotte Islands with a cargo of general merchandise, was driven on Rose Spit Sands. Edenshew was then residing with his uncle, who was the chief of an encampment at Yehling, near to this dangerous point. On seeing the ship stranded, with the waves breaking over her, he at once pushed off with a large party of the tribe in their canoes to take possession of the vessel. They boarded the ship, and, despite the efforts of the captain and officers, commenced to plunder her. A hand-to-hand conflict ensued, in which the ship's crew would most certainly have been overpowered, had not the captain ordered the magazine to be fired. The boats had already been lowered, and the next order was to take to them and push off from the ship. On seeing this hasty action, Edenshew apprehended danger. He and his men made a rush for their canoes, and paddled off, leaving their heaps of plunder on the deck. They were not a moment too soon, as they had just got clear of the vessel when she blew up with a tremendous explosion, scattering the wreckage far and wide on the waves around. The boats' crews were all armed, but, fearing to touch on the islands, they stood off for the mainland and Fort Simpson, some sixty miles distant, whilst the Haidas paddled back to their shores. The prompt action of the captain prevented the pillage of his vessel, and probably saved the lives of many of his men, who would have been overpowered and slain had they persisted in defending the vessel. Edenshew could never dismiss this act from his mind, as many years afterwards, when he met the first officer of the ship, who had in the meantime been promoted to the position of a chief factor in the Hudson's Bay Company, he declined to reply to his salutation, whilst most friendly disposed towards me.

Several years afterwards, when on a trading expedition

## QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS

to the mainland, one of the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company showed Edenshew a piece of gold ore, and informed him that if he could bring him a quantity similar to the sample he would reward him with such a number of bales of blankets as would enable him to give the greatest "potlatch" ever given by any Haida chief, and thus yet further elevate his chieftainship. Edenshew took away the piece of ore, promising to inquire amongst his people concerning it. Shortly after his return, he went on a visit southwards to Skidegate and vicinity, where he had many friends of his own crest. Here he was royally entertained, and, whilst seated with his friends around the camp-fire, he exhibited the sample of gold ore, and inquired if any of them knew of any rock like it. It was passed round the circle for examination, when one of the women exclaimed that she knew where rock similar to it could be found, and that she thought she had a piece of it in her possession. She immediately proceeded to search her treasures, and produced a large piece, evidently richer in gold than the specimen. She agreed to accompany the chief on the following morning, and point out the rock to him from which she had obtained it. Accordingly, next morning Edenshew, having provided himself with the necessary tools, embarked in a small canoe, accompanied only by his wife and child, together with the old woman, his guide. The Eldorado was a rock overhanging the sea. Leaving the child, a little boy of some three or four years, in the canoe, the chief proceeded to chip off the golden ore, which his wife gathered into a Haida sack-shaped basket until it was almost filled. This she carried down, and emptied into the canoe. Returning with the basket, she continued collecting the ore as Edenshew chipped it off until the basket was again filled. It was now agreed that he had procured a sufficient quantity, and together they returned to the canoe, but what was their surprise to find that but a few pieces remained of the first basketful. The child, left alone in

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## ARRIVAL FROM THE

the canoe, had amused himself by throwing overboard piece by piece during their absence. Edenshaw himself informed me afterwards, he was so enraged, that he would have thrown his child overboard also, had not his wife restrained him. As it was late in the evening, they returned with what they had.

On his next visit to the mainland, he brought the ore to Fort Simpson, where he received quite a cargo of blankets and other property as his reward. He consented, also, to act as guide to point out the treasure. A schooner was specially fitted out in Victoria, and a number of miners engaged for the expedition. Edenshaw accompanied them on their arrival, and guided them to the spot. A large amount in gold ore was taken from the rock, but they failed to trace it farther from the shore. This place, not far from Skidegate, has been known since as "Gold Harbour."

That child, whose life would most probably have been sacrificed had it not been for his mother's intercession and protection, was spared that he might become the possessor of greater treasures than gold. Under his influence, also, Edenshaw was yet to be led to discover the true riches which neither the world nor death could deprive him of. He was well rewarded for acting as pilot to the schooner which conveyed the mining party to the gold deposit, and this, together with the bales of blankets which he received on his first gold delivery, enabled him to give another great "potlatch," to which the members of all the other crests were invited from far and near. Thus his great gold discovery elevated him both in the estimation of Whites and Indians, and the promise made him by the Hudson's Bay Company was fulfilled.

I visited Seegay again for the last time, and commended both himself and his wife in prayer to God. He was trusting in the atonement and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Thus, for the Haidas, the darkness