

THE SHARK

The Fin-of-the-Shark (Port Simpson), the pole called the Fin-of-the-Shark (*næremkæt*), belonging to the household of Legyarh, head-chief in the Gisparhlawts tribe and of the leading Eagle clan of this tribe, at Port Simpson.

Description. The whole pole, a shaft about 30 feet long, squared with the edges rounded, gradually tapering off from about four feet from the ground to about 18 inches at the top, represented the Fin-of-the-Shark. At the top sat the Eagle carved out of wood, and meant to represent the Fugitive (*gwenhuut*) Eagle. The remains of this Eagle are still preserved at Port Simpson.

Function, age. It was erected by the members of the Gisparhlawts tribe and those assisting them about 90 years ago, according to Herbert Wallace; in 1837, or a few years after the Hudson's Bay Company's post was established at Port Simpson, according to John Tait. By 1926, it had fallen down, and was lying close to the shoreline.

The circumstances of its erection, in the middle 1830's, were recorded by William Beynon, in 1947, from John Tait (Sæleben), of Port Simpson, as follows:

The Gisparhlawts' chief Legyarh was the paternal origin of a former Tsibesæ, chief of the Gitrhahla; that is, a sister of a former Tsibesæ had married Legyarh, and both were deceased. The son of the Gitrhahla woman became the new Tsibesæ, but still acknowledged his paternal origin to the new Legyarh who was a nephew of the deceased father of this new Tsibesæ. He called upon the Legyarh group to perform paternal duties from time to time, and on each of these occasions they tried to outdo one another.

It was to one of these occasions that the Gitrhahla had invited the Gisparhlawts from Larh-kwaw-ralamps (Port Simpson). The fort of the Hudson's Bay Company had just been established, but as yet there was no missionary among the people. At Gitrhahla, seaweed was the staple food of the people, the best quality coming from their region. An insulting reference was made to their food. The Gitrhahla, resenting the taunt, gave their slanderers seaweed of an inferior quality, with the remark, "Since the Gisparhlawts are now white people, and a new generation, they will not know the difference between good and bad seaweed." The Gisparhlawts heard of this, and recognized the poor brand of seaweed given them, but they ate without showing any displeasure.

It so happened at this time that the new Legyarh of Gisparhlawts was going to have his *hrmæs* feast. It would be the final event in taking his deceased uncle's position as Legyarh. His *hrmæs* would end all signs of mourning, and he would take his seat among his fellow chiefs. From the time his uncle had died his hair had been cropped and his face streaked with black ochre. He slept in ashes and was in seclusion, since it was taboo for him to associate with anyone outside his own household. It was the anniversary of his uncle's death and of his assuming the function of Leg-

yarh. The principal guests to the *hrmæs* feast were the Gitrhahla, as well as all the other tribes of the Tsimsyans. Legyarh now was going to erect the pole Fin-of-the-Shark (*næremkæt*), at Port Simpson.

All the guests were gathered. The Gisparhlawts came into the Legyarh house with their contributions, and placed them in a pile. Calling each head man in turn, with the leading house first, Legyarh said: "Give me Kao'welæ (Larhskeek-Eagle)! What are you going to do now that these chiefs have come to visit me?" "Here I am, chief, here I am!" each of those summoned would say, advancing to the middle of the house with their contribution and placing it along with those of their chief. Then Legyarh started to call on his nephews and nieces, and as each name was called the individual came forward and placed a contribution on the pile. In this way everyone knew the names of the *lekaḡyet* of another tribe at the chief's feast. For when the *lekarhkiget* (middle-class) gave a feast, they confined it, in former days, to their own rank. Only when their royal chief gave a feast, all the tribes being invited, did the names of the *lekarhkiget* become known. Each one of them became thus known as he offered his own gifts. Then each of the *lekarhkiget* would call on the members of his household, and as each was called, he came forward with his contribution. This business often took many days. In a *hrmæs* feast, each headman was dressed to represent his own individual *narhnorh*, and his subdivision heads also had the privilege of showing different *narhnorh* names. Thus in gao'welæ he had also Hrup and Nees'awælp and Hæhlkæp as subdivision heads. These in turn had their nephews as successors who had names of dignitaries in the clan, and had also *narhnorhs*. These *narhnorhs* would be shown and dramatized. The procedure was termed *tselem'wæl* (the gathering of wealth).

When this was completed, a select group of the headmen of the Gisparhlawts was assigned the task of counting and apportioning the contributions. This procedure involved counting the guests. Each Gisparhlawts headman was assigned the care of so many chiefs. Counting sticks were employed. Each guest to receive gifts was assigned a stick, and the name of the chief and the stick was given to a *lekaḡyet*. The name of this was *'wæmkan* (name stick); that is, each stick represented a name, and each Gisparhlawts *lekaḡyet* was responsible for seeing that this guest was not overlooked, or given too small a gift. When all the sticks had been given, and the guests counted to correspond to the number of sticks, all the contributions were apportioned. Added to these contributions to the feast would be those of all outsiders of the same tribe who had paternal relatives in the Gisparhlawts, and those who had married into their tribe. The former was termed *welkse-wætk* (*wel*: where; *kse*: out; *'wætk*: origin) meaning paternal origin; the latter, *rhæ'næ'arh* (*rh*: taking of; *hæ'næ'arh*: woman) — having married into the tribe. These gifts were returnable at some future time according to the donor's indications. It was considered more as a loan or an assistance. The last to bring their contributions were the family of the wife or wives of Legyarh. All the maternal relatives of the wife would contribute; this was termed *sa'wæse* (*sa*: to make; *'wæse*: blanket), to cover with blanket. This was also a returnable gift, but it was an obligation on the maternal relatives of the chief's wife; otherwise her maternal group would be considered as poor and would be subject to ridicule. "What is the matter with so-and-so's family; they must be very poor," people would say.



Dog-Fish or Shark pole of the Tlingits, at Wrangell

So in this instance the head man started in to allot the contributions from all sources. When everything had been properly allotted, carefully checked and rechecked, the ceremony of distribution began. First the people were taken outside, and Legyarh called on each guest who was a chief, together with his tribesmen, to erect his totem pole. First, before touching it, Legyarh, together with his singers, sang the dirge of the Fin-of-the-Shark (*naremkæt*). At this particular time, a group of Eagles from the Nass, that of Thalarhætk, happened to arrive to trade at the post. Of the same ancestral origin as Legyarh, these Nass people came forward with a copper shield, and threw it into the hole as a foundation. So did Guhlhrærh and Skagwait of the Git'andaw, thus acknowledging their common origin. When they had finished, all the tribes together lifted the long pole. When it was erected, the spokesman for Legyarh announced: "Let all the chiefs go back into the house. There Legyarh will see them, and we will be happy together. It matters not if it takes many days. We are now happy again that Legyarh assumes his position among his equals."

The chiefs and their headmen entered Legyarh's house and, as they came in, they sang a nursery song belonging to the Eagle clan of Legyarh. When all were seated, Legyarh addressed them, beginning with the name of each of his distinguished guests: "Chief Tsibesæ, Chief Weesaiks . . . [a large number of them were named]. I greet you! To-day I have ended my deep mourning. Because of your influence, I have been able to overcome

my grief. Again I am associating with you in social activities. This will bring happiness to us all. The symbol (*sin'enlæideks*)¹ which you have just erected is the Fin-of-the-Shark (*næremkæt*), the Giant Shark that followed in the wake of our ancestors when they escaped from the country of the North Wind. As you all know, they separated at the mouth of Nass River. Some went up this river, and to-day you saw one of them come to my assistance, adding more value and prestige to this Fin-of-the-Shark.

"The Eagle which sits on top is in commemoration of the stone eagles which were lost while our ancestors were fugitives. When they took to flight, and were pursued by the Kanhadas who at the time out-numbered them, while they lived at the village of Larhsail, there had been a prolonged quarrel between Nees'wæmak, the Eagle chief who was our ancestor, and Hænatsu, the Kanhada chief, as to the location of their salmon weirs (*luulp*). The quarrel had been going on for a long time when it happened that one of our young chiefs of the Eagle had been carrying on an illicit love affair with a Kanhada princess. She was married to a son of the Kanhada chief at Larhsail, who was caught and killed. His death angered some of our thoughtless young men who at once went across to the Kanhada side of the village and killed a Kanhada. As we were greatly out-numbered, Nees'wæmak decided to flee the village at night. Gathering together all of the Eagle clansmen with their wives, they set off, going away towards the direction of the Southeast Wind (*hæi'wes*). They came to a place where they decided to anchor. Not having anything with which to anchor their canoes, they took their many copper shields and used them as anchors. Just before the break of day, they saw canoes approaching and, still afraid of the Kanhada people, they cut their anchors and again paddled off. When night came they anchored again, this time using as anchors the stone eagles which designated their clan, and which they had carried with them. Next morning, just at dawn, canoes were again seen coming upon them. Unable to haul up the stone eagles in time, they once more cut the anchor line and escaped. They now had lost their most valued possessions, the copper shields and the stone eagles. The long fin of a giant shark with an eagle sitting on it followed them continuously, so *Neeswæ'mak* decided to use the Fin as his exclusive crest.

"These Eagle clan people now arrived at the mouth of Nass River, where they separated. Some went where they knew former relatives had gone. These form now the Trhalarhætk, Læ'i, and Menæ'sk groups, and recognize the Fin to this day. In case the Legyarh house were without heirs, they would get one from any of the above groups, as all have the same crests and traditions, names, dirges, and nursery songs. Neeswæ'mak came to Marhlekrhahla, and then the Eagle clan went to the Gisparhlawts. Others went further south and joined the Kitamats, establishing a branch of the same clan there. The rest went to other tribes with the exception of Neeswæ'mak and Skagwait, who stayed among the Tsimsyans. Thus we grew into what we are now, among the Gisparhlawts, and elsewhere. In erecting this Fin-of-the-Shark, I am showing you what belongs to my own clan."

Turning to his own people, he said, "What have you to give to my guests, these chiefs? Have you opened my box? Bring it out, and distribute

¹ Here totem pole is meant.



Haida poles of the Shark, at Skidegate

it to the chiefs". Rhup and Kao'welæ then came forward and, addressing the Gisparhlawts, said, "Come, my fellow tribesmen! We will distribute the wealth of our master, Legyarh". Then they started to bring out from each pile which had already been apportioned, gifts of copper shields, moose skins (*hliyawn*), robes of fur, and as guns had now come into the hands of the people, they were included. This took a long while. When it was finished, and the guests had all been called, each of the spokesmen distributed gifts to each of the guest chiefs. Then Legyarh danced in front of each chief, as did all the lesser chiefs of his household. Food was distributed to all the guests. Thus ended a *rhmæs* feast.

On the next day was the *la'arh*. This was held in the following manner. The huge pile of gifts which had been set aside for this purpose was placed on the beach below Legyarh's house. All the lekarkiget and others who had not been guests at the *rhmæs* feast would take part in this. They stood some distance away from the pile and as soon as the Gisparhlawts called out "*wæ*", there was a wild scramble for the pile of goods, each helping himself to as much as he could. Then the chief Legyarh brought the guest chiefs into his house to give them the final food feast. For this he had made special canoes in which two naked men sat. A quantity of water was put in, then soapberries were added. The men in the canoes began stirring this with their hands and feet, working hard until the soapberries had foamed up. This was brought to the guest chiefs where they sat, the men still in the canoes, stirring the soapberries. The guests could not resent it. Many knew that this was a taunt aimed at the Gitrhahla who had served seaweed of poor quality to their guests when Tsibesæ had given his *rhmæs* feast. Legyarh had planned this retaliation. The only form of retaliation then allowed (by the white traders) was a *rhmæs* feast in which one would outdo the other who was guilty of offence. The Gitrhahla knew that this *rhmæs* had been aimed at them.

(Informant, Herbert Wallace; interpreter, William Beynon, in 1926. The long traditional account was recorded by William Beynon from John Tait — Sæleben — of Port Simpson, 1947. This pole had been recorded by the author at Port Simpson, in 1915.)

The Fin-of-the-Shark (Skeena River), the pole of the Fin-of-the-Shark (*næremkæt*), at the Gisparhlawts village near Shames on the lower Skeena.

Description. This pole was almost similar to the long Fin-of-the-Shark at Port Simpson. At the Gisparhlawts village, it stood among many other poles on an island where the main village stood. But the village and the poles were washed away by floods before the informant was born.

(Informant, Herbert Wallace, chief of the Ravens in the Gitsees tribe. Interpreter, William Beynon, 1926.)

The Fin-of-the-Shark (Nass River), the totem pole called Fin-of-the-Shark (*næremkæt*), of Tsenshut, a chief of an Eagle clan, at Gitwinksihlk, on the canyon of Nass River.

Information. This short pole stood, at one time, in the part of Gitwinksihlk known under the name of Gitsæq, where the Larh-tsemælih (On-the-Beaver) lived. As was his right, Tsenshut was getting ready to erect a tall Fin-of-the-Shark, a memorial column with one of his clan crests. But the ambitious Hladerh, Wolf chief at Gitrhadeen, lower on the river, objected to its length. He would not stand anybody but himself to raise such a long pole, which denoted high rank, and ordered Tsenshut to cut it down. This was done, but Hladerh was not yet satisfied. They had to reduce its length a second time.

This happened about 1870, during a period of intense rivalries on lower Nass River. This pole has since disappeared.

(Informant, Charles Barton, a Wolf chief of Gitrhadeen, in 1927.)



Haida house and house-front pole, at Skidegate

The Dog-fish Pole of Lukawt at Skidegate (Haida), described by J. R. Swanton (97: 123, and Plate I, Fig. 2).

The pole represented in Plate I, Fig. 2, belonged to Lukawt, chief of the Seaward-Squohladas, and stood at Skidegate. His wife was of the Rotten-House-People. The Dog-fish at the top, with its tail standing up straight and its head brought out forward, as well as the Raven immediately beneath it, belonged to her; while the Killer-Whale at the bottom, which has its tail folded up below, was her husband's crest.