

## THE CANNIBAL OR MOSQUITO

TLINGIT

**The Cannibal Myth**, as communicated verbally by Edward L. Keithahn to the author, in 1947.

The Cannibal on the totem pole in Klini's house, the Frog House of Klukwan, was a giant 16 feet tall. Whenever the fisher folk dried their salmon, the giant would come down from the mountains, devour the salmon on the rocks, and the people would starve. Armed men were sent against it, but its skin was so tough that it could not be killed. It now preyed upon the people, devouring them, until half of the tribe was destroyed.

The survivors held a council and decided to protect themselves. They went into the mountains looking for the monster. A community house they saw was billowing red smoke through the smoke-hole. They realized that this was the home of the cannibal. They dug a deep pit such as the hunters do when they hunt grizzly bears. At the bottom of the pit they strung a sinew net. Then they covered the hole with poles and forest debris. In the morning, one of them went to the house to draw the enemy out. When he appeared, his baiter ran away and skipped lightly over the hidden trap, followed by the giant. The big fellow fell in and enmeshed himself in the net. As he was lying helpless at the bottom, the men heaped dry branches on top of him, and set them on fire. When he grasped that they wanted him to die in there, he cried out that it was not in their power to destroy him. He would go on eating them even if they burnt him to cinders. To make sure that he could not accomplish his boast, they kept the brazier burning for four days and four nights. When they let the fire die down, only ashes were left at the bottom of the pit. With a long pole they stirred the ashes, to be sure that nothing was left of the Cannibal. Sparks flew up and changed into mosquitoes, which at once began to bite them and draw their blood.

They realized that the threat had come true. It was Cloo-teekhl or Gurhtihl that had come back in the form of mosquitoes still to bite and harass them. They carved a picture of him holding in his arms an emaciated child, half-frog and half-human. It was the house post of Klukwan. Since that day, the members of Klini's Frog House at Klukwan have fed the carved figure. The Eagle sits under the giant on the post. At the bottom are the Bear and the Wolf.

The top figure belongs to the head of the house; crests at the bottom are the wife's own.

**The Cannibal Goo-Teekhl of Klukwan**, as photographed in 1893 by Lloyd V. Winter, reproduced by Edward L. Keithahn (62:136).

(E.L.K.) The image of the cannibal giant Goo-teekhl (to left) is fed daily and on all ceremonial occasions in the belief that fortune favors those who recognize his power and immortality. The New Duk-toothl pole (right) was carved by Indians under Forest Service direction when the old pole rotted beyond repair.



Cannibal giant, at Klukwan

**The Giant Cannibal of Klukwan**  
(*Goo-Teekhl*) owned by John Shorty. Recorded and photographed by William L. Paul, of Juneau, Alaska.

About 8 or 10 feet high, it is the companion statue to the Cannibal Giant and the child. The Cannibal, whose face is human, has hands and feet in the style of a quadruped. The smaller woman, in front and unclad, is well and realistically carved. Both of these posts were transferred from an old community house to a modern habitation.

This mythical being, a familiar theme among the Tlingits of parts of Alaska, is shown holding a child in his or her arms; the child seems to be in torment. The greasy spots on the carving are due to the statue still being fed at times with oily foods from the sea. About 8 or 9 feet high, it is one of a pair, in the style of a Wrangell carver, who is supposed, in the early 1880's, to have been the author of both, as well as of carvings of the same quality in Shaiks' house on the Island at Wrangell.

The subject of the Cannibal Giant of the Tlingit is one of the most familiar with the Nimkish and other Kwakiutl tribes of Vancouver Island far to the south, but not displayed among the Tsimshyans and the Haidas. It may have been transferred, like the Raven and the Sun, the Thunderbird and other features, by the Hunt family, whose passage from Tongas and Port Simpson to Fort Rupert about 1840 may account for this transfusion of mythology and crests.

This figure of the Cannibal and the Child was later adapted to marble by a white carver for the graveyard at Klukwan, with the engraved name of *Tool-cutch-a-koo-nook* (a photograph of which was also communicated by William L. Paul).

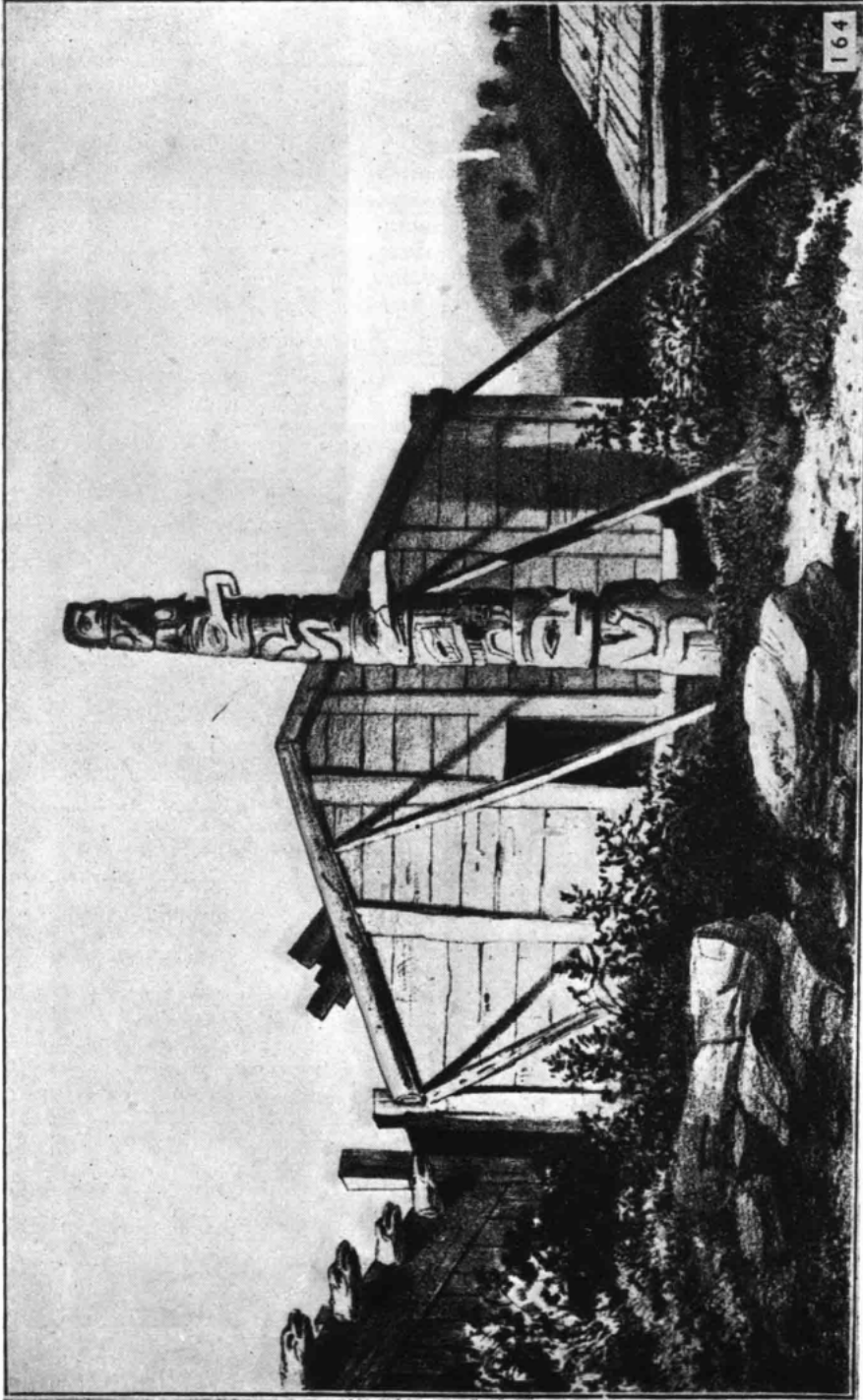


Cannibal of the Whale House, at Klukwan



Glass-Nose on a Wolf totem pole of the Niskæes

Cannibal on a tombstone, in the Klukwan graveyard



Totem pole in front of a Tsimshian house, Port Simpson



Sea-Lion pole, on the island of Port Simpson

Totem pole of the Tsimshyans, at Port Simpson

## THE CANNIBAL OR MOSQUITO

KWAKIUTL

**The Tsonoqoa** of the totem poles of the Kwakiutls, as described by Dr. Franz Boas (21:372).

A being which figures largely in the clan legends of the Kwakiutl is the Tsonoqoa, a wild woman who resides in the woods. She is represented as having enormous breasts and as carrying a basket, into which she puts children whom she steals in order to eat them. Her eyes are hollow and shine with a wild lustre. She is asleep most of the time. Her mouth is pushed forward, as she is, when awake, constantly uttering her cry, "ũ, hũ, ũ, ũ". This figure belongs to a great many clan legends, and is often represented on house posts or on masks.

The following tradition describes this spirit quite fully:

The first of the Lasqenorh lived at Rhanrh. On the one side of the river lived the clan Wisentsa. One day the children went across the river to play there. They made a house of fir branches and played in it. One of the boys went out of the house and he discovered a giantess who was approaching the house. He told his friends, who came running out of the house. The giantess was chewing gum which was as red as blood. The children wanted to have some of the gum. Then she called them and gave them some. They asked her: "Where do you get your gum?" "Come," she replied, "I will point it out to you." Then the children crept into the basket which she carried on her back, and she went into the woods. She was Tsonoqoa. She carried them far into the woods. Then she put the gum on their eyes and carried them to her house. She was a cannibal. Among the children were two sons of the chief of the Wisentsa; Lopekarhstelil was the name of the chief. His wife was Lewagilayuqoa. Then she cried, and sometimes she would blow her nose and throw the mucus on the ground. Suddenly she discovered a little boy lying on his back on the floor. He had originated from the mucus of her nose. She took the boy up and carried him into the house. He grew very quickly; after four days he was quite strong. Then he asked for a bow and two arrows. Now he was called Lendeqoayatsawal. When he had received his bow and arrows, Lewagilayuqoa asked him not to go across the river, but he did so against her request. He followed the trail which he found on the other side. He came to a house and entered. There he saw children sitting on the floor, and a woman named Lopekarhstelil, who was rooted to the floor. The latter spoke: "Don't stay long, Chief! She is gone after water; if she should come back, she would kill you." Then he went out and followed the trail. All of a sudden he saw the Tsonoqoa coming. She carried a bucket in each hand. The little boy climbed a tree, in order to hide in its branches. The Tsonoqoa saw his image in the water and made love to him. She looked up and discovered him. Then she called him to come down. Now he came down to her and that woman asked him: "How does it happen that you look so pretty?" The boy said: "I put my head between two stones." She replied: "Then I will take two stones too." He sent her to fetch two stones and soon she came back carrying them. She put them down. The boy said: "Now lie down on your back." Then the boy put the one stone under her head and told her to shut her eyes. Then he took the other stone and dropped it as hard as he could on her head. Her head was smashed and her brains were scattered. She was dead. The boy broke her bones with the stones and threw them into the water. Then he went into her house. As soon as he had entered, the woman who was rooted to the floor said: "Now do not stay long. I know that you have tried to kill the Tsonoqoa. It is the fourth time that somebody tried to kill her. She never dies. There in that covered hemlock branch (knothole?) is her life. Go there, and as soon as you see her enter, shoot her. Then she will be dead." She had hardly finished speaking when the Tsonoqoa came in, singing as she walked:

I have the magical treasure,  
I have the supernatural power,  
I can return to life.

That was her song. Then the boy shot her and she fell dead. Then the boy took her and threw her into the hole in which she was planning to roast the children. He washed their eyes with urine and took them home to Rhanrh. They were all alive again. Then Lendeqoayatsawal went back to heaven.

**The Wakius Pole of Alert Bay**, in Stanley Park, Vancouver, explained by the Rev. G. H. Raley (118:12-15).

This is what might be termed a composite house-pole, in as much as two legends are read into the symbols and both tell of the wise and valiant Chief Nan-wa-ka-wie, who feared naught but the cannibal giant of the "Forbidden Valley."



Tsonoqoa, at Alert Bay

Nan-wa-ka-wie had four grown-up sons, who asked if they might go into the Forbidden Valley to hunt mountain-goat. Their father gave his permission, but warned them to beware of the giant who lived there. Before they departed he placed in the hands of Tawik, his oldest son, four magic articles — a comb, a black stone, skin bottle of fish oil, and a piece of wool — which were to be used only in case of extreme danger.

They ventured forth at noon, and evening found them encamped on a low mountain ridge which divided their father's country from the Forbidden Valley. A view of surpassing beauty met their eyes as they gazed down the valley, through which a river of molten





Tsonoqoa, at Alert Bay

silver slowly wound its way. Upon its bank were houses, and they were quick to notice the smoke rising from them of different colors. White smoke indicated the abode of the mountain sheep; black, that of the black bear; brown, of the brown bear; and grey, of the terrible grizzly bear. In the distance was a dwelling apart, from the smoke-hole ascended a column of smoke red as blood. This they knew to be the home of the giant cannibal, Bax-ba-kaw-la-nux-si-wie. In spite of his father's warning Tawik led his brothers to it. Their eyes accustoming themselves to the gloom of the interior, they glimpsed through the open door a fat ugly woman and a boy seated on the farther side of the fire. Cautiously they stepped within, and the woman motioned them to a seat on a log near the fire. The boy became restless as he looked at them. Tawik asked the woman what was wrong. Pointing to his leg, scratched by a thorn bush during the journey and down which blood was trickling, she said:

"My son sees blood on your leg and wants it."

The mother tried to restrain her son, but without avail, and he commenced to lick the blood.

Then the young men knew they must make their escape without delay and managed it by a cunning ruse. Tawik took his bow and shot an arrow through the doorway, telling his younger brother to go after it. This he did, and ran homeward as fast as he could. A second and third arrow were shot, and the other brothers were sent after them. Then the woman got suspicious of their absence and asked if they were not coming back. Tawik told her, "They have gone to fetch my arrows." Then he shot a fourth arrow and followed it himself.

When he did not return the woman stepped outside and shouted to her husband, the giant, who was at work some distance from the house, "Bax-ba-kaw-la-nux-si-wie, our good dinner has run away." On hearing this, the cannibal set off in pursuit of the young men.

When Tawik heard his peculiar whistle-like breathing and knew he was approaching, he took the magic comb his father had given him and stuck it into the ground behind him. It was immediately transformed into a tangled mass of thorn bushes, which delayed the giant. So soon as he scrambled through the thicket, he gained on the brothers with every step. As he drew near again, Tawik threw the black stone over his shoulder. This was transformed into a towering cliff, down which the giant had to find a safe place to descend. Reaching the ground, mad with delay, he raced after the youths, and the third magic article, the small bottle of oil, was poured on the ground. This was transformed into a lake. While the giant lost time getting around it, the young men recovered their wind, and fleetly sped on. Once again they heard his heavy breathing close behind them, so Tawik let go the only thing which now stood between them and a horrible death, the magic wool. Floating in the air behind them appeared a dense black fog, through which the giant stumbled blindly. The boys gained distance, for it was clear in front. At last they were on the home stretch, and with a great burst of speed the race for life was won. As they ran through the door of their home, it was snapped closed behind them and securely barred, just as the ogre, beside himself with rage, repeatedly flung himself against it in a vain attempt to force an entrance.

Nan-wa-ka-wie called to him, "Bax-ba-kwa-la-nux-si-wie, fierce one, come again four days hence, and you shall have two of my sons to eat."

With a growl the giant agreed and left them in peace.

Meanwhile, Nan-wa-ka-wie called his slaves and had them dig a deep pit on one side of the fire. This was partly concealed by a settee without feet. The front of the seat rested on the ground; the back overhung the pit and was braced by two wooden props, the remainder of the pit being covered with cedar branches.

After four days the giant returned, bringing with him his wife and son. They were received with savage dignity and given, as the seat of honor, the settee beside the fire. While the feast was being prepared, Nan-wa-ka-wie entertained his unwelcome visitors with stories. The drone of his voice, the heat of the fire, and the weariness of the journey made them drowsy, and the magic sleep song did the rest. Soon his guests were fast asleep. At a sign from their father, the two younger boys, who had been concealed, came forth and knocked the props from the back of the settee and turned it over, throwing the guests into the pit. Some slave poured boiling water on them, while others with wooden tongs took red hot stones from the fire and cast them upon Bax-ba-kwa-la-nux-si-wie, his wife and son, as they died in torment.

The following morning, their bodies were taken from the pit, cut into small pieces and cremated. Nan-wa-ka-wie gathered up their ashes and scattered them upon the wind,

saying as he did so: "Bax-ba-kwa-la-nux-si-wie, you shall pursue men for all time and in all places."

And so it came to pass, that the ashes of the cannibal and his family were transformed into mosquitoes, black flies, sand flies, and all the biting insects which annoy mankind. So it is to this day the giant cannibal has vengeance on the people. And it is said that the four magic articles, so opportunely transformed into the dense growth of underbrush, the steep cliff, the lake, and the fog, can yet be found on the mainland, north of Queen Charlotte Sound.

**The Tsonerhwaw Giant** in a summary of a long tale given by Daniel Cranmer of Alert Bay. Recorded in 1947.

They saw that Tsonerhwaw is a giant woman with deep-set eyes and almost blind. She is apt to lapse into a sleep if you wave your finger before her eyes in a circle.

Many children once were playing on the playgrounds. One of them, a little boy named Tsemgyarhta, was disliked by the others, and kept out of the games. As he was approaching them while they were playing, he saw a giant. He cried out to them: "What is it I see? A big woman lies close to the tree over there." "Ah! he is telling lies just to have a chance to come and join us again."

They turned away from him and went back to their fun. Once more Tsemgyarhta warned them, but they did not even stop to listen. The giant then came towards them. It is said that as soon as you see this monster, you are scared stiff and cannot move. This is what happened to the young players.

On her back the Tsonerhwaw had a large basket hanging from her neck. She caught the players one by one and cast them into her basket. First among them, at the bottom of the basket, was Tsemgyarhta. The others were on top of him. When the giant had gathered them all she started with her load for her home in the woods. Tsemgyarhta happened to have a little knife. With it he cut a hole at the bottom of the basket through which he slipped out. Thus they all made their escape (the full story gives the details). After this the children loved little Tsemgyarhta and were happy to play with him.

The Tsonerhwaw was used by the chiefs in the potlatches. They carved feasting bowls with her figure on it, her breasts hanging down to her knees. This bowl was about 16 feet long and 3 feet wide, and it was filled with food. The chief would announce: "Here is the dish you can eat out of!" And the food was distributed to the guests. This dish was not an old one; it had been made out of cedar by the informant's uncle. A Tsonerhwaw bowl of Alert Bay was sold to Axel Rasmussen for the Skagway museum. (The informant learned this tale from his grandmother and other grandparents, who were in the habit of telling stories to keep the children quiet.)

## THE CANNIBAL OR MOSQUITO

### AT LARGE

**The Cannibal; its Siberian Origin (Holmberg).** The huge cannibal of the Tlingits is a concept familiar among the Tsimsyans under modified features. There it is the large Cutting-Nose or Glass-Beak or again Split-Person. The Cannibal or Glass-Beak whose ashes changed to mosquitoes after its incineration, appears frequently on the totem poles of both nations.

It seems to have by-passed the Haidas and proceeded down the coast to the Kwakiutl country, there to retain its Tlingit identity. But this diffusion of a folklore theme presumably is due, like that of the Thunderbird, the Raven and the Sun, and the custom of erecting large totems, to the agency of the Hunt family and of young Tongas-Tlingit women married to white traders who were transferred by the Hudson's Bay Company from Port Simpson to Fort Rupert, about a hundred years ago.

Whatever may have been the precise development of the Cannibal theme in the northern Rockies, it remains strikingly similar to its prototypes in Asia as a few quotations from "The Origin of the Mosquito" by Uno Holmberg. (115:386-389) will show.

The Yenisei Ostiaks declare that a cannibalistic demon woman, Khosadam, living in the farthest north, created the mosquitoes. Many other Siberian peoples have a special myth to explain their origin.

The Ostiak Samoyeds tell of a hero named Itje, whose parents had been devoured by a man-eating giant named Punegusse. He himself succeeded in escaping and making his way to a desert, where he was brought up by his relations. When he had grown to be a strong and heroic youth, he decided to free his people from this demon from the north. He succeeded in killing it, but the demon kept on being born again. He resolved therefore to burn up the carcass of the man-eater, but even in the fire the demon continued to exist. Its jaws ground against each other when the fire had burnt out, and its voice cried out that even when burnt up it would continue to plague mankind. The wind would scatter its ashes into the air, whence they would everywhere suck the blood of men. From these ashes the innumerable mosquitoes of Siberia arise each summer.

In a Samoyed variant a small black bird is born of the flesh of Punegusse. This bird is called "a bit of Punegusse's flesh."

Among the Ostiaks of the river Vach this story runs briefly as follows: A great bird once caught a great pike and gave it to its sister to cook. The latter prepared instead a meal of dog's offal, which so enraged the bird that it flew away until at last it came to the man-eater. Finding the hut empty, the bird ate its fill of a large kettle of fat, but was caught by the man-eater. To save its own life the bird promised its sister in marriage to the giant and was set free. It then hurried home and to save its sister, fastened the door so that only a small hole was left. The man-eater, coming for his bride, tried to get through this hole, but stuck fast there. The bird then killed him with a great knife and set fire to the house. The body of the man-eater was burnt to ashes, but here also the spirit spoke, foretelling that its ashes would each summer be born anew as mosquitoes and would continue to live on the flesh of men.

According to a Yakut cannibal myth, the man-eating giant was burnt up, and from the fragments of his bones all kinds of destructive insects, and also frogs and snails were born. Karaty-Khan vanquishes a demon, grinds it into fragments and throws these into the air, thus giving birth to mosquitoes and other insects.

Far away to the east, among the Goldes, tales of a similar character are met with. These tell of two sisters who lived in the same hut. The women now came forward and broke the demon into pieces with hammers, scattering the pieces in all directions. While doing so, they said: "Man-eater, thou fedst thyself on human flesh, may the pieces of thy flesh and thy bones change into small insects, which like thee shall eat human blood. Of the smallest fragments may gnats be born, of those a little larger, mosquitoes, and of the largest, flies, beetles, etc." Immediately great clouds of insects arose, which spread over the earth.

The Goldes have still another tale related to this: A brother and sister lived in a hut in peace. Once when the brother came home from the forest, he noticed that his sister had altered considerably. He began to suspect that some one kept company with her. For this reason, he strewed ashes outside the hut when setting off again on a hunting trip. While singing she said: "I have lived with the tiger, he is my husband, his spirit is in me; thou canst not kill me, but if thou wilt cut off my little finger, I shall die." The brother cut off his sister's little finger and when she was dead, built a large log-fire and threw the body on to it. While the body was burning, instead of sparks, all kinds of evil spirits in the form of birds and insects flew out of the fire.



Tsonoqoa, at Alert Bay

Cannibal myths of this description, which are to be found also among the Tungus, and are extremely characteristic of the more northern peoples of Siberia, have been noted down also on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. As in Siberia, North American Indian myths tell of the birth of blood-sucking insects from the ashes of a man-eater. It seems probable, therefore, that these primitive tales have a common origin.

**The Cannibal-Woman among the Koriaks**, according to Waldemar Jochelson (116:352).

The frequent episode in Indian tales of the origin of mosquitoes, flies, frogs, or snakes, etc., from the body, bones, or ashes, of spirits, cannibals, or shamans, is found not only in Yukaghir tales, but also in Mongol-Turk traditions.

I will point out here one more passage, common to the Indian and Mongol-Turk tales. A monster woman or a deity is described in the myths of the Bella Coola Indians as a cannibal, who inserts her long snout in the ears of man and sucks out his brain. She is afterwards transformed into mosquitoes. In a Buryat variant of Gesser we find a similar episode. A monster bee, monster wasp, and a monster snake are sent one after another to the infant they split into small pieces, which become bees, wasps, and snakes.

**The Giantess among the Chukchees, and the Koriaks**, according to Waldemar Jochelson (116:374).

A giantess carries away children in a basket, but they succeed in making good their escape (Bogoras, *Amer. Anthropologist*, p. 623).

Coasts of Northern and Southern British Columbia. — A monster-woman does the same (Boas, *Indianische Sagen*, pp. 57, 110, 224, 241, 249).

**The Magic Flight and Strewn Obstacles**, among other North American Tribes and the Koriaks, according to Waldemar Jochelson (116:369-370).

Some ornaments are thrown backward in order to detain pursuers (p. 219).

Kutka defecates all kinds of berries in order to detain pursuers; (Steller, p. 263).

Eme'mqut throws some berries into the boat of his pursuers in order to detain them (p. 286).

Coast of Northern British Columbia — The pursuer is detained by throwing in his way some things belonging to his child (Boas, *Indianische Sagen*, p. 210).

Stars pursue fugitives, who throw away tobacco, paint, and sling-stones. The Stars stop and paint their faces (Boas, *Tsimshian Texts*, p. 92).

Also widely known on the Great Plains.

West Coast of Hudson Bay — The father of a girl who is being pursued by her husband tells her to throw backward various things in order to delay the pursuit (Boas, *Baffin-Land Eskimo*, p. 318).

Cumberland Sound — A man pursued by a monster makes a great many berries by means of sorcery. The monster sees them, stops, and eats a great many (Ibid. p. 177).

European — In the Greek legend of the Argonauts, Medea and Jason, pursued in their flight by Medea's father, kill her brother, and scatter the fragments of his body on the sea. Her father pausing for the burial of the remains, they gain time for their escape.

The magic flight, or the throwing-back by pursued people of different objects, such as a chip of wood, a stone, etc., which turn into a forest, a mountain-ridge, or a river (pp. 112, 187, 257).

Coasts of Northern and Southern British Columbia — A pursued deer throws back a piece of fat, which turns into a lake; he then throws some of his hair, which turns into woods (Boas, *Indianische Sagen*, p. 187) (See also, pp. 99, 164, 224, 240, 268).

Cumberland Sound — For a similar episode, see Boas, *Baffin-Land Eskimo*, p. 177.

Central Eskimo — A similar episode (Boas, *Central Eskimo*, p. 619).

Athapascan — Pursued men throw parts of a caribou stomach over their shoulders, which are transformed into mountains (Boas, *Traditions of the Ts'ets'ut*, p. 260).

Coast of Washington — Wild-cat, pursued by a woman-monster, turns his dog into a mountain, which the old woman has to climb (Farrand, *Quinault Indians*, p. 116).

Samoyed (Siberia) — Two women, pursued by cannibal, throw back a comb and a steel of a strike-a-light, which turn into a forest and a mountain (Castren, *Ethnologische Vorlesungen*, p. 165).

Russian — Episodes of the magic flight are found in the tales of Russians on the Kolyma and Anadyr Rivers, and of the Russianized Yukaghir (Bogoras, *Anthropologist*, p. 673).