

TSIMSYAN MYTHS

which he presented his nephews and nieces and also adopted the Marhlek-peel crest. This crest was used as a house-front painting and on the dancing garments. That is why the Gitwilgyawt have Haida connections, even to this day, and frequently intermarry among them.

THE BEAVER HAT

(Narrative collected by William Beynon, in 1954, from John Tate, Sælaben, of the leading Eagle clan of the Gisparhlots tribe of the Tsimshyan, Port Simpson.)

While the people were living at Na'a (now Loring), Alaska, a long way from here (Port Simpson), there were two villages. Onë belonged to the Raven (Kanhade) group, and the other, opposite, to the Eagle group. These two groups intermarried and lived peacefully together. One of the Raven clan (Kanhade) princesses married an Eagle clan chief, who was a jealous man. He used to beat her, accusing her of infidelity. One day, the woman was chatting with one of the chief's young nephews when her husband unexpectedly appeared. In a fit of jealousy he stabbed her. She ran out bleeding and made good her escape to her own village, where she dropped dead in front of her uncle's house. Her uncle at once planned to be avenged for his niece's death. He secretly hid her corpse away, so that those in the opposite village would not know anything of it.

Now this dead princess had a sister who was her exact double, and the chief meant to use her as a decoy. Every day, this sister would go down to the water-hole, where everybody addressed her as if she were the married princess. The Raven clan chief made it known discreetly that his niece had recovered after being stabbed by her Eagle husband but would not return to him.

Hearing these reports, the Eagle chief was anxious to be reunited with his estranged wife. He sent various women over to intercede for him. "Tell her I will not do her any harm if she will come back to me." To these entreaties, the young woman, who was impersonating her dead sister, replied, "Why does he not come himself, then I might listen to him." This would have been far beneath the pride of so great a chief. He would not come and intercede for himself. Even for his marriage, in the first place, he had sent people to intercede for him; he had not personally made overtures to her. Now she insisted that he himself should come and promise personally not to injure her. It is true that she was a clever woman and a beautiful one as well. That is why the chief did not want to lose her. So one day, very secretly, as he did not want his people to see him going in person to beg his wife's return to his house, he went out for an ordinary stroll. It was about dusk. As he drew near the water-hole, where both villages drew water, he saw her who he thought

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was his wife, but who, in reality, was his dead wife's sister. He followed her and spoke to her, "I want you to come back. I will not ill-treat you any more. Never again will I injure you." "I do not trust you," she said. "If what you say is true, you will come to my uncle's house and sleep with me. But you must not touch me, as I am not yet quite recovered from my injuries." Thinking it was his wife to whom he was speaking, the chief answered, "I will go and sleep with you, and I will not touch you, as you say. In this way I will show to all that we are reconciled to each other."



10A. Husband and wife carried by Whale to the other world.



10B. Opposite side of 10A.

That night, the Eagle chief came to his wife's sleeping place to spend the night with her. As he had promised, he did not touch her but went to sleep. When he was sound asleep, the brother of the murdered woman came and cut off his head. The body was put on a drying rack above the entrance to the house, and the head was placed there also.

At first the Eagle people did not think seriously of the absence of their chief. They thought he had gone on a visit of reconciliation to his wife and that he would return soon. But after he had been gone many days, and no one had seen anything of him, they began to suspect treachery. Rumours trickled in that the chief's wife really had died of her injuries and that her husband had been lured over and had been killed in retaliation.

To find out the truth, the Eagle people sent over spies to endeavour to detect what had happened to their chief. These spies visited every house of the Kanhade, but no trace of the chief was found. One day, a slave went over to get fire by lighting her pitch torch at the house where they suspected their chief had gone. The slave woman came in and said "My master's fire has become extinguished. He has sent me to light my torch at your fire." She was in no hurry but gossiped with other servants of the house, at the same time taking in the contents of the house. Seeing nothing to arouse her suspicions, she arose, after lighting her torch, and headed for the doorway. As she

passed under the drying rack over the house entrance, drops of blood fell on her foot. She did not stop to examine it but went on out. When she saw that it was blood, she purposely stumbled and fell in the snow, thus extinguishing her pitch torch. She returned to the house and told them, "In my hurry, I stumbled. Falling down, I have extinguished my torch." She sat by the fire for a while, recovering from the shock and preparing a second torch. While she was doing this, she looked up to the drying rack above the doorway, and behold she saw the head of her Eagle chief and his body. She remained calm and didn't get excited but carefully lighted her torch. Then she left to return to her master's house. When she got there, she began to weep and cry out, "They have killed my master. I have seen his body and his head. It is on the drying rack above the door."

The Eagles now knew that the woman's people had retaliated for killing the princess, the wife of their chief. But they feared that, as the Kanhade outnumbered them, any hasty action by any of their quick-tempered young men might endanger them. If they acted hastily, they would place the Eagle people in a risky position. The Kanhade, on their part, were already prepared. They knew that the spies had been looking for their missing chief and that when the slave woman had pretended to stumble, she really had seen the remains of her chief on the rack. They were all ready for any drastic action. The Eagle wise men gathered together with their tribesmen and cautioned them "We must consider carefully anything we may do, as we are fewer in numbers than the Kanhade people. They can overcome us easily. We must make, if we can, an attack which will take them by surprise. Then we must be prepared for flight. Those on the other side already know that we have found out what happened to our chief, so we have to be careful how we act." To this advice the young quick-tempered warriors gave little heed. They at once made preparations for an attack on the Kanhade to try to capture the remains of their chief. Knowing the plans of these hot-headed young warriors, the calmer leaders made ready for flight.

The next night, a number of these young Eagles made a surprise raid on the house in which the remains of their chief were being kept. They were able to escape with the body and to burn the house down in retaliation. As soon as the Eagles who had remained behind knew what had happened, they ran away and went on down the coast. Some of them were killed by their enemies, but most of them managed to escape. They took away with them their many copper shields and also their stone eagles—a large one, a middle-sized one, and a small one which was called the child of the large and middle-sized Eagles.

The first night of their escape, they arrived at another Kanhade village but were afraid to land there. So they anchored early in the evening in order to go by during the night when all in the camp would be asleep. They anchored their canoes, using as an anchor their copper shields tied together.

They were asleep in their canoes when their leader Nees'wamak suddenly woke up and saw in the darkening light many canoes approaching. These he knew at once to be the Kanhade. So he called out, "They are coming! Awaken, all of you!" The water was very deep, and it was too late to pull up their anchor of copper shields, so to escape their pursuers they cut the anchor lines and paddled away.



11. Grizzly and young woman.

The next night they anchored as they had done the night before; they were afraid to make a camp anywhere near, as they did not know when a sudden attack would come upon them in a strange country. Having no other anchor but the large stone Eagle, their most important possession, they used it. It was the symbol of the power of their Eagle clan. All were soon asleep. Just before daybreak, the Eagle chief Rhpeelk awoke and saw canoes approaching in the dim light. So he called, "Awaken everyone! The attackers are upon us again. Pull up the anchor!" This stone anchor was very heavy, and the pursuing Kanhade were too close to them, so they had to cut away the stone anchor, their most valuable possession. There was great grief among the fugitives. They escaped their enemies. Rhpeelk, the older of the two chiefs, was the second leader, the other was Nees'wamak.

Soon they came to an island which was somewhat out to sea, away from the mainland. There they went to seek shelter and rest. A young prince took a small canoe and his halibut hooks, and he went to try to get fish some distance from the shore of the island. He dropped his hooks in the water and began chanting his fishing chant. "Come, great lady! Come big-mouthed lady, come! I have prepared this hook only for you." He kept repeating his chant.

His purpose was to antagonize the halibut, who would bite the halibut hook. This way of fishing was called *tkidedælkask*.¹ While he was fishing, an immense halibut emerged from the water, and opening its huge mouth, it swallowed the canoe and the prince. When he found himself inside the halibut, the prince took his shell knife and cut to pieces the insides of the monster, which died and floated up. The Eagle chief Rhpeelk noticed that all along the back of this supernatural Halibut were small human faces. The Eagles towed it to shore and cut it open. There they found their prince and his canoe inside. Rhpeelk adopted this Prince of Halibut as a crest.

They now travelled on and came to another place, where they anchored. They were still fleeing from the pursuing Kanhade. This time they used the two smaller stone Eagles for anchors. The same thing happened. The Kanhade descended upon them. They did not have time to pull the stone anchors up, and so lost them in the way they had lost their other treasures. Barely escaping their pursuers, they sought refuge in a long inlet. There they rested while a great storm arose outside.

While here, Rhpeelk went up into the hills. He was very downhearted and sad because of the plight his people were in. Some had perished; others had gone over to the other Eagle villages they had encountered on the way. Now there were only a few left. While he was thus wandering about in the woods, he came upon a lake in which he saw many beaver huts. He sat down by the edge of the lake, and while he was sitting there, a huge Beaver emerged. Rhpeelk saw on its back several human heads. Its tail had a large human head, like a hat. It was shaped like a gnawed stick, and in each groove were abalone pearls. At the sight of this, he knew that it was meant for him as a crest, for he already had the Beaver as a symbol. Now he was just receiving the Beaver Hat (*Kaidam Stsawlt*).

He returned to his people and told them of his experience and announced that the Beaver Hat was another of his crests. So he now had two new crests, the Prince of Halibut and the Beaver Hat.

As the Kanhade people had now given up the pursuit, the Eagles made camp. They heard of two rivers, each full of fish, and of the many valleys full of game and food. These places they decided to look for. So they set out and soon arrived at the mouth of the Nass River. Here they found on the shore a dead monster, like a large whale. This they called Lawrom-Gibelk, and the chiefs of the Eagles took it as another crest. It was like a huge whale. Along its back and on its fins were many human faces.

When the Eagles reached the mouth of the Nass River, some members of this group separated from the others. Menæsk, Hlerh, and Trhalarhæth, together with their own individual houses, joined the Niskæ tribes. The rest

¹ *tiki*: (down), *dadælkask* (speaking). To speak down at the halibut. *'ni'ni* (this), *t'in* (which), *gwenidzen* (shows), *na* (the), *Katgyæde* (strength), *welnæt'ahle* (group of), *larhskeek* (on the Eagle): This was what showed the powers of the Eagle clan.

of the group proceeded down to the Skeena River. These were the house heads. They joined the Gisparhlots, whose chief at that time was Læt, a Gispewudwade. Some of this Eagle group joined the Gitandaw, whose chief



12. Grizzlies and young woman.

was Gyæhluk, also a Gispewudwade. The Eagles afterwards intermarried with the other tribes. They became very numerous and powerful. Soon the progeny of Læt and Gyæhluk became nearly extinct. So their places among

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the Gisparhlots were taken by Rhpeelk and Nees'wamak. Among the Gitandaw, Gyæhluk was replaced by Skagwayt and Guhlrhærh. Guhlrhæh eventually went to the Gitsalas tribe and became the Eagle chief there. Soon Legyærh, who was the son of a sister of Nees'wamak and who had been taken captive by the Wudstæ tribe, returned to the Gisparhlots and brought back with him the Wudstæ name of Legyærh.¹ Because of Legyærh's success as a war leader and because of his wealth, he soon was recognized as the leading chief of all the Tsimcyan. For all the feasts Legyærh was the first chief called out. He also had the privilege of being the last chief to enter a feast house. He would often hold up a feast purposely, to show his privilege, which had been proclaimed and recognized by all the people. His foremost head-dress was the Beaver Hat, which Rhpeelk had acquired while escaping the Kanhade.

Many have challenged the strength of Legyærh's position as head-chief of the Tsimcyan. But he has overcome them all by great displays of wealth. He has strengthened his position to this day. A former Legyærh had a painting representing himself on a high cliff at the entrance to the Nass River, at Ktsiyaurhl, known as Ten Mile Point. Here, at one time, all the Tsimcyan and Gitrhahla, Gitsalas, Gitra'ata, and Niskæ were the guests of Legyærh at the feast where he showed his cliff painting.

STRONG MAN WHO HOLDS UP THE WORLD

(Recorded by William Beynon, in 1952, from Sam Bennet, Ninspins, a Gispewudwade of the Gilodzau tribe; aged 75, at Metlakatla.)

Ages ago, when all the Tsimcyan were living at Metlakatla Passage and at Gadu, on the present cemetery site at Metlakatla stood the Gitzarhlæhl village. The chief had four sons. Three of them were very active, but the fourth, the youngest, appeared to be very lazy and also indifferent to everything. Nothing seemed to interest him. His brothers were very industrious and were foremost in all activities. In wrestling they overcame everybody, and in rock-putting they also outdid all competitors. In hunting they were unsurpassed. At all times they made fun of their young dirty brother, who was lazy and dirty and always slept in the ashes beside the fire. He would never take a cleansing bath but would be content to lie by the fire in what looked like filth. Everyone in the house made fun of him and rebuked him for his laziness, but he never paid any attention to what they said.

It was now the time when the people would go and hunt the sea-lions at an island away out to sea. Only the strongest and quickest could take part. The island was a bare one. A high sea always ran, and one mistake by the hunter would mean his death. He must be able to climb and grasp the huge

¹Legyærh, meaning Great Cliff.