

THE LEGEND OF TAUQUITCH AND ALGOOT.

by George Wharton James

Journal of American Folk-Lore XVI, No. 62, pp. 153-9.

[1903]

THE LEGEND OF TAUQUITCH AND ALGOOT.

MOUNT SAN JACINTO is a most notable mountain in Southern California. On a clear day its bold nature-battlemented summit is clearly to be seen from the hills near Los Angeles, eighty miles away. It is a mountain around which science, romance, tradition, and history are equally located. Science sees in it one of the determining causes of the paradisaical climate of Southern California--a desert on one side, a garden of Eden on the other. It was the centre of the destructive earthquake of Christmas, 1899, and it has long been known as a breeder of seismic troubles.

H. H. in her "Ramona" has made its shoulders the home of her heroine, when she and Alessandro fled from the presuming brutality of the whites. There Alessandro was shot, and there he is buried. The Indians of the region invest the mountain with strange powers, and in its most secret recesses dwells Tauquitch, the evil being of whom I am about to write. Certain noises are heard at times on the mountain, and the superstitious Indians regard these as the groanings of the victims of Tauquitch, or the wild roars of anger of the god as he seeks to frighten the poor wretches he has inveigled into his lair. H. H. thus refers to the heights of San Jacinto, and the noises, and Alessandro's feelings, in "Ramona:" "Safe at last! Oh, yes, very safe; not only against whites, who, because the little valley was so small and bare, would not desire it, but against Indians also. For the Indians, silly things, had a terror of the upper heights of San Jacinto; they believed the devil lived there, and money would not hire one of the Saboba Indians to go so high as this valley which Alessandro had discovered. Fiercely he gloated over each one of these figures of safety in their hiding-place."

And here it was these two persecuted beings came to live, and here Alessandro was shot by Jim Farrar, just as recorded in the novel. This part of the "fictitious story" is literally true.

And the noises! Who can account for them? They exist, and there must be some reasonable scientific theory that explains their existence. Some think that there are internal changes going on within the bowels of the mountain, caused by the more rapid radiation of heat than is common elsewhere. If this be a volcanic centre, though there are no great outward manifestations, internal changes undoubtedly are occurring all the time, and these perhaps take the form of falling masses of rock, which, echoing in the hollow vaults beneath, produce the alarming and terrifying noises.

Others claim that there is a vast limestone cave in the heart of the mountain through which passes chemically charged water that

decomposes the limestone, and that the noises are caused by the falling of walls, the supporting bases of which have been thus decomposed.

In some way these noises have become associated (in the minds of the Indians) with Tauquitch. This evil power made his appearance soon after Uuyot brought the Saboba and kindred peoples to the American shores from across the Great Western Water--the Pacific Ocean--and took up his abode on Mount San Jacinto. Here he lived in a cave, and was guilty of many and great crimes against the people. He had the power of assuming all kinds of disguises, and would inveigle men, women, and children to his lair, where he fell upon them, and ate them.

These fearful practices continued for many years, long, long after Uuyot was dead, and until a new captain of great power was the leader of the Saboba peoples. His name was Algoot. He had a well-beloved son, a young man of fine presence, of frank and generous nature, a leader among the young men, and one upon whom Those Above had smiled. He was a favorite with everybody, and none had a word of unkindness to speak of him.

One day this young man and two of his adventurous companions started to climb up Mount San Jacinto, which, however, in those days, and ever since, to the Indians, has been known only as Tauquitch, the abode of the evil spirit. They were a brave and fearless trio, and laughed to scorn the idea that Tauquitch could do them any harm. They felt they were a match for Tauquitch, and were proof against all his arts of witchcraft, sorcery, and impersonation. With shouts of laughter they scaled the rugged peaks, stopping now and again to look down at the quiet and peaceful villages below, where their people were busily engaged in their regular avocations. Algoot had not been apprised of his son's intention to climb the mountain and brave the demon Tauquitch, and only learned of it accidentally some hours after the youths had departed. At first he felt no fear, but suddenly a deep dread fell upon his soul. What it was he feared he could not tell. It was as if the shadow of some great evil that had happened or was to happen had cast its black pall over his heart. Then fear for his son arose like a bodily presence before him. He reasoned with himself. What, have fear for his strong, brave, and manly son,--he, an athlete, the best runner, and climber, and wrestler, and boxer, and swimmer of the Land of the Sun Down Sea? It was foolish, weak-minded, womanish. Still, all the same, the fear grew instead of diminishing, and finally yielding to it, he determined to set forth, climb Tauquitch, and return only with his son.

His fear and dread grew greater as he climbed higher. Soon

came a blind, unreasonable terror, which lent him wings and superhuman strength. He fairly flew upwards until he reached a quiet little valley, a mile or so below where the noises were heard that were said to emanate from Tauquitch's hidden cave. Here, stretched out as if dead upon the greensward were the two companions of his son, but Algoot's heart grew heavier and heavier as he saw no signs of that beloved form. What could it mean?

Administering restoratives to the young men, he soon brought them back to life, and as they looked around in terror and amazement, Algoot saw that something dreadful had happened to them. They almost fainted again with dread when they saw the rugged spires of Tauquitch peak against the clear afternoon sky. Begging to be allowed to leave the accursed spot before they told what had happened, Algoot, in a frenzy of fear and dread, hurried them along, until he could wait no longer, and then pressed them to tell what had become of his son.

"Oh, Algoot, how shall we tell you, and we ourselves live? Better had it been that Tauquitch had taken all three than to have left two of us to tell you the dreadful news. Your son, ah, Algoot, your son, our friend and companion, never shall we see him again!"

"What!" exclaimed Algoot, in agony and despair, "never see my brave and manly son again? Never see him to whom the sun gave the brightness of his eyes; the giant trees of the northern mountains his straight and stalwart form; the grizzly bear the strength and power of his body; the dove the soft sweetness of his disposition; the fox his stealthiness in following his foes; the fire its scorching power to destroy them; the mockingbird the sweetness of his voice; oh, my boy, my boy, the beloved of my beloved and me, the only son of my loins, shall I never, never see thee again?"

And he listened in mute anguish while the two lads told how that everything had been happy and gay with them until they reached the Tauquitch Valley. Here, suddenly, loud roars and echoing noises were heard. They were affrighted and wished to return, but the son of Algoot declared he had not come so far to retreat at the first sound of danger. As he was speaking, the heavens were overcast, and suddenly a brilliant flash of lightning came, followed by greater darkness, denser clouds, loud thunders, and more lightnings. But undaunted the young man continued his journey, regardless of the appeals of his friends until, suddenly, in a loud clap of thunder and in the brilliancy of long-continued lightning, the monster appeared before them. Almost dead with the fear that seized them at the awful appearance of the frightful demon, they were just able to recognize what happened. With one fierce sweep of his band, in which he held a rawhide-covered battle-axe, he smote down the brave and

fearless youth, who had thus laughingly rushed to his doom. With his skull crushed in he must have died instantly, but that was nothing to what followed. Picking the dead body up in his hands as if he were a merest nothing, he pulled an arm out of its socket, and slinging the body over his shoulder, marched back to his cave eating the still warm flesh of his victim, the blood covering his hands and jaws. As the two youths looked upon the horrid sight and heard the crunching of the bones between his teeth, they fainted, and knew nothing more until they came to consciousness with Algoot standing over them.

The anger of Algoot was now terrible to behold. Though silent, he seemed to fairly tower to the tops of the trees and swell into a monstrous giant. In those moments of silent anger he made a fearful resolution. He called upon the gods silently and in his heart, but seriously and earnestly, vowing to them that he would never rest until he had slain Tauquitch or been slain by him.

Silently he returned to his home in the valley, and silently he set to work to carry out his vow. He spake never a word to any one of it, but each day saw him energetically training his body for the great conflict ahead of him. He ate only good food that gave him strength and power. He drank no injurious liquors; he went to bed with the sun, and rose at earliest dawn. He took long walks; he climbed over steepest mountains; he wrestled with the wild bears and struggled until he slew them. He followed the trail of the mountain lion, and without weapons engaged in deadly battle with him and tore him limb from limb. He ran, day by day, long distances, until his lungs were twice the size they were before, and his muscles were tougher than the fibres of the hardest trees.

Many moons waxed and waned, and still he kept up his training. Then one day he called all his people together, and with a stern and forbidding countenance said: "I have not asked you to sorrow with me, to shed your tears with mine, to mingle your cries and groans with mine, at the fearful death of my noble son. I did not want to weep and sorrow and cry away the anger of my soul. I wanted my heart to keep burning hot with fury against his hated destroyer. As the sun reaches its height to-day, I leave my home and you my people never to return until Tauquitch is slain. He shall die or Algoot will die Those Above cannot resist my plea for aid. Send up your prayers with mine that I may find this enemy of my people, and that I may have strength to slay him."

With loud shouts the people gave their approval to the brave words of Algoot, and when he started forth in search of Tauquitch they followed him, to cheer him not with words but by their silent presence and sympathy. Ascending Mount San Jacinto to the neighborhood

of Tauquitch cave and valley, Algoot called with a loud voice taunting and sneering words to the mountain giant.

Tauquitch did not reply.

Then Algoot came nearer still, and cried aloud: "Slayer of young children and women, coward, braggart, thou darest not to come forth and fight a man!"

Tauquitch came to the entrance of his cave, stretching and yawning, pretending he had been asleep. "What is it, funny creature, you have to say to me?"

"I say you are a braggart and coward, a slayer of women and children, that dare not meet a man in conflict. Come out and I will spit on you and cover you with ordure!" cried Algoot.

Then the people all shouted, "He is a coward! he dare not fight Algoot!"

At this Tauquitch glared with furious anger. He said, "Fight thee? Yes! and a dozen such!" Then, craftily laying a plot by which he thought he might be able to slay not only Algoot, but many of the people, he said, "Go you away to the valley where the river of my mountain flows into the lake, and there I will meet and fight you, and in less time than it takes for me to talk to you, I will crunch the bones of your arms and legs between my teeth."

He wanted to get the people down there to watch the conflict where they could not readily escape, so that when he had slain Algoot he might seize a lot of them and slay them for his horrid and cannibalistic feasts.

Though Algoot knew he must be ready for treachery from the wicked Tauquitch, he assented without a murmur, and went down into the valley, where Algooton, once called Lakeview, now is. In those days the San Jacinto River emptied into a large lake here, and there was no passageway cut through to make the lake at Elsinore as it now is.

Soon, with wild roars, Tauquitch was seen coming over the mountain. Instead of descending into the valley, he picked up huge granite boulders, and threw them with great force at Algoot. The poor people looked on with terror, feeling certain that their hero and champion would speedily be slain. But they little knew how Those Above had prepared Algoot for this tremendous conflict. His eyes were so keen, and his strength of limb so great that he could always see where the great boulder was likely to fall, and as it came he rapidly sprang aside, and the massive rock fell harmlessly into the ground. Scores of such rocks were thus thrown, and to the great amazement of the people Algoot himself began to pick up the rocks, and, as Tauquitch ventured nearer, threw them with accurate aim and awful force upon the monster. Not expecting such attacks as

this, Tauquitch was unable to get out of the way, and the rocks smote him so thick and so fast that he began to roar with rage and anger, as before he had roared to scare Algoot. But Algoot paid no attention to his roarings. He steadily fought on. Now and again he rushed upon Tauquitch, and grappled him, but just as he was getting the upper hand, the monster, who had all the powers of a wizard, changed his form, and disappeared from the hands of Algoot. This would disconcert Algoot, but he did not allow it to discourage him. He was determined to fight until one or the other of them fell dead. Again Tauquitch had recourse to the throwing of the rocks, and those who now wander about the San Jacinto and Moreno valleys will see the piled-up granite boulders there, all of which were thrown by the mountain monster during this terrific conflict.

But little by little Algoot began to get the better of his foe. Hour after hour they fought, and at length, in despair, Tauquitch turned himself into a great sea serpent, hoping thus to frighten Algoot and compel him to give up the battle. Instead of this the hero rushed upon the hideous monster, and grappled with his long and slimy body. He held it so tightly that Tauquitch writhed and wriggled and lashed the water and all the surrounding country with his tail, in his frantic endeavors to shake off his persistent enemy. In one of these lashings his tail cut through the rim that formed the shore of the lake, and made the deep cut through the hills through which the waters now flow to make Lake Elsinore. Speedily all the water was drained away, and thus Tauquitch gave help to Algoot to slay him. For, not having the water to swim in, and having assumed the form of a sea serpent, Tauquitch was helpless on the dry or muddy land. Fearlessly and relentlessly Algoot fell upon him, and soon with a great and mighty effort strangled the brutal murderer of his son.

Then the people rejoiced with such rejoicing as could not find expression in words.

But Algoot was not through with his dread foe. There the scaly serpent lay dead on the ground, and Algoot determined there would be no peace unless he were burned and utterly destroyed. Calling upon the people, therefore, they brought down great piles of wood from the mountain. He himself went up, and in a quiet spot of the San Bernardino Mountains, naked and tired as he was, sat down on the rocks to rest, while the people prepared the funeral pyre upon which he was to burn the body of his foe. And to this day the rock there bears the impress of his naked body. No one can mistake the marks, but the Indians do not care to show the place to the white man, for the white man has always used his knowledge to the injury of the Indian. After he had rested for a while, he returned with a great armful of green wood, and, adding together all the wood, some

green and some dry, that the people had brought, he soon had a large enough pile. Then he placed the long body of the sea serpent (Tauquitch) upon the pile, and set fire to it. In silence the people watched the fire reach the body, and in silence they waited until it should be consumed.

But, alas, the use of green wood was a great misfortune. For as the fire burned the body of the sea monster, those who were watching saw the spirit of Tauquitch ascend to the sky in a dim wreath of smoke. Had only dry wood been used he would have been entirely destroyed.

Hence, although Algoot slew Tauquitch, his spirit was not dead, and he soon returned to his cave in the San Jacinto Mountains. There he still makes the terrible noises, and never appears now except in disguise. He it is that makes the earthquakes, and he is bad and wicked in every conceivable way. Some years ago he appeared as an old man, well dressed and honest looking. He went to where some Sabobas were working and sat and watched them. When they went home, they all became sick and soon thereafter died. He was on the watch to seize their spirits, and that is why the Sabobas never leave a dead body before it is buried. For it is at this time, while the spirit is hovering near, looking at his own body, that Tauquitch has the power to seize it. He has no power after the body is burned or buried.

Another time he appeared as a "dude." He had gloves on his hands, and a cane in his fingers, and walked "all same swell white man." It is when he appears like this that the earthquakes come. So the Indians still hate and fear Tauquitch. They dread his cave in the mountains, and never go near it.

"Perhaps some day Those Above will kill the spirit of Tauquitch, and then we shall no longer be afraid." Thus exclaimed my Indian friend as he concluded his interesting story.

George Wharton James.

PASADENA, CAL.