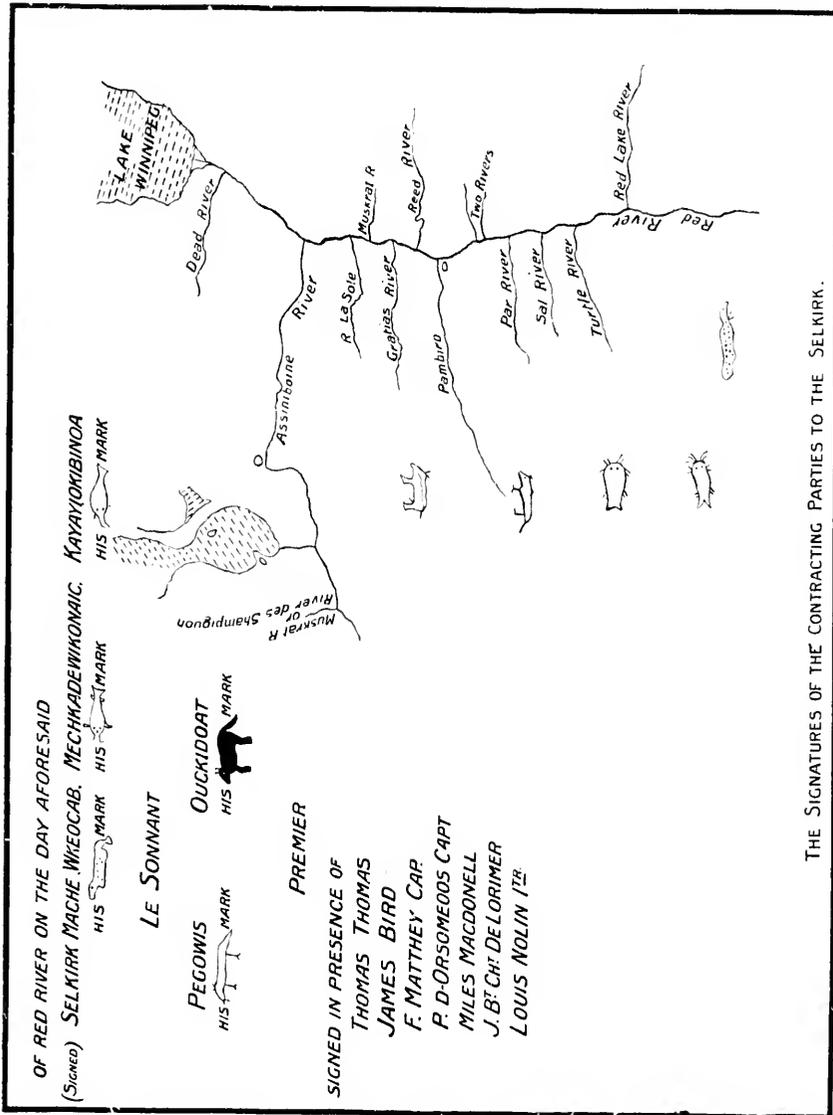


## PICTURE-WRITING OF THE BLACKFEET.

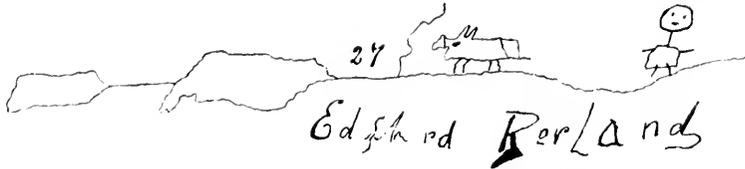
BY REV. JOHN MACLEAN, PH.D.

[Read 17th March, 1894.]

The natives of the American Continent preserved their legends and traditions through the agency of men who kept an accurate remembrance of them with important historical events by means of wampum records. A more permanent form, however, was needed for the recording of events and conveying them to others, which originated and developed the system of picture-writing. Etchings made upon rocks and trees, pictures painted on the lodges, birch bark and buffalo-ropes retained the knowledge of events for future generations. The totem-posts of the Tshimpsheans and the grave-posts of the Ojibways represent one kind of picture-writing limited in its application and yet necessary for recording facts. From the most primitive form of writing has this system developed, in the rough outline or full picture rudely drawn, through a symbolic stage until the perfect stage of writing was produced. In the Ojibway pictography the symbol for lightning is a rattlesnake. Colonel Mallery in explaining this development says:—"It can be readily seen how a hawk with bright eye and lofty flight might be selected as a symbol of divinity and royalty, and that the crocodile should denote darkness, while a slightly further step in metaphysical symbolism made the ostrich feather, from the equality of its filaments, typical of truth." In some of the pictographs the name of a man is made by making the head of a man and then placing the bird or animal which represents his name over the crown of the head, as in designating Chief *Red Crow* (Mikasto) a crow painted red is placed in position. Another method is to place the animal which represents the name upon the pictograph. This is shown in the *Selkirk Treaty*, where the chiefs signed their names by drawing animals representing them, which were placed opposite the tracts of land which they claimed. The appended copy of the signatures of the contracting parties to the *Selkirk Treaty* is taken from: "The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba, the North-West Territories and Keewatin."



Rock-carvings and etchings on bone and shell are found, illustrating the modes of picture-writing. As in the Indian chant there is the repetition of a single idea, so in the native pictography there is an expression of a single thought represented by a pictograph. The headless body of an Indian with a gun or spear beside him represents death, and the means by which he was slain. The following pictograph was found by Sir George Simpson upon a tree as he was travelling in the West:



This was inscribed with a piece of burnt wood, and was nothing less than a letter for the information of the party. The contents of this pictograph were, that Edward Berland was awaiting the party with a band of twenty-seven horses at the point where the river received a tributary before expanding into two consecutive lakes. In a pictograph describing a battle, an Indian with an empty hand and fingers extended meant that he had no weapons with which to fight.

The native tribes used this system of writing extensively for the purpose of ornament, expression of religious ideas, recording of notable events, which may be the history of the tribe for half a century as in the Dakota Count, some single event in the life of a single individual, or a war party, or the autobiography of a man. Map-making by the Eskimo and Indians was accurately done on birch bark and other substances.

An Indian can describe upon the ground with a piece of wood, as I have seen them do, the geographical features of the country and various routes.

Concerning the Ojibway pictography, Schoolcraft says:—"For their pictographic devices the North American Indians have two terms, namely, *Kekewin*, or such things as are generally understood by the tribe, and *Kekewowin*, or teachings of the *medas*, or priests, and *jussakeds* or prophets. The knowledge of the latter is chiefly confined to persons who are versed in their system of magic medicine or their religion, and may be deemed hieratic. The former consists of the common figurative signs, such as are employed at places of sepulture, or by hunting or travelling parties. It is also employed in the *muzznabiks*, or rock-writings. Many of the figures are common to both, and are seen in the drawings generally; but it is to be understood that this

results from the figure-alphabet being precisely the same in both, while the devices of the nugameons, or medicine, wabino, hunting and war songs are known solely to the initiates who have learned them, and who always pay high to the native professors for this knowledge." The mythology of the Indians was sometimes represented by pictographs. When Marquette and his companions went down the Mississippi a pictograph was seen which filled the Indians with awe, and they told him that this rock-inscription represented a story, which was "that a demon haunted the river at this place, whose roar could be heard at a great distance, and who would engulf them in the abyss where he dwelt; that the waters were full of frightful monsters who would devour them in their canoe." Rock inscriptions are abundant in the localities frequented by the Indians scattered over the northern part of the continent. Many of them, however, are in secluded places, and not easily discovered by travellers.

Birch-bark rolls are used by the Cree Indians, one of which, belonging to Louis Constant, is neatly illustrated in "The Rainbow of the North," with this explanation:—"Some time since he put into Mr. Hunter's hands the last relic of his former superstition. It is a roll of birch-rind, about four feet long and nearly a foot broad, and on the inner surface are scratched with some pointed instrument various hieroglyphic devices, intended to mark out the straight road to long life and happiness. This road is guarded on one side by figures of the sacred goose, and on the other by a corresponding row of the heads and arms of some of their other deities, while the supposed paths of the wicked diverge from the main road and are lost. But the whole is so uncouth that it is only worthy of attention as a proof of the extravagances into which the human mind is suffered to fall when it has departed from the living God. And yet it cannot rest satisfied without a guide, real or self-created. Louis Constant told Mr. Hunter that he used to regard this roll with the same reverence he now felt for the Bible, but that, as might be expected, it had since his conversion been to him a source of shame and sorrow." In various places in the Dominion pictographs have been discovered. Schoolcraft describes an elaborate inscription on the rocks on Cunningham's Island, ascribed to the Eries, a tribe now extinct. Some have been found in the country of the Micmacs in the eastern part of the Dominion. About twenty miles from Port Arthur and three and a half miles from Rabbit Mountain Mine, lying between it and Lake Superior, is a small lake opening out of Lake Oliver. Upon the rocky walls of one of the shores of this small lake are coloured pictures of men, canoes, paddles, crabs serpents and other figures. There is the "Jesuits' Cross" on a rock on the northern shore of Lake Superior, between

Silver Islet and Nepigon, and upon the Nepigon River are pictographs so accurately drawn that Indians from the far north have been known to interpret their meaning. Upon the Missouri river near Cow Island, and about thirty miles south of Benton, there are figures of lodges, men fighting and similar pictures upon the face of the high cliffs, and so great is their elevation that the Indians say they are the works of the spirits. When the South Piegan Indians visited these rocks, they used them as models when they returned home, drawing figures on robes similar to those they had seen. Henry Shoecat, an intelligent young Indian who was acting as interpreter for the Mounted Police, informed me during my residence among the Blood Indians that there are some pictured rocks which he had seen between Helena and Sun River, in Montana, and others on the south side of Chief Mountain. Indians and white men have told me repeatedly of the wonderful *writing stones* on the Milk River, about forty miles from Lethbridge, and near the West Butte, where the Mounted Police have a post. These stones are covered with figures, some of which the Indians say were written by the spirits, but the better interpretation given by many of the Indians is that war-parties of the Bloods and Piegans passing to and fro were in the habit of writing upon these rocks, stating the number of men and horses there were in the camps of their enemies. This is the opinion of Jerry Potts, the Piegan chief and Mounted Police guide and interpreter. When Henry Shoecat was acting as interpreter at the police post near the *writing stones*, the men stationed there were in the habit of writing upon these stones, thus mingling the figures made by white men with the native pictography. Not far distant from the *writing stones*, and on Milk River, are several caves which have been visited by Jerry Potts and others, in which there are stone couches and drawings upon the walls.

The Blackfoot system of pictography was used by the Indians on the outside of their lodges. Figures were painted in different colours which were a record of the exploits of the master of the lodge. The scalp-locks were fastened above the picture-writing, the latter passing around, the figures generally enclosed between two lines, running evenly around the lodge leaving a space from two to three feet wide for the pictographs. The lodges of Medicine Calf, Red Crow and Bull Shield were especially noticeable in the early years. Some of the Indians could draw pictures of animals upon paper very well. Hunting and war scenes on paper or leather were also well executed.

One of my Blood Indian young men drew for me upon two sheets of foolscap, two specimens of the native pictography, which are here shown (Plates I., II.).

A short time ago I procured for a friend in England the hide of a steer having the autobiography of one of the Blackfeet upon it. This is the *Life of Many Shots*, which is here produced with the translation of this native autobiography.

## LIFE OF MANY SHOTS.

1. There are two lodges and two carts at the place where Many Shots with a large party of warriors, who are following the foot-marks of their horses which have been stolen. They overtake their enemies, and Many Shots kills the last man. In front of the man at *A*, holding his gun in the act of shooting, will be seen small dots which represent the bullets flying. From the lodges at *B* following down by *A* will be seen small strokes—which can be distinguished from the footprints of the horses; these represent the number of journeys undertaken by *Many Shots*.

2. The wife of Many Shots has been out riding and has caught sight of an antelope, which she kills with an axe. She continues her journey and with the same weapon kills a bear.

3. There are six lodges of the Cree Indians, which do not mean actually that number, but a large camp. The Blackfeet steal the horses of the Crees, who follow them to recover their horses.

4. The Blackfeet make a rifle-pit where they come to a stand and fight. Within the pit they have a medicine-man with them, who can be distinguished by the medicine-pipe which he is smoking. The guns around the pit signify that there is a great number of Indians. In the fight there are three Crees and one Blackfoot killed. These are seen lying inside the rifle-pit.

5. There are four lodges. The Cree Indians stole the horses of the Blackfeet, who went in pursuit of them.

6. As they journeyed the Blackfeet killed an antelope. Many Shots met an Indian and stabbed him.

7. The Blackfeet still followed the Crees, and came to a place where five Indians had killed a buffalo.

8. They overtook the five Indians and killed one with an axe, four of the Cree Indians escaping.

9. A large circle of lodges, in which there was a great battle.

10. Beside this circle of lodges is a buffalo-pound, having two walls made upon the prairie, marking the path by which the buffalo were driven into the pound. Within the pound are two buffalo, and on the outside are Indians shooting at them. This is to show the method Many Shots used in killing buffalo.

11. This circle represents a lake, and within the circle is an elk, which is Many Shots' method and is according to the Blackfoot custom of naming it. The lake is called Elk Lake.

12. Three Sioux Indians are seen confronting Many Shots, who is on horseback. They shot and killed the man in front of the horse. The two remaining companions of Many Shots ran away, represented by the two men on foot running away from the horse. Many Shots fired at the Sioux Indians and killed the one farthest from him, as is shown by the man holding up his gun, and the blood flowing from under his arm.

13. Many Shots came upon two Indians fighting. He fired and broke the leg of one of the men, as can be seen from the blood flowing from his leg. Under this man's arm can be seen a bow and arrow which he took from the man. After he broke the leg of his enemy he ran towards him and killed him. Behind the horse of Many Shots can be seen a bow and seven guns, which represent the number which he took in the battles in which he was engaged.

14. The thirteen strokes in the middle of the robe represent the thirteen battles in which Many Shots was engaged during his life.

This is the history of the events of the life of Many Shots, as painted by himself in various colours upon a hide neatly tanned, in my possession, and the style of pictography fitly illustrates the system in use among the Blackfeet. Many Shots is the hero of every adventure, and the whole constitutes a native book on leather worthy of preservation.

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Fol. V.

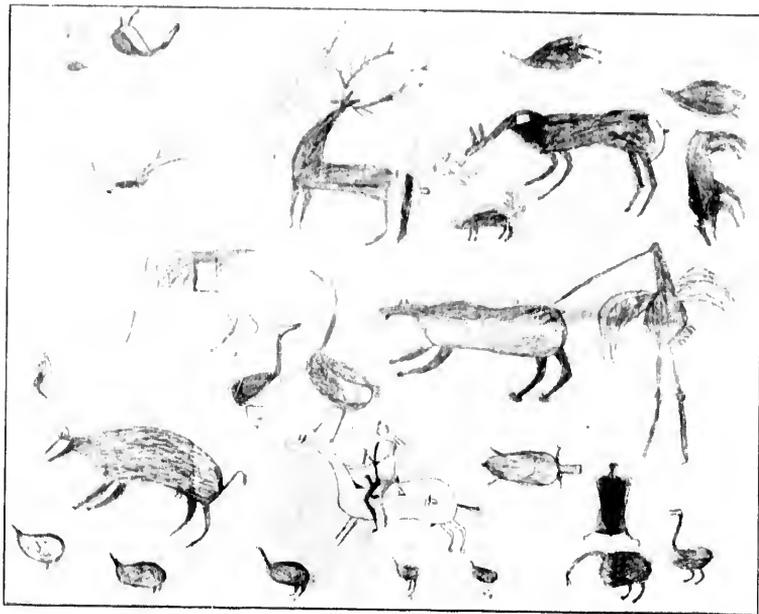
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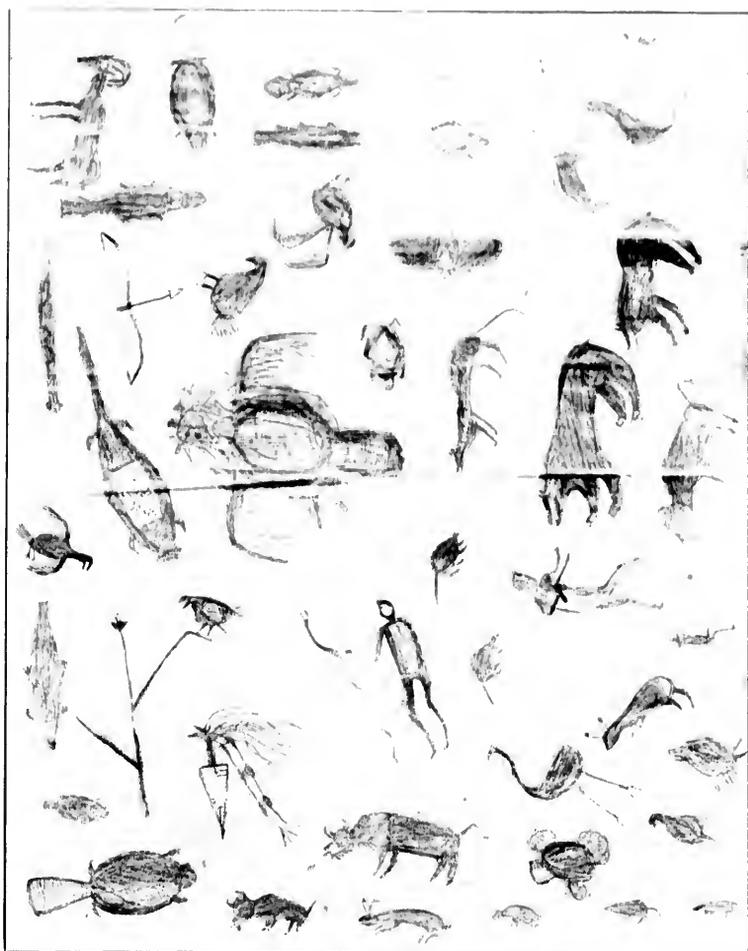
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BLOOD INDIAN PICTOGRAPHS.

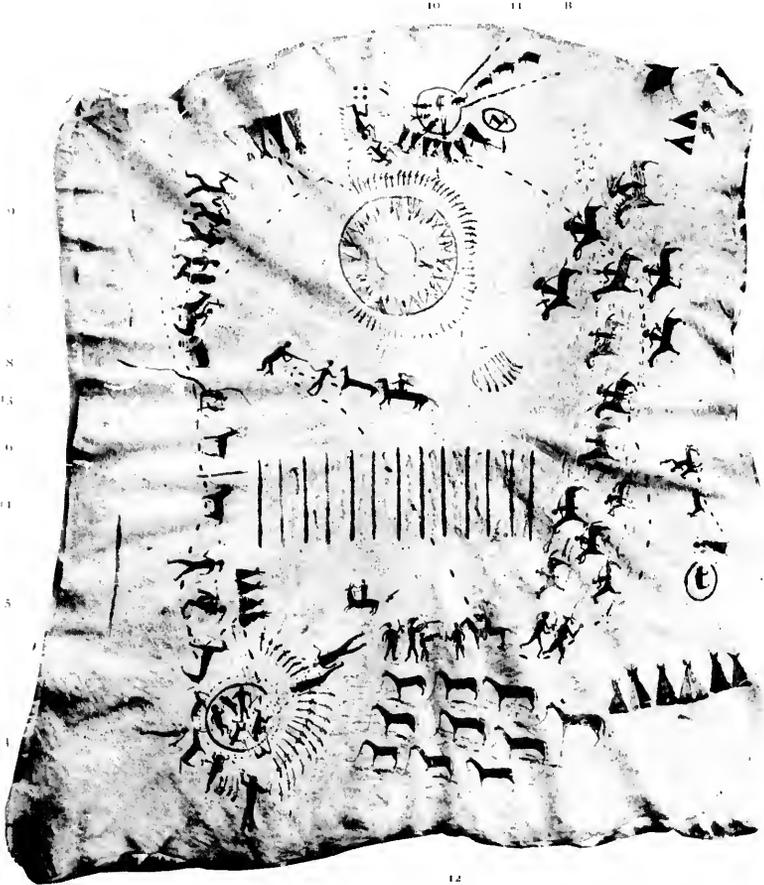
PLATE I.



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BLOOD INDIAN PICTOGRAPHS

PLATE II.



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LIFE OF MANY SHOTS.—BLACKFOOT PICTOGRAPHY.

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PLATE III.