

Picture - Writing.



IN the beginning of all writing men exchanged ideas by means of rough pictures, and picture-writing was the first writing of all. Our own alphabet is derived, through many changes, from the picture-writing of the Egyptians. The process was this. First, the early Egyptians cut or drew, in wood or stone, pictorial representations of the elementary facts which formed the subjects of the writing for which need was first felt. Next they found the need of representing *abstractions*, and adapted their drawings to that end. "Joy," for instance, was represented by a man dancing. Thus *hieroglyphic* writing came into being. But this was found slow by the priests and scribes who, when papyrus was invented, began writing long treatises and records. So the forms were simplified, and what had been a fully drawn figure became a line of a similar contour, and so arose the *hieratic script* form of Egyptian writing. Here the Phœnicians took up the running, and made a great revolution. Until this time the signs represented ideas or words simply, or, at most, syllables. The Phœnicians went farther, and separated their speech into single sounds, each represented by a *letter*, of which they made twenty-two, derived from the Egyptian hieratic script. This was the first alphabet. Then the Greeks got their alphabet from the Phœnicians, variously modifying it, and the Romans adopted the Greek letters, with more modifications; and so our alphabet took shape. Our letter A is now traced back through these various stages to the original Egyptian drawing of an eagle, and our letter L to that of a lion. The Chinese have retained their own ideographs to the present time, with many signs of hieroglyphic and picture-writing origin about them. And other nations of less civilization have used, and still use, picture-writing in our own day. Notably, the North American Indians, of whose

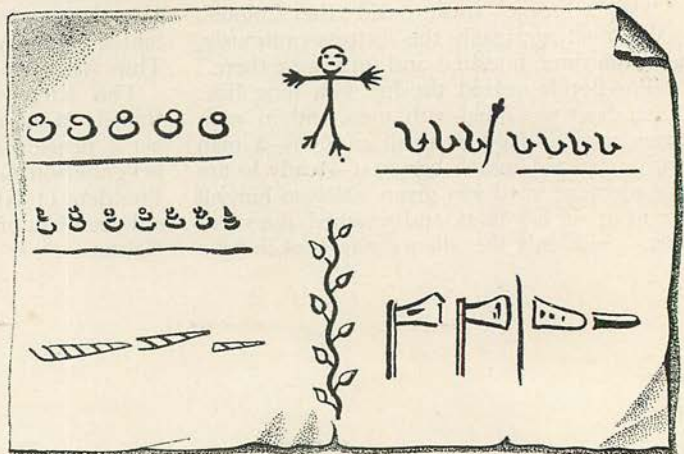
picture-writing we shall give a number of examples in course of this article.

But first, we begin with an exceedingly primitive pictorial inscription, by way of introduction to some others less simple. Our first illustration is a facsimile of a letter from a native of the Caroline Islands, sent by the captain of a trading vessel to a trader at Rotta, with certain sea-shells. These shells the native had agreed to collect and give in exchange for a few axes and other useful articles. The captain who conveyed the shells gave the native a piece of paper, on which the message was drawn. The human figure at the top, like unto that of a turnip-headed ghost, is to represent the captain; and his arms are outstretched at each side, to denote his office as go-between, or messenger, from one of the parties to the other. The vine beneath him denotes friendship, and it separates the paper into two parts, one for each side of the transaction, just on the principle of the debtor and creditor sides in an account-book. On the left the number and sorts of shells sent are shown; on the right it is made plain that in exchange the Caroline Islander expected to receive seven fish-hooks, three large and four small, two axes, and two pieces of iron.

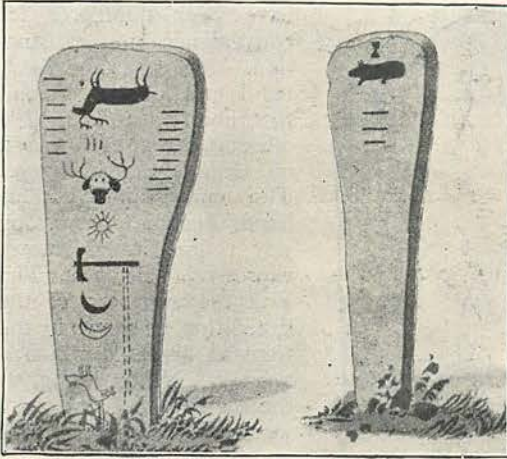
The whole barter was faithfully and accurately carried out to everybody's satisfaction.

To come now to the North American Indians. Perhaps the simplest form of their picture-writing is that on the grave-head

memorials of their chiefs. These are boards,



I.—LETTER FROM A NATIVE OF THE CAROLINE ISLANDS.



2.—INDIAN EPITAPHS.

or posts, set up and inscribed, as the illustration shows. The two posts shown in No. 2 are memorials of members of the Chippeway tribe, the first being that of a distinguished chief, the second that of a hunter. In the first the drawing is made upside down—a symbol of death and return to earth. This is the usual way, but in the second we see another, in which the drawing is right side up, and death is indicated by a cross with two spaces filled in, leaving a figure somewhat of the hour-glass shape. The reindeer at the top of the first post is the totem mark of the deceased and his family—upside down, for the reason explained. To the left of this figure are seven transverse marks, meaning that the dead chief had led seven war parties. Three vertical marks below mean three wounds received in battle. The moose's head tells of a desperate struggle with an infuriated

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animal of that sort, and the hatchet and pipe indicate great influence in peace and war. This post was set up rather more than a hundred years ago. The second post shows simply that the departed hunter was of the Bear clan or family, and that he had attended three war parties.

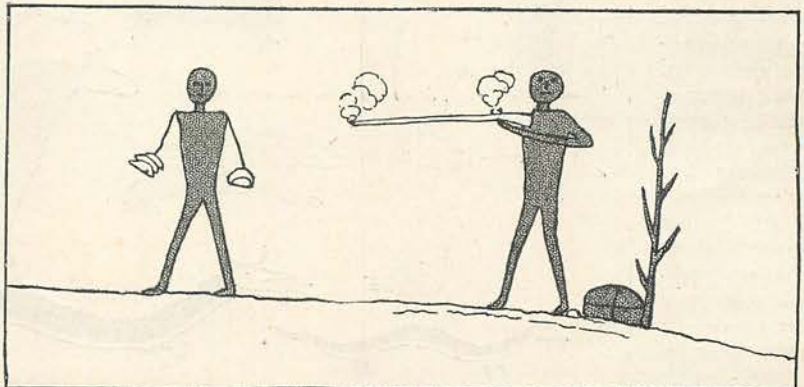
The next example (No. 3) is an inscription on a buffalo's shoulder-blade. This, though still very simple, carries us a little farther in the progress of picture-writing. It is an old inscription, dating back to the times when Spain made American conquest, and the bone, with drawing complete, was found on the plains in the Comanche country in Texas. It tells of the competition between the white and red races for the hunting of the buffalo.



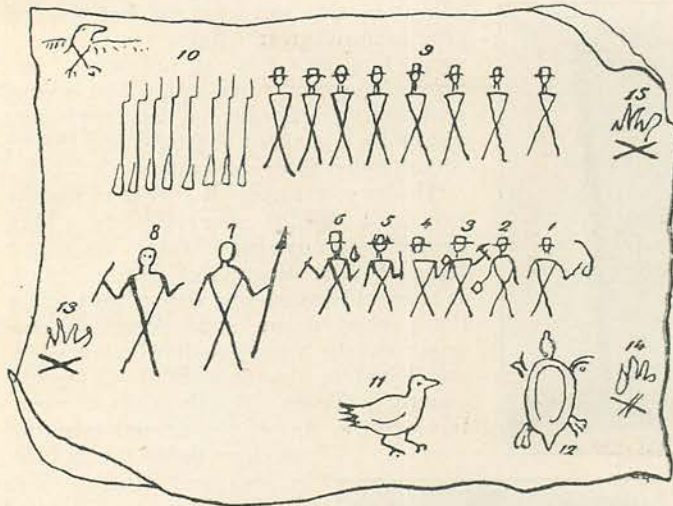
3.—INDIAN INSCRIPTION ON BONE.

A mounted Indian kills with a spear a Spaniard armed with a gun, in presence of the disputed buffalo itself, who, in a piebald or semi-skinned condition, "sees fair" from a lower part of the picture. An elegant curl or shaving by the side of the doomed Spaniard expresses the circuitous route by which the Indian followed his enemy. There is a deal of distance between the ends of the horse, which would seem to have a strain of dachshund blood, and the buffalo is elegantly adorned with moths' antennæ by way of horns.

Our next example (No. 4) is legible beyond all possibility of misconception. It



4.—INDIAN TRESPASS NOTICE.



5.—AN INDIAN RECORD.

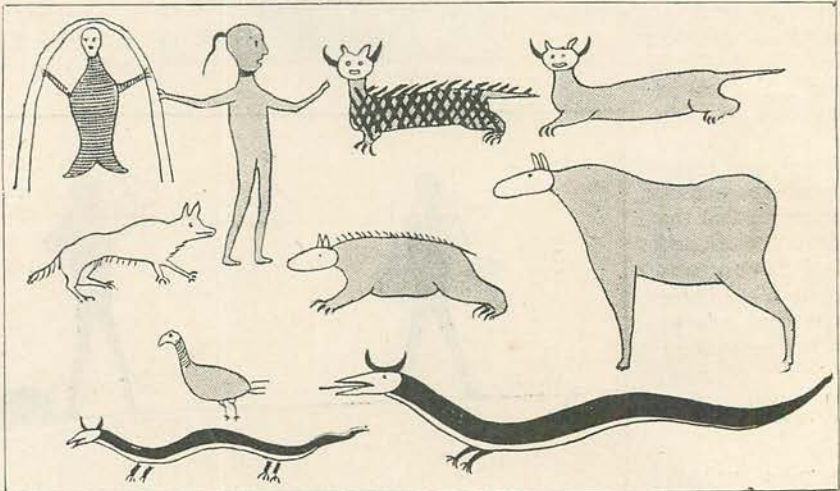
have been numbered for convenience in explanation. Fig. 1, at the right-hand end of the second row, represents the subaltern officer in charge of the guard of United States troops. The curly thing by his hand, like a 6 the wrong way round, is his sword, expressive of his rank. Fig. 2 is the secretary of the expedition, as shown by the thing in his hand, which is a book. Next, Fig. 3, is the geologist, and the weapon with which he appears to be attacking the secretary's head is his geological hammer. Figs. 4 and 5 are assistants, and

is an Indian "Trespassers beware" notice-board. On the right is the owner with his property and his gun, and on the left is the unlucky trespasser, with hands full of some indefinite articles which do not rightfully belong to him. The whole thing is a very strong hint to the passer-by.

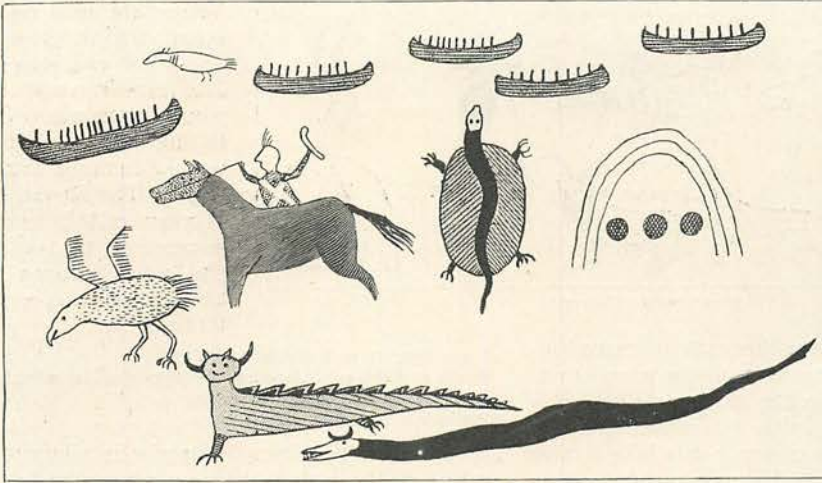
6 is the interpreter. Just above is a row of infantry soldiers, marked 9, and each is shown to be provided with a gun and bayonet, 10. Figs. 13 and 15 are fires, and they are placed to show that the soldiers had a separate fire and mess. Figs. 11 and 12 are a prairie hen and a green tortoise, the result of the preceding day's chase, cooked (as indicated by another fire, 14) and eaten. So far, it will be observed that all the human figures are provided with hats. That denotes them to be white men. But the figures 7 and 8 have none, which makes it plain that they are Indians—the guides, in fact, who have drawn themselves of an imposing magnitude corresponding with their importance.

Two photographs follow, which form a pair

We proceed to something a trifle more intricate. We give a copy of a sketch (No. 5) recording an incident in exploration. Schoolcraft, the great historiographer of the Indians, accompanied by a party and guided by two Indians, made a journey in 1820. The party lost its way in a forest, and after camping for the night were about to start again, when it was perceived that the Indian guides had made this sketch on a piece of birch-bark and had fixed it at the top of a pole, which they had stuck in the ground with an inclination toward the direction the explorers were taking. It was a message for anybody who might pass that way, telling of the encampment and the nature of the party. The figures



6.—RECORD OF AN INDIAN VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.



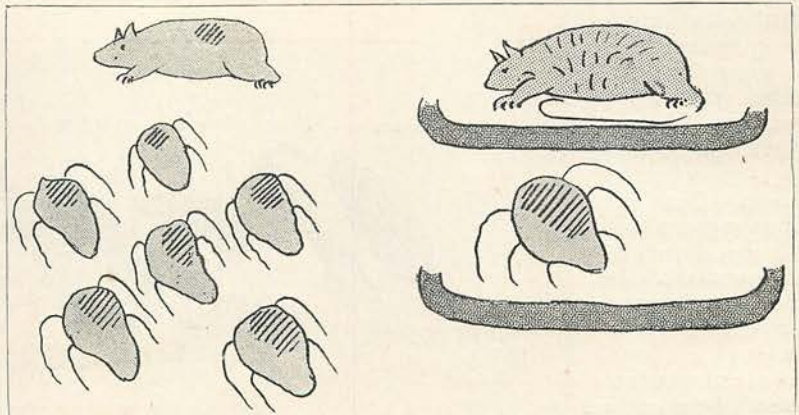
7.—RECORD OF AN INDIAN VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

of great interest. They are records of the first crossing of Lake Superior by a very famous chief of long ago. He was reported greatly skilled in magic, and was of large influence in the tribes. In commemoration of his exploit, he set up these two inscriptions, the first on the south shore of the lake, whence he started, and the other on the north, where he landed. Take the first (No. 6). Here the sole human figure represents the chief himself—one hopes without flattery. The arch at the left at top represents his lodge, or household, and the odd creature it contains is his totem. It is made to fill the whole space, to denote that the whole of the household bears the same mark. Just below is a wolf—the personal name of the chief. The horned thing in a violent check pattern is a fabulous horned panther, symbolizing power. The cross-lines mean night, and the similar creature without network denotes power by day. Then there are the lion, the black bear, and the moose, meaning foresight, strength and sagacity, and wariness. The two horned snakes, with certain legs, symbolize swiftness and power to kill, and the whole menagerie represents the various powers

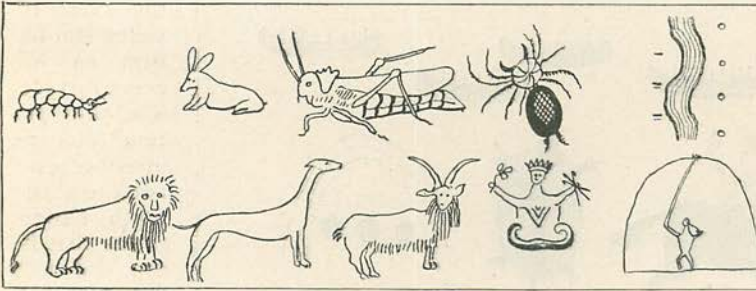
the chief invokes to aid him in his enterprise. The other picture (No. 7), inscribed on a rock on the north shore, shows that he crossed with five canoes of different sizes, carrying altogether fifty-one men, the first canoe being commanded by a chief called

after the king-fisher—the bird drawn just above its prow. The crossing occupied three days, as shown by the three suns under a shaky sort of rainbow, representing the sky. By this is drawn a land-tortoise, indicating triumph in the matter of reaching land at last. To the left of this is a portrait (unflattering again) of the chief on horseback—another symbol of triumphant progress on *terra firma*. The eagle means courage, and below, the comic horned panther and the snake are duly acknowledged to have extended their patronage.

But picture-writing was also employed for the passing on of casual news of an unimportant character. Our next specimen exemplifies this (No. 8). It was inscribed on the side of a blazed tree. At the top right-hand side is the figure of a fabled animal, the copper-tailed bear. This is the totem of a



8.—AN INDIAN POSTER.



9.—AN INDIAN WAR-SONG.

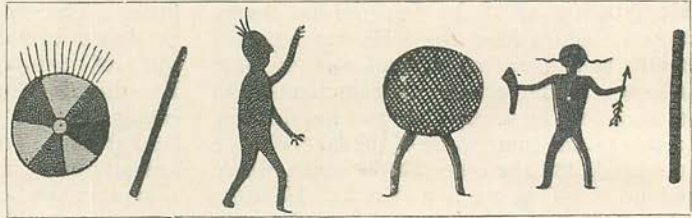
hunter, and the thing beneath it, curved up at each end, denotes the canoe he travelled in. Under this again is the totem (cat-fish) of a companion hunter, with his canoe. At the top, to the left, is a common black bear, and below it six cat-fish. The whole thing means simply that the two hunters in question, while encamped at that particular spot, killed a bear and caught six cat-fish in the river. It was a piece of small personal news left for the information of anybody passing.

The next example (No. 9) is very interesting. It is nothing more nor less than a war-song, written pictorially. Such songs are often expressed by symbols of a most intricate and abstract kind, but this has been selected for its simplicity and clearness. First, we have a multi-coloured target sort of thing with radiating lines at the top. This is the sun, though many who have seen the original may fail to recognise the portrait. The warrior sings, "I am rising." Then, after an oblique line—a sort of rest—we have the figure of the warrior himself, one hand extended to sky and one to earth, by which is declared his vast and world-wide power and prowess—"I take both earth and sky," is what he sings. Next he appears (or at least his legs do) under the symbol of the moon, as denoting night, the time of secrecy and warlike enterprise. Last, there is a figure symbolizing

Venus, the evening star, which the Indians call the Eastern Woman, who is made witness to his valour and warlike cunning. He sings, "The Eastern Woman calls." It is possible to read the whole something in these terms:—

I am rising to seek the war-path,
Earth and sky are before me and they shall be mine.
I walk both by day and by night,
And the evening star is my guide.

We follow this by a transcript in picture-writing of the 25th to the 32nd verses (inclusive) of the 30th chapter of Proverbs (No. 10). In the first four of these verses the principal



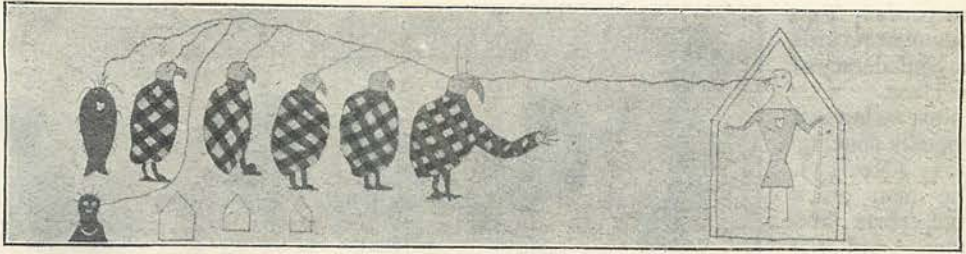
10.—A QUOTATION FROM PROVERBS.

object mentioned is drawn, somewhat in the manner of a mnemonic, by which the rest may be remembered. The other verses are more fully indicated.

About fifty years ago a delegation of the Chippeway tribe arrived at Washington with a petition drawn on birch bark, of which we reproduce a part (No. 11). The petition asked for the retrocession of a part of certain lands, which the Indians had handed over to



11.—PETITION OF CHIPPEWAY CHIEFS.



12.—ANOTHER LEAF FROM THE SAME PETITION.

the United States seven years before. The curious figures connected by lines represent the various totems of leading Indians among the delegation. In front one recognises (or, perhaps, fails to recognise) the crane, totem of the chief who headed the party. The lines drawn from its eye to the eyes of all the other totems signify *unity of view* among the deputation. Other lines connect the crane's heart with the hearts of the rest, denoting *unity of feeling and purpose*.

As well as these lines, the crane chief has a line drawn from his eye *forward*, to indicate the course of his journey; and another *backward*, to a sort of small map of a collection of rice-lakes, the grant of which is the desire of the mission. The long object, upon which the totems appear to be standing, represents Lake Superior, with a path leading from its southern shore to the vicinity of the lakes, a place

where the Indians propose settling down to peaceful pursuits. Of the rest of the petition we reproduce one leaf (No. 12), wherein a chief of the eagle totem, with others of his clan, are represented as joining in the request to the President, represented standing in his official residence at Washington, a place, apparently, of severe and primitive architecture. Some more puissant chief stayed at home, and he (or his head and shoulders, at least) is represented to the left at the bottom, with rays to denote his rank, and an eye-line to prove his con-

currence in the petition. The eagles wear "dittoes" of an uncommonly loud pattern, and are associated with an unknown fish, of elderly and bearded aspect. Three little figures, like the outlines of hayricks, mean houses, and express the desire of the Indians to become civilized, and live in them.

The Iroquois were the tribe whose pictures showed the greatest finish, and frequently distinctly resembled the object intended. We



13.—IROQUOIS PICTURE-WRITING.

give four specimens of their work. In the first (No. 13), the seated figure, elegantly dressed in a collection of snakes, is the first over-chief of the Iroquois confederacy, a man of great traditional fame, equally for military prowess and powers of magic. By his charms he was proof against the attacks of all animals, and in token of this he is drawn festooned with rattlesnakes, which defend him on all sides, while he smokes his pipe with casual indifference. The two standing figures are Mohawk war-chiefs, handing the great chief the spear symbolizing authority over all the

Iroquois. The document records the confederacy of the clans.

Next we have an Iroquois dancing-party (No. 14). The man on a stool sings and drums, and the remaining four dance with the vigour and elegance the picture suggests. It is a war-dance, as is evidenced by the feathers decorating their heads and elbows, and the clubs



14.—DESCRIPTION OF AN IROQUOIS DANCE.



15.—IROQUOIS FAIRY STORY OF THE FLYING HEAD.

prominently brandished. The drawing, grotesque as it is, really shows some primitive idea of pictorial grouping.

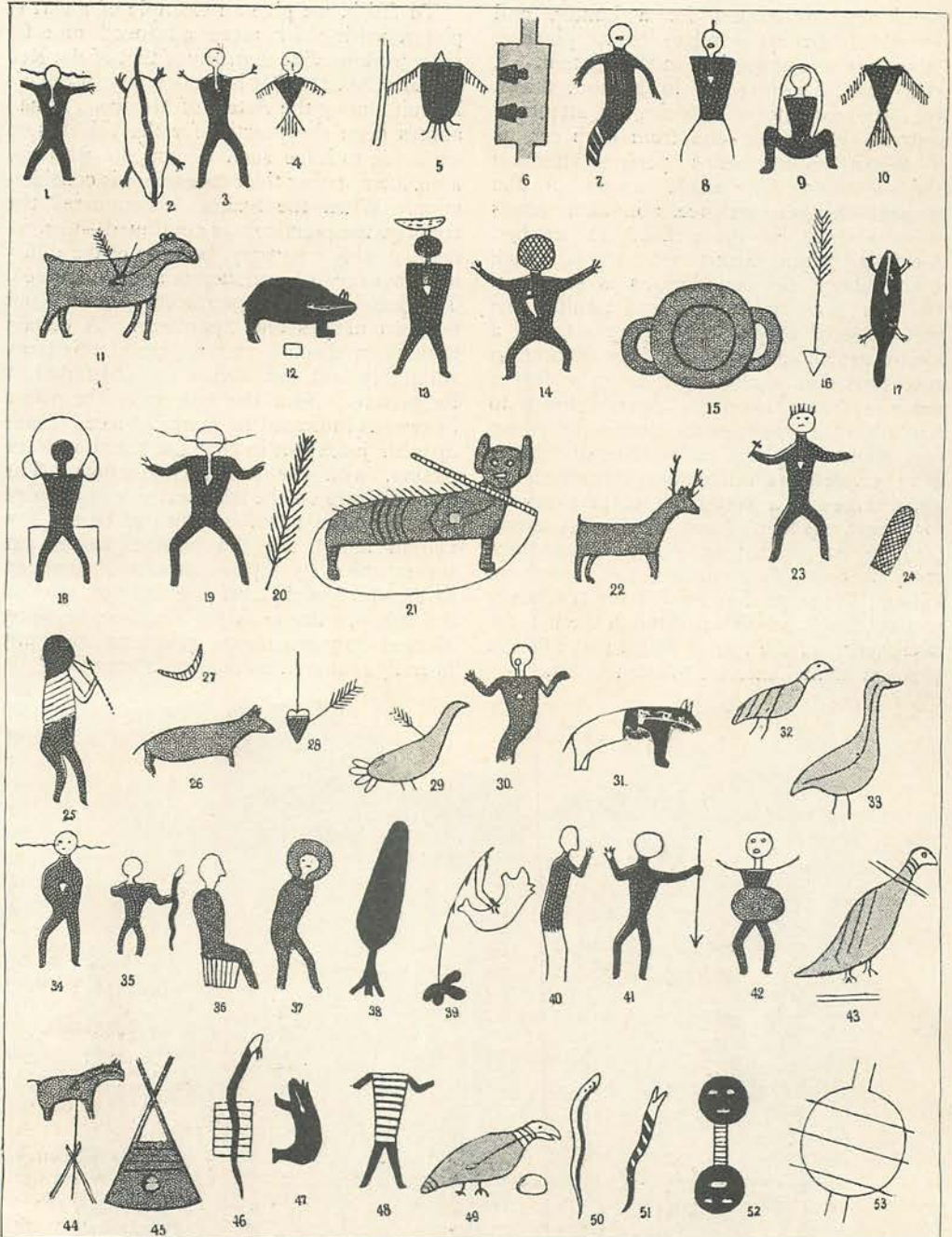
The drawing following this (No. 15) records a story of the traditional myth of the fairy flying head. There seems to be no doubt that the stories told of this creature arose from attempts to account for meteors. In the picture we see the flying head itself, prowling about the earth. The shaggy hair and the claws symbolize rays and tearing flashes of fire. But the flying head is astonished, and no wonder. For he has suddenly come upon a woman roasting chestnuts at a fire, and eating them. Unacquainted with the mysteries of

cooking, the flying head naturally supposes to be a fire-eater, a creature as powerful to handle fire as himself; whereat he is naturally astonished, not to say jealous. The dog's opinion of the proceedings is not made plain, though the tip of his tail is in serious danger of conflagration.

Last of the Iroquois drawings (No. 16) is a record of another legend of that nation—that of the Stonish Giants. It is not known from what precise circumstances the story arose, but it tells of great men the Indians once encountered in some remote period of history: giants



16.—IROQUOIS LEGEND OF THE STONISH GIANTS.



17.—SIGNS USED IN HUNTING.

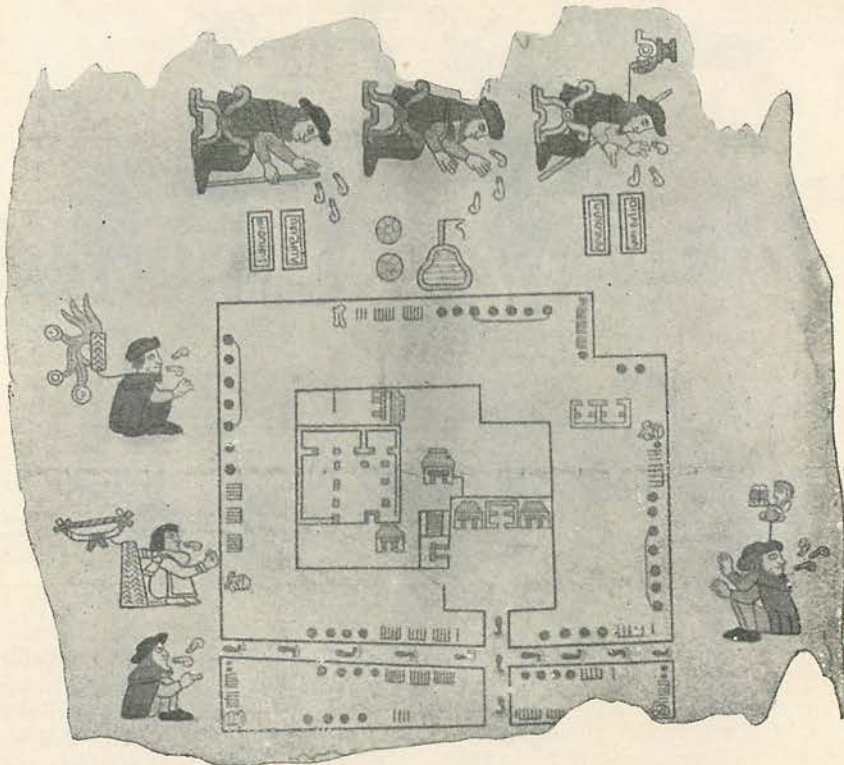
whose clothing was impenetrable to spears and arrows. The picture shows with a good deal of vigour certain Indians executing a hurried rearward movement, pursued by two of the giants, regardless of a shower of arrows. Could these mailed men have been the

Vikings, who are said to have discovered America many centuries before Columbus?

We print next a collection of the signs used by Indians in inscriptions relating to hunting (No. 17). It is, indeed, a sort of ideographic alphabet. Magic was supposed to be a most

useful accomplishment for a hunter, and several of the signs relate to its practise. Others are more practical in their intent. A wavy line, denoting air in motion, drawn from the ear, means listening or attention, and two such lines, one from each ear, as is shown in 1, means perfect attention and devotion. A circle drawn at the stomach signifies opulence, abundant means of subsistence, as the well-fed 42 testifies. A sitting position means rest, as in 9. Such a line about the shoulders, as is shown in 18, is a pack or burden, and signifies the possession of goods. The three sides of a square which include the legs denote a good provision of clothing. In 13 a dish of water is drawn over the figure's head, to symbolize the waters of the clouds and power over them. A circle surrounding the head, as in 37, denotes miraculous influence. In 45, a lodge and a kettle tell of preparations for a feast. A man's hand lifted to his mouth (40) speaks of eating. The human face crossed over (14) means the power of killing; the serpent is an emblem of power and subtlety, and so on through the list, the deciphering of the rest of which may afford a pleasant mental exercise to our readers.

To finish, we give an example of a sort of picture-writing far more advanced and far more workmanlike than any of that of the Red Indians (No. 18). It is a document used in a lawsuit among the Aztecs of Mexico. It had always been the practice for the litigants on each side to leave such documents with the king, after stating their cases, for his consideration. When the Spaniards conquered the country, the practice was continued—was, indeed, doubly necessary, because of the differing languages of conquerors and conquered. The drawing here reproduced tells of a suit between natives and Spaniards. A certain farm is in dispute, and a plan of this farm, admirably laid out, forms the chief part of the picture. Near the bottom of the plan a footway is indicated by marks of feet. Three Spanish judges sit in chairs at the top of the picture, with the laws before them. The middle figure on the left-hand side is a native litigant, whose name is indicated by the bow behind him. All the human figures are accompanied by representations of tongues, to signify speech, and the inferior state of the unhappy native is plain to see, he being allowed only one tongue as against the many liberally scattered among the Spaniards.



18.—DOCUMENT IN AN AZTEC LAWSUIT.