

THE STORY OF THE MOCCASIN

BY EMERSON HOUGH

ILLUSTRATED BY PHOTOGRAPHS



E OF the Anglo-Saxon race display to gods and men some strange contradictions. In all the corners of the world we have fought and destroyed the wilderness, but having destroyed it we have mourned it and sought to restore it. We have fallen upon savage and inferior peoples and exterminated them; and thereupon, with Homeric simplicity, forthwith have become charitably interested in them. Having abolished a race, altered a land, ended an epoch, we have made atonement by studying each and admiring all—sometimes, it must be confessed, with an enthusiasm whose results are more diverting than convincing.

Of late, with a grave and eminently self-respecting earnestness, we have betaken ourselves to a study of the American Indian, his arts and crafts, his morals and customs, his implements, weapons and apparel. Dreading no longer the whistle of his winged arrow at the forest-fringed maize fields, we may examine the arrow more closely. No longer able to differentiate between moccasin tracks in the dust of our far-faring trails, we may, with a less practical but not less earnest zeal, endeavor to gain some notion of the moccasin as an abstract and not a concrete proposition.

Indeed, in this latter task, we might well be both sober and sincere. This shoe known as the moccasin, this aboriginal foot-covering, is one of the most interesting articles of all the Indian gear, old or modern. It not only invites but with stands investigation.

Individualism is found in all the records of the Indian, whether in material or artistic ways. We make our shoes by millions,

each pair like the other. The Indian made his shoes one pair at a time, each for itself, each like to no other, and each with a significance of its own. Considering them as records, therefore, we are obliged to study them literally piece by piece. The Indian to-day, beaten, robbed, defrauded, vanishing, has more contempt for us than aught else, and he will die with this contempt and this mystery in his heart. As he dies, he tosses us his discarded shoes and bids us read them if we can.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE MOCCASIN

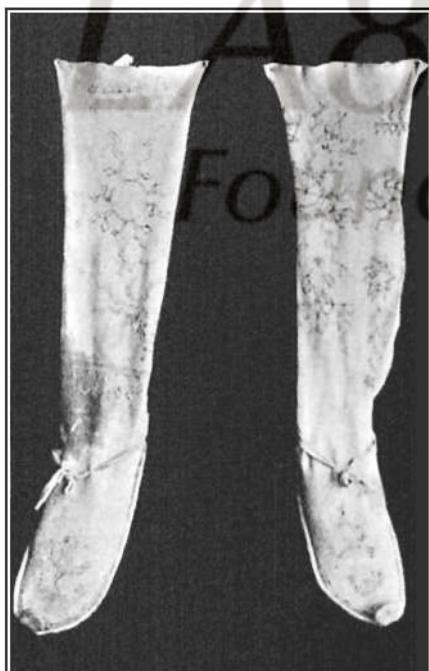
There is a symbolism in the decorative scheme shown by many different Indian tribes. We may say that each and every Indian moccasin of pure type is a picture, or is both a picture and a pictograph. It may mean something, although it is not a pictograph.

The meaning must perforce depend largely upon the surroundings of the maker. A thousand reasons might influence this or that pattern. Sometimes a very old and wise woman who made moccasins, might have a dream, and she would put her "dream" into the moccasin. Perhaps a well content and simple-minded maker would put in merely a reflex of the life about her, the objects with which she was in continual contact. There would be present the continual tribute of superstition to the great forces, life, death, the unknown hereafter; the air, the sun, the wind. The trees, the earth; the immediate ignorance, the common necessity, the passing event of present importance—all these abstract or concrete things might come into the mind of the worker with pigments, quills and beads. These, the moccasin-maker put down as best she might. She could not write it out, for her product

was no letter and no pictograph. So in time she came to use the condensed thought of symbolism, just as we do in our astronomy or astrology or mathematics. She struggled toward the shorthand of thought-universal.

As showing the complexity of the question of symbolism in these native decorations, it may be said that in one Plains tribe alone there purport to have been discovered some four hundred and fifty-eight distinct symbolic figures used in decorative work. That is a pretty large order. It grows still larger when we remember that these decorative figures would not be duplicated or understood in the ornamentations typical of another tribe. The civilized nations of the world possess common grounds of interpretation. The savage tribes of America did not. Even as among individuals of the same tribe there was no absolutely common ground of interpretation. These facts make the reading of an Indian moccasin a heavy task; although the more baffling it is, the more interesting.

Two propositions present themselves at once, even to the most indifferent observer. If the moccasin be part picture and part



Apache. (Rawhide rolled sole and toe disk.)



Hopi-Navajo. (Rawhide sole with rolled edge.)

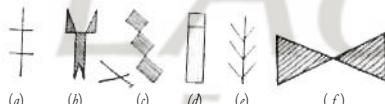
pictograph, how much shall we assign to decoration and how much to significance, meaning or symbolism? Did the first moccasin maker simply try to make something that seemed to her beautiful, or did she intend it to mean something, to tell a story? How much of her work was decorative art and how much was literature?

In answering these questions we must bear in mind that the Indian had but the one medium of expression, and that the materials for that medium were not very flexible or adaptable. It was not easy for him to draw out each object in detail. Hence he invented a condensed form of expression, a sort of shorthand in art. To him a symbol was a labor-saving device. Why portray the whole object, when a few of its distinguishing features would indicate it just as well? Why work out in full the figure of a buffalo, or a bear or an elk, when an arbitrary figure would represent either more quickly and as conclusively?

So much for Indian art and expression as it was in the beginning. But in time the art might change. This change might be in either of two directions. The artist might become more literal and more imi-

tative, or he might tend more and more to condense, to syncopate, to symbolize. Did he keep on symbolizing and condensing more and more for a few thousand years, he might find himself ceasing to imitate, and finally coming merely to write down a name for an object, as we do, his literature having then developed at the cost of his realistic art, so that he would have to work out his art-pictorial all over again, and by itself, as we do.

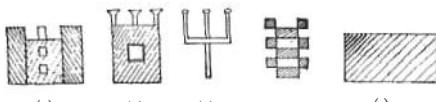
Keeping in mind these two possible differentiations, these two-change tendencies, toward decoration or toward symbolism, we must also restore mentally the aboriginal conditions of life, and the aboriginal limitations in art materials. The materials at the hand of the artist, and the space for their employment, were both limited. The Indian's largest canvas was a buffalo robe. In his moccasin decorations he was confined to the space of a small piece of buckskin. Upon this the picture-story, or the signs which stood for the picture-story, must be shown in quills or beads—stiff, unyielding. Was it not natural for him, since he could not write, and since he could not paint out or depict, literally, that he should invent symbols like the following:



(a) the dragon fly; (b) the crawfish, the scorpion; (c) the worm; (d) the caterpillar; (e) the centipede; (f) the butterfly.

SOME DIFFICULT SYMBOLS

These are all beautiful and beautifully simple indications of native symbols. An assiduous student finds them among the Arapahoes. But let us go softly, for assuredly there is deep water ahead. Here are some more object-signs which will tend to give us pause.



(a) bear's foot; (b) the buffalo intestine or stomach; (c) the buffalo.

It is a bit disconcerting, is it not, to see three different arbitrary symbols for

the foot of the bear? Still more disconcerting is it to remember that these Arapaho symbols for the bear's foot are absolutely distinct and dissimilar to the equally arbitrary geometric design which means bear-foot among the tribes of the Northwest coast. No doubt you have seen the painted geometric effect or alternate color squares on a moccasin front; Anglo-Saxon-like you found this design in geometry. The Indian found it in the coating of the buffalo intestine or stomach! That might be called descriptive or literal rendition, might it not? Perhaps. But what shall we say to the sign for Buffalo, which is simply a plain, solid-colored rectangle? Only that a universal object could not have a simpler representation.

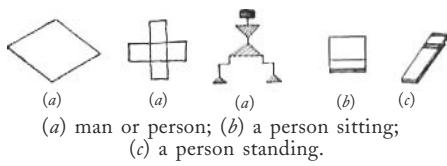
It is difficult to draw in beads or quills a representation of the human eye. The Arapaho had many symbols for it, of which three follow:



The eye.

We might trace the pupil of the eye in the first symbol; but how about the other two? And sometimes the eye was indicated by a triangle, Δ. The triangle was a much-used and hard-worked symbol. Two triangles joined, may mean woman; or it may mean butterfly, in some of the Southwestern tribes. Even we whites sometimes compare woman to a butterfly, but we do so less literally!

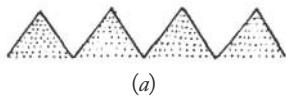
Natural objects, such as man, and the other animals, would be supposed to gain universal acceptance in thought-sign; but this seems not to have been the case. Thus, the Arapahoes have the following signs for man:



(a) man or person; (b) a person sitting; (c) a person standing.

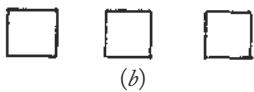
The symbol for man was also at times a triangle, a rectangle, a cross, or even a dot. We speak of squaring the circle. The simple Arapaho has already squared it. He treats the square and the circle as mean-

ing precisely the same thing. The figure of the triangle is an easy and natural one, but its meanings reach a confusing total. A triangle with the point downward, ∇ stands for heart; with the point upward, Δ it may mean a tent, a tepee, or a mountain. A series of triangles or notches



(a)

may stand for clouds (a). A simple cross + may mean a star, or the Morning Star.



(b)

A line of little squares (b) means tracks, which may be buffalo tracks, deer tracks, or what not.

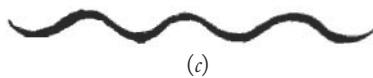
It is difficult for us to resolve all these contradictions, for we see them only as the slow result of the two elemental tendencies earlier established. We must simply admit that the sign for bear-foot, half picture and half writing, is as good as our way of expressing it. We draw an imitation of a bear's foot—or we think we do—and then we write under it words, "Foot of a Bear." The Indian, having no written language, abbreviated more than we do. When we read his moccasin story, we read a shorthand, in which the characters are syncopated pictures.

WHY SYMBOLS ARE ARBITRARY

We should do very well with the abbreviation if only it were the same in the same tribe, and more especially among different tribes. We are willing to put ourselves in the frame of mind which we entertain when we visit a Chinese theater. We are perhaps able to feel, when the chief actor makes a sweep of his leg, that he is after that on horseback. But we demand of all Chinese theaters that this horseback-sign must be the same; or at least it must always be the same in this one theater. We instinctively ask that these symbols, these thought-condensations shown on Indian moccasins shall be the same in all the tribes. There is where our great difficulties begin. It is also where our white methods of thought begin.

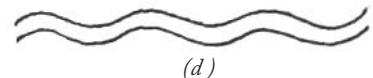
Instinctively we ask of savage life and

conditions methods and results comparable to the intercommunicating civilization of our world. The Sioux makes one sign for buffalo, elk, bear, or some other simple object. The Indian of the Northwest coast makes an entirely different sign for the same thing. Thus, in the Northwest a



(c)

simple wavy line (c) means shade, or shade-of-a-tree. Another line drawn



(d)

below this (d) means lightning. In very many tribes east of the Rocky mountains



(e)

this wavy line (e) means snake. We discover that it is all arbitrary. We become irritated at it. We are perhaps ready to cast it all aside and call it a jargon and a jumble. We insist that red meanings shall be as fixed and universal as white meanings. We ask Cheyenne and Siwash to draw alike, though they have met no more than though they dwelt on different planets. Now, this is not in the least reasonable of us.

We should remember that in the old tribal days there was no such intercommunication of thought as exists among the whites. We have a swift and general transportation. We have newspapers, mails, the telegraph. The Indians had no such things. When two tribes met they fought, because each wanted the hunting range. If at last they settled down in peace near each other, there was a certain assimilation of custom and of symbolism—which in time began between the two. Suppose we had no written records, and dwelt upon opposite sides of the world, ignorant of the existence of any other souls. What guarantee is there that you, upon one side of the world, would devise the same symbol to mean the sun, or moon, or star as might be done by myself, dwelling upon the opposite side of the earth? You make it a circle. I make it a square with a dot in it. My symbol is clear to me, yours is to you. We meet at

last. Perhaps then we compare our symbols and perhaps afterward we unite upon one. After all, this is much the same as the slow history of the Indian tribes. They had little intercommunication. Moreover, they were great democrats, great individuals, each for himself. They were uncommunicative even with each other. Different *gentes*, even different families, might have their own ideas and their own symbols. Their education in common was to hunt, to eat, to fight, to live. There were few other common thoughts discussed. There was no school of symbols, no education in thought-shorthand. The Indian environment was limited, the Indian touch with other life was loose and slight, the Indian mind was simple as that of a child—vague, superstitious, as hard to understand as was your own mind, dreamy, mystic, when you yourself were a child, looking at the sky, dreaming on the top of some high place.

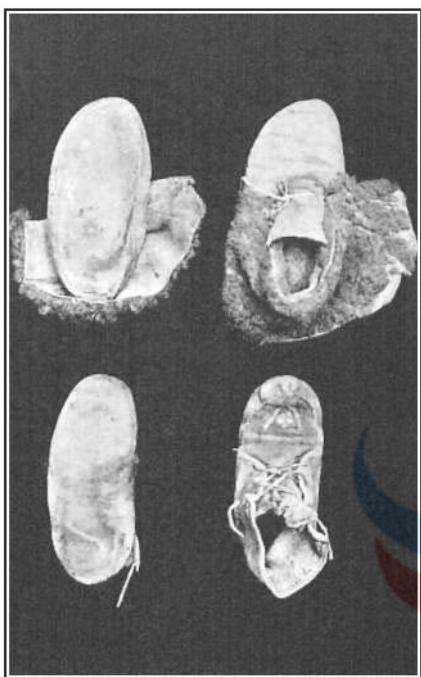
By this line of thought we can account for many inter-tribal or even inter-family divergencies in the form of symbols for the same thing; and we may also begin to see how this form or the other of decoration gradually became fixed, an accepted type, in any given tribe or portion of a tribe. There would naturally be a certain amount of indirect imitation. The native artist might perhaps see a pair of moccasins which she liked, and so would improve or parallel them, although she would not copy them. All the time she would conform in some general way to a tribal scheme. Thus, if she were a Cheyenne or an Arapaho she would use a great many white beads in the groundwork of her pattern. Why? She could not tell you that, although this is one of the distinguishing characteristics of decoration in these two tribes. It was established simply by some ancient dropping into line, some half-unconscious imitation. There was no tribal dictum or tradition back of it. There were no written canons of art, no great artists, no teachers of art. Moreover, the origin of the tribe, its family stock, had nothing to do with these accepted models or symbols. The Blackfeet, Cheyennes, Ojibways and Arapahoes are all of the Algonquin stock; yet their tribal moccasins are wholly dissimilar in model and in decoration. Comparative

philology and decorative symbolism do not check out together with any sort of satisfaction. Looking upon the several tribes and sub-tribes as having small interchange of thought, we must consider each tribe as responsible for its own art ideas and its own symbolism.

Since each moccasin is a law unto itself, we ought to content ourselves with accepting it as such, and not too much befuddle ourselves with attempts at broad generalization. Thus Mr. Kroeber, a very earnest student, sensibly says of his chosen tribe: "The number of their symbols is considerable. Several may express abstract ideas. Connection between the symbols is usual, and they may even tell a story. All this suggests picture-writing, but at the same time they are no real pictographs. Symbols described cannot be read. One man may give us the meaning of another's design, but he may fail to understand it or may even misinterpret it."

That is a fair admission for any specialist to make. It admits the personal equation of the native artist. Still more fair is the admission of the personal equation of the observer as well as the observed. "If one concentrates his attention on the symbolism, or happens to be temperamentally more interested in it, he is very likely to see it more abundantly than the decoration. But if one thinks more of the decoration as such, or if one's mind runs naturally toward the ornamental and technical, he will probably notice most this side, and finally champion the theory of expanded decoration."

We do not need to be ultra-scientific in getting at a fair interpretation of our moccasin pattern. We can remember our two original tendencies, and our two personal equations, and can remember that quills and beads might sometimes be scant or even in part lacking in the meager resources of the artist. Benjamin West could pull hairs from the tail of the family cat to make himself a paint brush; but what could the bead-worker do if the bead-bag were empty? We can remember that contact with other peoples would naturally modify artistic expression. Most important of all, we can remember the ever-present influence of immediate environment, the continual imprint of natural objects upon the simple native mind.



Cheyenne buffalo moccasin.

East-Canadian moccasin. (Milicete model.)
Moose-hide.

How much new contacts and changed environments left imprint on the native decorative schemes may be proved by the total change in moccasin decorations since the tribes have had touch with the white man. The Indian has abandoned much of his ancient symbolism and has blindly and childishly adopted the white man's patterns, flowers, crosses, rosettes and scrolls. The half-breed's influence, and the mission school influence, extend deeply into the native art of every tribe to-day. The tribes also visit each other in these days of railroad travel. Members of widely separated peoples meet at Washington or at Indian congresses or at Wild West shows. The result has been a breaking down of the old tribal lines and tribal arts and an altering of the ancient symbols. If your moccasins, probably bought on some reservation or at some collector's store, show a flower pattern, be sure they are not ancient and are not typical of Indian art. The Indian woman might represent the intestinal tract of the buffalo, but she never imitated the prairie sunflower or the wild

rose. She was like a child. Neither does a child portray flowers. He runs to crude and arbitrary objects. He draws some weird figure in the dust, and if you ask him what it is he says it is "a man;" and that figure does him and his immediate associates for a man until some boy on some other block draws what seems to him a better figure of a man, and he accepts it blindly.

SOME UNIVERSAL SYMBOLS

What can we hold as common and typical in inter-tribal decoration schemes? How many symbols are there which have the same meaning in different tribes? Probably not a great many, though there are some figures and symbols which seem to have a widely accepted significance. Perhaps your pair of old moccasins may show a straight narrow line in quills or beads, extending to the toe of the upper piece. You may see this decoration in a Cree or Blackfoot or Cheyenne or Sioux or Crow or Arapaho shoe. It will not always be there, but will often appear. This straight line seems to have about the same significance in all the tribes, meaning the path of the sun, the path of life, the way to a destination. It seems also to be the sign of departure, of Going Somewhere—making with an interesting and pretty bit of symbolism.

Possibly you have noticed on your moccasins, as upon many decorated buffalo robes, certain cross-lines done in beads or quill-work. These lines may mean different things, but in proper relation to other lines they seem to mean, among very many tribes, the same thing; that is to say, paths or trails, usually paths of the buffalo. The buffalo symbol was the symbol of abundance, of plenty, and the buffalo comes into the life and the art of the American Indian continually.

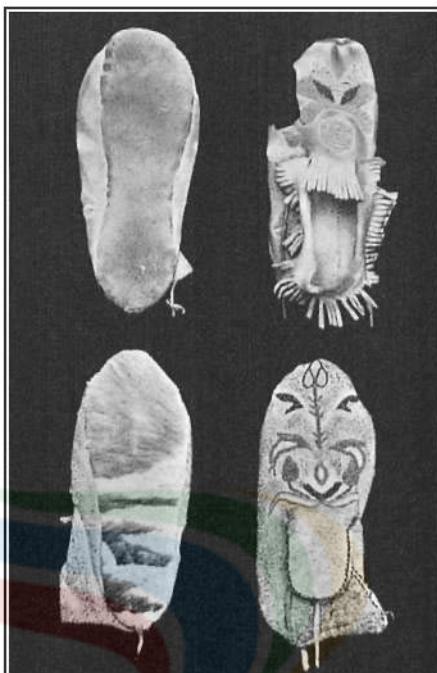
The figure denoting the four winds, or four cardinal points usually taking the form of a cross, with limbs of equal length—is not confined to any one tribe. At times this cross takes the form of the swastika. This figure, as well as the figure of the cross, appears on nearly every continent of the globe and among nearly every nation. Certain fanatics have fallen into ecstasies at seeing the sign of the cross among savage tribes which

have not met Christianity. They go too far in their own symbolism. The cross is the simplest arrangement of two straight lines. The swastika is easily made by attaching

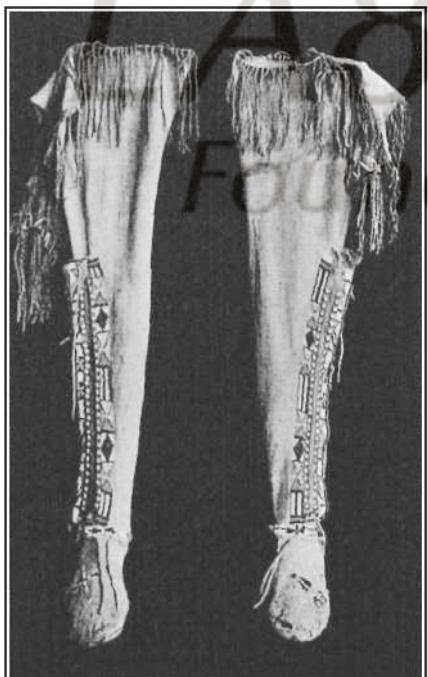


a short line at the end of each arm of the cross. This figure almost seems to be spontaneous and not to have been gained by intercommunication. The simple cross is widely used in the decoration of all the tribes, but the figure has a very wide and divergent significance. Sometimes it means Morning Star, sometimes any star, and sometimes very many other things; but the signification of the star seems to be the most widely accepted one.

An Indian, asked to interpret a certain piece of decoration, said that the straight lines meant straight paths, a good life. The crosses shown meant the Morning Star. A long, horizontal green line also meant a straight path. The red flannel at the edge of the decoration meant the first glimpse or shining of the star. Notches along the bottom of the pattern meant clouds. Perhaps a neighboring tribesman might have gathered something of the same meaning out of this decoration pattern.



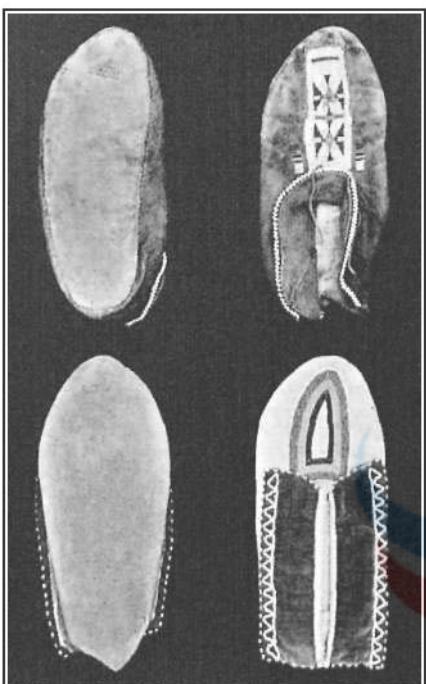
Sioux-made, fancy trade moccasin.
Blackfoot (Piegan) modern—beef-hide.



Wichita.

If the cross was a natural and spontaneous symbol in many corners of the world, the circle seems also to have been one readily present in all manner of human minds. Most often it meant the lodge-floor or a worn spot on the ground, in Indian significance. The interior of the circle can readily be divided into two symmetrical figures—as in the sign of the Great Monad. This mystic symbol appears on some of the pottery of the American tribes, but is not so far as known, noted in the foregoing form in any moccasin decorations. Some learned men have seized upon this symbol as showing the Asiatic origin of the American tribes. Following out this course of reasoning, we could as easily prove our Indians originally to have been Chinese, Japanese or Co-rean; for the Great Monad, in one form or other, appears in the blazonry of all these peoples. The Indians often broke the circle's interior with many arbitrary figures, and these frequently were purely decorative.

The thunder bird or eagle appears here and there in the moccasin patterns of

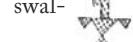


Pawnee. Old ceremonial moccasins, colored black; worn by medicine men
Caddo.

nearly all the Plains tribes, in more or less elaborate forms, as thus:



Note now the ease with which realism may alter a symbol in a few details so that it may mean quite another thing. A few sharp lines at the bottom of the thunderbird figure cause it to stand for swallow. The stiff tail-feathers of the swallow are thus represented:



This eagle figure has almost as wide a significance as the rows of squares indicating animal tracks or the transverse straight lines which mean paths. Yet the same tribe might have more easily drawn symbols for the eagle. The Arapahoes sometimes paraphrased it thus:



In view of all these discrepancies which, in spite of all, still mar the best possible tribal generalizations in symbolism, is it any wonder that, did you take your pair of moccasins back to the tribe which pro-

duced them, you would perhaps hardly find two Indians there who would read their symbolism alike? You show your Indian friend a pair of moccasins made by his people—you know they are such, for you have seen them made. "Ah, it was a woman of another tribe who married here, and who makes moccasins like her own people—they are not ours," he says. You show him a pair handsomely done in flowers and branch patterns. He shakes his head. "They are not ours," he says.

A pair of moccasins from the lower plains may show you a sign like this:  It means what we mean when we say infinity. The tribesman calls it "The-Many-Things-Unknown." Those are two pathetic human symbols, while or red—the-Going-Somewhere sign, and the-Many-Things-Unknown. Indeed, Indian symbolism, taking hold upon life itself, reflecting that which produced it, and offering betimes results pleasing and beautiful in its adaptation of limited means to vague and childlike purposes, is even more pathetic than puzzling in its crudeness and simplicity.



Comanche. Beautiful example of chiefs' moccasins.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLOR

So much for the confusing question of the different forms in moccasin patterns. Now, much of the beauty of these tribal decorations lay in the color scheme as well as in the arrangement of the different figures or designs. We ought, in accordance with our own standpoints, to be able to find some sort of common denominator in the color schemes of the moccasins of different tribes. Perhaps; but this also seems a difficult and baffling thing to run down. The arbitrary establishment of symbols seems never to have contemplated any sort of universal color significance. Thus in many tribes red signifies life, blood, and hence man, bravery, the male child. Yellow means naturally the sun, day. A yellow bead or brass tack-head may mean a gleaming sky. It may also mean a gleaming eye. It shines. Green is accepted as the natural color for representing grass, "The-Earth-in-Springtime." Blue naturally indicates sky. White is accepted to mean snow, but also means the Plains, a white or sandy soil. But we must go softly in our generalizations. The aboriginal mind sometimes made a green sky and blue grass. Sometimes a river was shown blue and sometimes green. The Arapahoes, for instance, made no distinction between blue and green as colors. The color black — night, gloom, shade — ought to be universal in its meaning among all the tribes, but it does not seem to be. It is the sad and solemn color for us; but among many tribes it meant simply power, wisdom. The Pawnee medicine man painted his moccasins black. This did not mean that he was going upon the warpath, or that his heart was bad. It meant that he was wise and strong, or wanted to be wise and strong. The Arapahoes call red, yellow, black and white "the old colors," and say they stand for the four ages of the world or its four "lives." This classification cannot be traced, even to all the other Plains tribes. Indeed the significance of color, simple and universal as our white minds would suppose it to be, is well-nigh as confusing as any other feature of Indian decoration. The symbol was as the native artist found room and material for making it; the color in which the symbol was shown was

established by her whim or her present resources.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FRINGE

Still continuing our study of individual specimens in this infinite assortment offered us by never-duplicating native artists, and still continuing our search for some generalization which shall accord with the Anglo-Saxon lines of thought, we may consider other features and forms of the Indian moccasin. Assuredly we may call each pair of moccasins in decoration a reflection, and in form an expression, of the environment that gave it out. The ornamentation sometimes extended to the treatment of the body-fabric of the moccasin. Thus it might have fringes or streamers at the heels; there might be different forms given to the tongue or flap, etc. Perhaps we may get some sort of idea here which will serve for a generalization. The fringe on a shirt seam served to protect the seam; yet fringe, to the mind red or white, naturally signifies wealth, abundance, extravagance, debonairness. Sometimes in tribal symbolism fringe meant tree; sometimes wind; sometimes wind-in-the-trees. Now we know that all the horse peoples take to fringes naturally, as witness, if you please, our own plainsmen and cow-punchers, who always rode fast, and who always had some flapping or flying bit of leather or fringe here or there. Eastern artists put fringe on all their cowboys today, and they are right in instinct if not in verity. Fringes on moccasins meant for actual use in the snow country were not sensible, and hence were not common. For a pair of dress moccasins, such as one puts on when entering a strange village upon a visit, these might be employed. They might also appear in moccasins worn indoors or in ceremonial use. On the Plains, where the horse was used part of the time, we see fringes becoming more natural and more common. In the extreme south, where the Comanches lived—horse-Indians pure and simple, who scarce set foot upon the ground—there you would see the most exuberantly fringed moccasins to be discovered upon the continent—not walking shoes but riding shoes, and brave enough in their ornamentation, the more especially when



Pottawatomie.

Chippewa.

stained green or rubbed with crude earth colors. Whether it was Comanche or Sioux that displayed decorative fringes, the holiday significance of ease and opulence was somewhat the same.

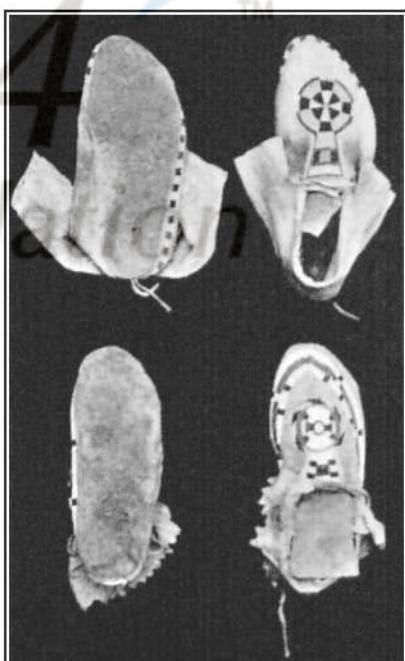
That contact with other peoples governed in the establishment of decoration and form in Indian moccasins, may be proved again by noting the Spanish-like decoration of bangles, *conchas* and disks of metal on the footwear of the tribes of the lower ranges. They got this from the Spanish as clearly as did our American cowpuncher many of his ideas.

Again, as showing this more slowly working influence of the natural environment, and the more permanent forms arising from it, note the tall, high-topped leggings of these Southern moccasins—for instance, those of the Wichitas, Caddoes, etc., good protection against the rough mesquite and chaparral of the lower ranges. Observe the natural fitness of Hopi or Navajo shoe, from the hard and thorny Southwest. Its sole is of hard rawhide, patiently hammered until it rolls up at the edge—the best possible protec-

tion against piercing cactus. Examine the tall-topped Apache moccasin, a very clever specimen of native footwear. Its sole also is of rolled rawhide, beautifully worked in with the upper seam; and at its toe there is a round disk of rawhide, a part of the sole—the best cactus shield man ever put upon his foot.

ENVIRONMENT DETERMINED TRIBAL MODELS

The veriest amateur can find points of common form and peculiarities in these broad assemblages of native footwear, and can understand that the environment established the model, if it did not definitely establish the decoration. Thus it was entirely natural that the model of the ancient Sioux moccasin—a sole with a widely sweeping curve on the outer side, to give the foot full room; one of the most rational, and indeed one of the most widely accepted and most permanent of all the tribal models—was made with a hard rawhide sole. The hard soil of the northern Plains required this sort of sole, for cactus



Crow.

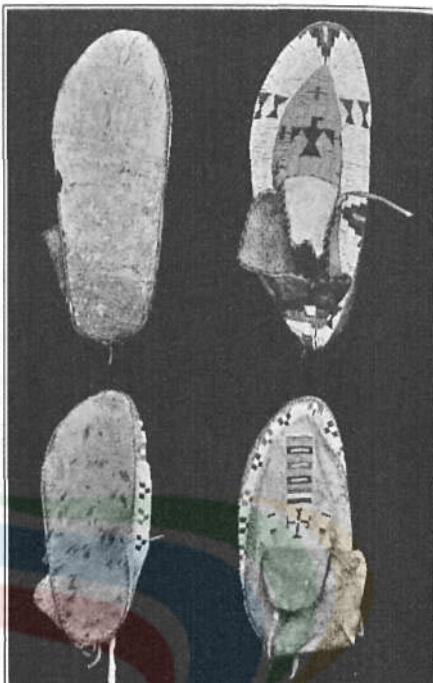
Blackfeet. (Blood branch.)

was sometimes found there, as well as stubs of grass and pebbles. As a matter of fact, all the pure Plains tribes, the buffalo peoples, all the tribes that lived in tepees or movable lodges, made their moccasins with hard rawhide soles. Here is at least one generalization which we can accept. The Pawnees, for instance, lived on the Plains, but their moccasins were typically soft-soled; and they were not a buffalo people exclusively, but lived in permanent earth-covered lodges.

In the snowy countries of the far north it was natural that the moccasins should have soft soles. Snowshoes would not admit of the use of the hard rawhide sole. We do not find the latter in the woods tribes of the north; but we find a higher ankle-flap, the native device for keeping out snow. The native Canadian moccasin, made of moose-hide, and with the upper gathered in a long curve at the fore part of the foot, is adopted by the white man as an ideal foot-cover for snowshoeing. It came from the Indians. The Canadian shoe-pack is cut the same way, with the white man's improvement of a tall top and a bellows-tongue, and a fabric of oil-soaked grain leather instead of the less impervious moose-hide. This bellows-tongue, however, is the white man's invention. It is not seen in any native model. In the tribal moccasin the flap or tongue is always loose and not attached at the sides, whether the specimen be taken from among the Eskimos or the Comanches. The white man also uses hooks or eyelets for the fastening of his imitation moccasins. Thongs, and not hooks and eyes or buttons, made the aboriginal fastening. The Hopi alone fastens his moccasin side-flap at the ankle with a button, sometimes of wood; but the thong wrapping around the ankle was the typical form.

THE LESSON OF THE SHOES

Now we have been able to discover a loose sort of uniformity in the scheme of ornamentation of this or the other tribe, if not among all the tribes. We have been able also to find a common meaning in some few features of decoration or formal adornments. We have perhaps recognized the forces of the law by which each section of the country inevitably produced its own form, if not its own style of decora-

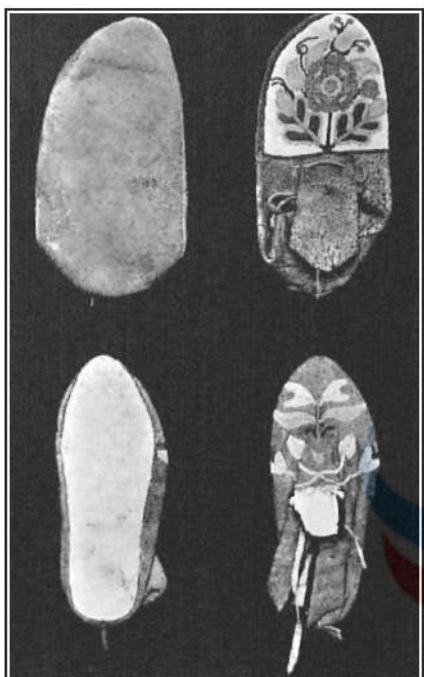


Cheyenne.

Sioux. (Beef-hide.)

tion in footwear. There will be additional interest in examining different examples showing the many ingenious and differing ways which widely separated native tribes had of securing the same general purpose in footwear.

The aboriginal moccasin fabric was moose-hide for cold weather in the North; buffalo-hide with the hair on for cold weather on the Plains; buckskin for the most general uses; and later on often beef-hide in substitution of all these disappearing fabrics. In the one fabric or the other we may see many different, distinct, and permanent tribal models. The ankle-flap may run up straight or it may roll down strongly at the heel, as in the Chippewa moccasin. It may be rectangular in shape, as among the Caddoes, or circular, as among the Pawnees. It may open in front, as in most moccasins; or, rarely, in the rear, as in the pair of Pawnee medicine man's ceremonial shoes. Again, the ankle-flap may extend up in the form of an attached legging, as shown in some moccasins of the Southwest. The tongue or



Cree. (Modern.)

Piegan. (Modern.)

flap of the upper also has different and distinct values among different tribes. The heel-tags or streamers are also different. We may group these tribal shoes just as accurately as we may group the varying climatic and topographical differences of this country; that is, roughly in sections. If not every man of the same tribe could read the symbols of a pair of moccasins produced in that tribe, at least, taking form and decoration together, every

member of that tribe could tell at a glance that his people had made the moccasins. They could look at moccasins of other tribes and usually tell at once to which tribe this or that specimen belonged. The type was established in general if not in detail.

This is speaking for the older days of the tribal life. Today, when the old lines are breaking down, when the ways of the white man are insistently making themselves felt in each detail of the life of this passing race, it is becoming more and more difficult not only to interpret the symbolism of the different native tribes but to find that symbolism properly and adequately expressed. Suppose it remain a mystery, suppose that each moccasin be a law unto itself. Even so, it may have beauty and suggestion, though it have not a literal and easily understandable significance, for our part, rather than seek to analyze and dissect too far the Indian heart and brain as shown in his simple forms of expression, let us prefer to follow this expression, this manifestation of that heart and brain, out to the edge of things, out to the old frontier; and let us leave it there, still a mystery; as the whisper of the wind in the grasses is a mystery, and the pink at morn upon a snow-topped mountain peak. It is enough for symbolism that it talks to us also in its vague and lisping syllables; enough, if through it we can hear again the whisper in the untrdden verdure of the Plains, and note the message of the sky, and see the sunrise on the peaks, and witness the wild peopling of an unravaged land; and so catch again the wild, crude flavor of the wilderness and a day gone by.

