

THE GRAPHIC ART OF THE ESKIMOS.

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INTRODUCTION.

In the selection of appropriate materials upon which to inscribe his thoughts, primitive man was governed to a great extent by his environment.

In a country abounding in rocks and cliffs, it was but natural for him to portray upon a smooth conspicuous surface the record of an exploit, or a character to direct his companions on the right trail or to a convenient camping place. In that portion of the West known as the "Great Plains," rock pictures are of seldom occurrence. The numerous tribes of many different languages were hunters of the buffalo, and in their frequent movements from place to place found the skin of that animal, as well as that of the deer, the most convenient. Along the shores of the Great Lakes, where the white birch is of frequent occurrence, the Indians employ the bark of this tree for their mnemonic and other records. The bark, when fresh, is tough, and retains permanently the slightest markings indented or incised upon it by means of a sharply pointed bone or nail.

Various Indian tribes employ, also, other substances, such as bone, wood, and various arrangements of shell beads, as well as feathers and textile substances, to convey special forms of information.¹

The Innuited or Eskimo of Alaska utilize the tusks of the walrus, and in occasional instances the horns of the reindeer. The tusks are cut longitudinally into rods, upon the faces of which delicate engravings or etchings are made, the depressions or incisions thus produced being filled with black or some other color so as to heighten the effect.

The Eskimo of Greenland, Labrador, and the remaining portions of the Arctic regions east of the delta of the Mackenzie River, use flat pieces of wood upon which to exercise their more primitive skill at art ornamentation. Although ivory is abundant in some portions of the Melville Peninsula, yet it appears generally absent in the collections from that region.

¹ For details and history of pictography, see the writer's "Beginnings of Writing." D. Appleton & Co., New York, 1895.