

The Megaliths of the Souris River.



ON THE banks of the Souris River in the Canadian Northwest Territories, was formerly a sacred spot of the Dakotas. With something of the same reverence

with which the Indian tribes gathered to their solemn meeting place, when were

"All the warriors drawn together,
By the signal of the Peace-Pipe,
To the mountains of the prairie,
To the great Red Pipestone Quarry."

did Sioux, Assiniboines, and in times of peace, wandering bands of Crees visit with awe the great rocks standing out like sentinels on the prairie banks of the Souris River.

The early French voyageurs who named the river in their musical tongue, Riviere la Souris, observed overlooking them the great sentinel rock, through which the elements had pierced or eaten an opening to be seen for miles, and designated it "La Roche percee"—a name extended to the whole fantastically formed group since called "The pierced rocks."

The plains, in the region lying around these sacred rocks, were, as tradition and even recent history tells, black with buffalo, and when the Sioux or Assiniboine hunter had with special ardour pursued the chase to the base of the rocks, here he stopped to worship. In token of his gratitude to the Dakotan "Wakan Tonka"—the Great Spirit—he inscribed on the soft, white sandstone the story of his prowess in pictures, whose dim outlines the traveler can still trace. Awed by the strange rock mass the hunter prayed to it, for it is "Wawkawn"—mysterious or supernatural. Hither too the Kinistineaux or Cree from the North, when he could safely reach this shrine on the borderland of his tribe, came to pay his offering, and in this place of sanctuary smoked the pipe of peace with his hereditary enemies the Sioux, appealing to the protective care of his "Gitche Manitou."

The offering made, the hunter then returned to his home hundreds of miles away—the Cree to recount on the shores of Lake Manitoba—Spirit Lake—to white, or half-breed, or Ojibway, the tale of his meeting with the awful spirit at the rocky

shrine; the Dakota, as he reached his home on the shores of Minnewakan, not Devil's Lake as wrongly called, but Spirit Water, to tell of his Northwestern pilgrimage; and the Assiniboine to revisit with reverence "Big Stone Lake," the abode of his fathers.

"Where first Wawkeean's footsteps pressed.
About his burning brow, a cloud
Black as the raven's wing, he wore.
Thick tempests wrapt him like a shroud,
Red lightnings in his hands he bore."

How strange that the old meeting place of the Indian nations should be but one-tenth of a degree north of the forty-ninth parallel, the boundary line to day between Dakota and Assinibolia!

It does not surprise us to learn that when Captain Palliser's celebrated expedition crossed the prairies of the Northwest in 1857, the explorer, with Dr. Hector, his scientific assistant, diverged from Fort Ellice, and in the month of August, the queen of prairie months, made, under the leading of his well-trained guides, a pilgrimage of not less than two hundred miles to "La Roche percee"—the famous Indian shrine.

In his diary of August 20th, Captain Palliser says: "The only animals we have met since leaving Fort Ellice up to this point are bands of prairie antelopes, but we had not proceeded far after breakfast when we came in sight with two buffalo bulls, which I killed. As this hunt occasioned a delay of some time, when once again started we pushed on fast in order to reach the Souris river by nightfall."

August 21st. "When day broke this morning we discovered on the opposite bank of the river a large camp of Indians, from the glistening of their white tents in the rising sun. We rode off to examine the river and the banks of the valley through which it runs. We found the valley very extensive. . . . As we continued riding up the valley slowly, we observed a number of Indians coming rapidly towards us. From the open manner in which they approached we saw that their intentions were friendly, so we awaited them, choosing however a good position for observing them as they neared us. A few had guns, but the majority were armed with bows and arrows. They