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CALIFORNIA PICTOGRAPHS AND HIEROGLYPHICS.

BY MRS. THEODORE H. HITTELL, SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

THE study and investigation of the works of the earliest inhabitants of a country is now a science in itself, and is receiving more and more attention in all parts of the world.

Too little has heretofore been done in California, Alaska, Nevada, and Arizona to investigate, gather up, and preserve the relics and works of the prehistoric races which inhabited these western territories, and as there is now but little left, that little should without delay be carefully sought out and put in such shape as to remain a permanent possession. Of much, on account of our own carelessness we have been despoiled, and much that yet remains has been more or less defaced and injured.

Government, as well as scientific societies, should look to the preservation of what remains of the structures, tools, utensils, and weapons of the aborigines, and by all means endeavor to gather together and preserve by photographs the cipher writings which are yet to be found and which, year after year, by the corroding hand of time and the more destructive hand of ruthless vandalism, are becoming more and more defaced and ruined.

The cipher writings yet to be found from Alaska to Arizona, if carefully gathered and studied, might enable us to learn many very important facts concerning the customs of the redskins and their early history.

In the Sierra Nevada Mountains, near the so-called Summit Soda Springs, about fourteen miles south of Donner Lake and at an elevation of about 6,000 feet above the level of the ocean, the attention of tourists is attracted by numerous inscriptions incised in the rocks.

The most prominent, and the most inviting of attention of these, are those cut in the granite rocks, about a hundred feet high, which stand nearly isolated on the right and on the left of the headwaters of the North Fork of the American River.

The stream there is almost a little torrent and dashes over the rocks in cascades and from there it plunges into and through a mountain gorge towards the lower level far below.

To a person standing near the fountain-head of the river, on the rocks against which it chafes and which it is gradually but surely wearing away, and who takes note and truly appreciates the grandeur of the scenery, there comes a feeling of awe and reverence. It elevates the soul and calls forth a spirit akin to religious worship.

It was here in this sublime region that an unknown people left pictographs on the rocks pertaining doubtless to their history and religion. The seasons of centuries since then have come and gone; the snows of uncounted winters have covered them; succeeding springs and summers unnumbered have decked the mountains with yearly verdure, and the river has been rushing on and on and cutting its bed deeper and deeper. All this we know; but we know nothing of those who wrote these ciphers on the monumental rocks. They have long since passed away.

Only with the help of science and long study and comparison,

can we hope to gain an inkling of the meaning these ciphers were intended to convey, and add, perhaps, some important facts to the ancient history of California—a subject now so full of interest and becoming daily of more and more interest to the world.

According to the Report of the Bureau of Ethnology at Washington, pictographs of the North American Indians are found at Santa Barbara and San Diego in California, and in Nevada, Arizona, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah.

In Nevada great numbers of incised characters of various kinds are found on the rocks flanking Walker River. These are waving lines, rings, and what appear to be vegetable, animal, and human forms. Among the copies of pictographs obtained in various portions of the Northwestern States and Territories by Mr. Gilbert, one kind is referred to as being on a block of basalt at Reville, Nevada, and is mentioned as Shinuma or Mosquis.

This suggestion is based upon the general resemblance to drawings found in Arizona, and known to have been made by Mosquis Indians.

In Oregon, numerous boulders and rock escarpments at and near the Dalles of the Columbia River are covered with incised or pecked pictographs. Human figures occur; but other forms predominate. From Lieut. J. H. Simpson's Topographical Bureau Report we take the following: "At the Rio de Zuni, in 1849, we met Mr. Lewis, who had been a trader among the Navajas, and according to his statement had seen inscriptions on a rock on his travels to and fro. He offered to guide us. He led us to a low mound. We went up and found inscriptions of interest, if not of value; and of them some dating so far back as 1606. The rock is since mentioned as Inscription Rock." The following letter, addressed to Lieut. J. H. Simpson, was written by Danatiana Vigil, Secretary of the Province of Santa Fé, on October 19, 1849.

"Sir:—The engravings which are sculptured on the rock of Fish Spring, near the Pueblo of Zuni, copies of which you have taken, were made in the epoch to which they refer. I have an indistinct idea of their existence; but, although I have passed the place some three times, I never availed myself of the opportunity to observe them. The other signs or characters noticed are traditional remembrances, by means of which the Indians transmit historical accounts of all their remarkable successes. To discover these sets by themselves is very difficult. Some of the Indians make trifling indications, which divulge, with a great deal of reserve, something of their history, to persons in whom they have entire confidence. The people who inhabited this country before its discovery by the Spaniards were superstitious and worshipped the sun."

Mr. G. K. Gilbert discovered etchings at Oakley Springs, Eastern Arizona, in 1878, relative to which he remarks that an Orabi chief explained them to him and said that the Mosquis make excursions to a locality on the Colorado Chiquito to get salt. On their return they stop at Oakley Springs and each Indian makes a picture on the rock. Each Indian draws his crest or totem, the symbol of his genus. He draws it once, and once only on a visit.

From Alaska to Arizona many inscriptions on rocks are found. Of some of them photographs have been taken. But so far as we know none are as extensive or of such variety and of so ancient a date as those situated near the source of the American River.

These pictographs seemingly resemble and are written in much the same way as the Chinese ciphers where each figure is a word and has a full meaning, and seemingly they should be read from right to left.

Max Müller says, in writing of the American aborigines: "Though the Indians never arrived at the perfection of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, they had a number of symbolic emblems, which were perfectly understood by all their tribes. For instance, power over man is symbolized by a line drawn in the figure from the mouth to the heart. Power, in general, by a head with two horns. A figure with a plant as head and two wings, denotes a doctor skilled in medicine. A tree with human legs, a herbalist. Night is represented by a finely crossed or barred sun, or a circle with human legs. Rain is figured by a