

# Lecture on the Aborigines of Newfoundland eBook

## Lecture on the Aborigines of Newfoundland

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# Page 1

**Author: Joseph Noad**

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*Lecture*

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bsp; *On*

*The aborigines*

*Of*

Newfoundland,

*Delivered before the Mechanics Institute, at St.  
John's, on Monday, 17th January,*

*By*

*The Hon. Joseph Noad,*

*Surveyor-General.*

*St. John's, Newfoundland:*

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## Lecture

*DELIVERED BEFORE THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE AT ST. JOHN'S,  
NEWFOUNDLAND.*

**BY**

*The Hon. Joseph Noad,*

*Surveyor-General,*

Of the various theories advanced on the origin of the North American Indians, none has been so entirely satisfactory as to command a general assent; and on this point many and different opinions are yet held. The late De Witt Clinton, Governor of the State of New York, a man who had given no slight consideration to subjects of this nature, maintained that they were of Tatar origin; others have thought them the descendants of the Ten Tribes, or the offspring of the Canaanites expelled by Joshua. The opinion, however, most commonly entertained is, that the vast continent of North America was peopled from the Northeast of Asia; in proof of which it is urged that every peculiarity, whether in person or disposition, which characterises the Americans, bears some resemblance to the rude tribes scattered over the northeast of Asia, but almost none to the nations settled on the northern extremity of Europe. Robertson, however, gives a new phase to this question; from his authority we learn that, as early as the ninth century, the Norwegians discovered Greenland and planted colonies there. The communication with that country, after a long interruption, was renewed in the last century, and through Moravian missionaries, it is now ascertained that the Esquimaux speak the same language as the Greenlanders, and that they are in every respect the same people. By this decisive fact, not only is the consanguinity of the Greenlanders with the Esquimaux established, but also the possibility of peopling America from the north of Europe demonstrated, and if of America, then of course of Newfoundland also, and thus it appears within the verge of possibility,



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that the original inhabitants of this Island may be descendants of Europeans, in fact merely a distinct tribe of the Esquimaux. At a meeting of the Philosophical Society held in England some few years ago, the subject of the Red Indians of Newfoundland was brought under discussion by Mr. Jukes, the gentleman who conducted the geological survey of this Island; and Dr. King, a name well-known among scientific men, gave it as his opinion, founded on historical evidence, going so far back as the period of Sebastian Cabot, that they were really an Esquimaux tribe. Others are of opinion, founded on some real or presumed affinity between the vocabulary of the one people with that of the other, that the Indian tribes of North America and the original inhabitants of Newfoundland, called by themselves "Boeothicks," and by Europeans "Red Indians," are of the same descent.

The enquiry, however, into the mere origin of a people is one more curious in its nature than it is calculated to be useful, and failure in attempting to discover it need excite but little regret; but it is much to be lamented that the early history of the Boeothick is shrouded in such obscurity, that any attempt to penetrate it must be vain. All that we know of the tribe as it existed in past ages, is derived from tradition handed down to us chiefly thro' the Micmacs; and even from this source, doubtful and uncertain as such authority confessedly is, the amount of information conveyed to us is both scanty and imperfect. From such traditionary facts we gather, that the Boeothicks were once a powerful and numerous tribe, like their neighbouring tribe the Micmacs, and that for a long period these tribes were on friendly terms and inhabited the western shores of Newfoundland in common, together with other parts of the Island as well as the Labrador, and this good understanding continued until some time after the discovery of Newfoundland by Cabot; but it was at length violently interrupted by the Micmacs, who, to ingratiate themselves with the French, who at that time held the sway in these parts, and who had taken offence at some proceedings of the Boeothicks, slew two Red Indians with the intention of taking their heads, which they had severed from the bodies, to the French. This wanton and unprovoked outrage was discovered by the Boeothicks, who gave no intimation of such discovery, but who, after consulting together, determined on revenge. They invited the Micmacs to a feast, and arranged their guests in such order that every Boeothick had a Micmac by his side; at a preconcerted signal every Boeothick slew his guest. War of course ensued. Firearms were but little known to the Indians at that time, but they soon came into more general use among such tribes as continued to hold intercourse with Europeans. This circumstance gave the Micmacs an undisputed ascendancy over the Boeothicks, who were forced to betake themselves to the recesses of the interior and other parts of the Island, alarmed, as well they might be, at every report of the firelock. What may be the present feelings of the Red Indians, supposing any of the tribe to be yet living, towards the Micmacs we know not; but we do know that the latter cherish feelings of unmitigated hatred against the very name of "Red Indian."



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When Cabot discovered Newfoundland in 1497 he saw Savages, whom he describes as “painted with red ochre, and covered with skins.” Cartier in 1534 saw the Red Indians, whom he describes “as of good stature,—wearing their hair in a bunch on the top of the head, and adorned with feathers.” In 1574 Frobisher having been driven by the ice on the coast of Newfoundland, induced some of the natives to come on board, and with one of them he sent five sailors on shore, whom he never saw again; on this account he seized one of the Indians, who died shortly after arriving in England.

As soon after the discovery of Newfoundland as its valuable fisheries became known, vessels from various countries found their way hither, for the purpose of catching whales, and of following other pursuits connected with the fishery. Among those early visitors was a Captain Richard Whitburne, who commanded a ship of 300 tons, belonging to “one Master Cotton of South-hampton” and who fished at Trinity. This Captain Whitburne, in a work published by him in 1622, describing the coast, fishery, soil, and produce of Newfoundland, says, “the natives are ingenious and apt by discreet and moderate government, to be brought to obedience. Many of them join the French and Biscayans on the Northern coast, and work hard for them about fish, whales, and other things; receiving for their labor some bread or trifling trinkets.” They believed, according to Whitburne, that they were created from arrows stuck in the ground by the Good Spirit, and that the dead went into a far country to make merry with their friends. Other early voyagers also make favourable mention of the natives, but notwithstanding this testimony, it is evident, even from information given by their apologist Whitburne himself, that the Red Indians were not exempt from those pilfering habits which, in many instances, have marked the conduct of the inhabitants of newly discovered Islands on their first meeting with Europeans. Whitburne, when expressing his readiness to adopt measures for opening a trade with the Indians, incidentally mentions an instance where their thievish propensities were displayed.—He says, “I am ready with my life and means whereby to find out some new trade with the Indians of the country, for they have great store of red ochre, which they use to colour their bodies, bows, arrows, and canoes. The canoes are built in shape like wherries on the river Thames, but that they are much longer, made with the rinds of birch trees, which they sew very artificially and close together, and overlay every seam with turpentine. In like manner they sew the rinds of birch trees round and deep in proportion like a brass kettle, to boil their meat in; which hath been proved to me by three mariners of a ship riding at anchor by me—who being robbed in the night by the savages of their apparel and provisions, did next day seek after and came suddenly to where they had set up three tents and were feasting; they had three pots made of the



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rinds of trees standing each of them on stones, boiling with fowls in each; they had also many such pots so sewed, and which were full of yolk of eggs that they had boiled hard and so dried, and which the savages do use in their broth. They had great store of skins of deer, beaver, bears, otter, seal, and divers other fine skins, which were well dressed; they had also great store of several sorts of fish dried. By shooting off a musquet towards them, they all ran away without any apparel but only their hats on, which were made of seal skins, in fashion like our hats, sewed handsomely with narrow bands and set round with fine white shels. All the canoes, flesh, skins, yolks of eggs, bows, arrows, and much fine ochre and divers other things did the ship's company take and share among them." And from Whitburne's time up to 1818 have complaints been made of thefts committed by the Indians. To the Northward the settlers, as they allege, had many effects stolen from them—one individual alone made a deposition to the effect that he had lost through the depredations of the Indians, property to the amount of L200.

Now whether in such thefts (although they were only of a petty character) we are to trace the origin of that murderous warfare so relentlessly carried on by the Whites against the Red Indians, or whether the atrocities of the former, were the result of brutal ignorance and a wanton disregard of human life, cannot now be determined,—we have only the lamentable fact before us, that to a set of men not only destitute of all religious principle, but also of the common feelings of humanity, the pursuit and slaughter of the Red Indian became a pastime—an amusement—eagerly sought after—wantonly and barbarously pursued, and in the issue fatally, and it may be added, awfully successful.

For the greater part of the seventeenth century the history of the Red Indians present a dreary waste—no sympathy appears to have been felt for them, and no efforts were made to stay the hands of their merciless destroyers. In their attempts to avoid the Micmac, their dire enemy, they fell in the path of the no less dreaded White, and thus year after year passed away, and the comparatively defenceless Boeothick found, only in the grave, a refuge and rest from his barbarous and powerful foes. During the long period just adverted to, the Red Indian was regarded by furriers, whose path he sometimes crossed; and with whose gains his necessities compelled him sometimes to interfere, with as little compassion as they entertained for any wild or dangerous beast of the forest, and were shot or butchered with as little hesitation. And barbarities of this nature became at length so common, that the attention of the Government was directed to it; and in 1786 a proclamation was issued by Governor Elliot, in which it is stated "that it having been represented to the King that his subjects residing in this Island do often treat the Indians with the greatest inhumanity,

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and frequently destroy them without the least provocation or remorse; it was therefore his Majesty's pleasure that all means should be used to discover and apprehend all who may be guilty of murdering any of the said Indians, in order that such offenders may be sent over to England to be tried for such capital crimes." In 1797 Governor Waldegrave issued a proclamation of a similar character, which document also adverts to the cruelties to which the Indians were subject at the hands of hunters, fishermen and others.—And again in 1802 a proclamation of a like description was also issued.

In 1803 a native Indian was for the first time taken alive—this was a female,—she was captured at the northern part of the Island, being surprised by a fisherman while paddling her canoe towards a small island in quest of birds' eggs. She was carried to St. John's and taken to Government-house, where she was kindly treated. She admired the epaulets of the officers more than any thing she saw, but appeared to value her own dress more highly, for although presents were given her, and indeed whatever she asked for, she would never let her own fur garments go out of her hands. In the hope that if this woman were returned to her tribe, her own description of the treatment she had received, and the presents she would convey to her people, may lead to a friendly communication being opened with the Red Indians, a gentleman residing in Fogo, (Mr. Andrew Pearce) in the vicinity of which place the woman was taken, was authorised to hire men for the purpose of returning her in safety to her tribe. She was accordingly put under the care of four men, and the manner in which they dealt with her is recounted in the following copy of a letter, written by one of them, and addressed to Mr. Trounsell, who was the Admiral's Secretary:—He says, "This is to inform you that I could get no men until the 20th August, when we proceeded with the Indian to the Bay of Exploits, and there went with her up the river as far as we possibly could for want of more strength, and there let her remain ten days, and when I returned the rest of the Indians had carried her off into the country. I would not wish to have any more hand with the Indians, in case you will send round and insure payment for a number of men to go in the country in the winter. The people do not hold with civilizing the Indians, as they think that they will kill more than they did before.

(Signed,) *William Cull.*"

This letter, or at least the latter part of it, is not easily understood; but there is nothing either in its diction or its tone to remove the doubt which, at the time the letter was written, was entertained as to the safety of the poor Indian, and which still rests upon her fate—a strong suspicion was felt, and which has never been removed, that Cull had not dealt fairly with her. Cull heard that such an opinion was entertained, and expressed a strong desire to "get hold of the fellow who said he had murdered the Indian woman." A gentleman who knew Cull well, said, "if ever the person who charged him with the crime, comes within the reach of Cull's gun, and a long gun it is, that cost

L7 at Fogo, he is as dead as any of the Red Indians which Cull has often shot.” Cull received L50 for capturing the woman, and a further sum of L15 for her maintenance.

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In 1807 a proclamation was issued by Governor Holloway, offering a reward of L50 “to such person or persons as shall be able to induce or persuade any of the male tribe of native Indians to attend them to the town of St. John’s; also all expenses attending their journey or passage,” and the same reward was offered to any person who would give information of any murder committed upon the bodies of the Indians.

In 1809, the Government, not satisfied with merely issuing proclamations, sent a vessel to Exploit’s Bay, in order if possible to meet with the Indians. Lieutenant Spratt, who commanded the vessel, had with him a picture representing the officers of the Royal Navy, shaking hands with an Indian chief—a party of sailors laying goods at his feet—a European and Indian mother looking at their respective children of the same age—Indian men and women presenting furs to the officers, and a young sailor looking admiration at an Indian girl. The expedition, however, did not meet with any of the tribe.

In the following year, 1810, several efforts were made to open a communication with the natives, and to arrest the destruction to which they were exposed—first, a proclamation was issued by Sir John Duckworth, stating that the native Indians, by the ill treatment of wicked persons, had been driven from all communication with His Majesty’s subjects, and forced to take refuge in the woods, and offering a reward of L100 to any person who should, to use the words of the proclamation, “generously and meritoriously exert himself to bring about and establish on a firm and settled footing an intercourse with the natives; and moreover, that such persons should be honorably mentioned to His Majesty.”

In the same year a proclamation was also issued, addressed exclusively to the Micmacs, the Esquimaux, and American Indians frequenting the Island, recommending them to live in harmony with the Red Indians, and threatening punishment to any who should injure them; and early in the same year, William Cull, the same person who has been spoken of, with six others, and two Micmacs, set out upon the river Exploits, then frozen over, in quest of their residence in the interior of the country. On the fourth day, having travelled 60 miles, they discovered a building on the bank of the river, about 40 or 50 feet long, and nearly as wide. It was constructed of wood, and covered with the rinds of trees, and skins of deer. It contained large quantities of venison, estimated to have been the choicest parts of at least 100 deer—the flesh was in junks, entirely divested of bone, and stored in boxes made of birch and spruce rinds—each box containing about two cwt. The tongues and hearts were placed in the middle of the packages. In this structure, says the celebrated William Cull, we saw three lids of tin tea kettles, which he believed to be the very same given by Governor Gambier to the Indian woman he was entrusted to restore to her tribe.

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Whether Cull, by this very opportune discovery, removed the suspicion that attached itself to the manner in which he discharged the trust committed to him, does not appear. On the opposite bank of the river stood another store-house considerably larger than the former, but the ice being bad across the river, it was not examined. Two Indians were seen, but avoided all communication with the Whites. The two store-houses stood opposite each other, and from the margin of the river on each side there extended for some miles into the country, high fences erected for the purpose of conducting the deer to the river, and along the margin of the lake in the neighbourhood of those store-houses, were also erected extensive fences, on each side, in order to prevent the deer when they had taken the water from landing. It would appear that as soon as a herd of deer, few or many, enter the water, the Indians who are upon the watch, launch their canoes, and the parallel fences preventing the re-landing of the deer, they become an easy prey to their pursuers, and the buildings before described are depots, for their reception.

Captain Buchan's expedition, too, which is generally, but erroneously spoken of as having been made in the winter of 1815 and 1816, in the course of which two of his men were killed, was also commenced in the autumn of this same year, 1810. Subsequently, indeed, he made one or two journeys into the interior, but only on the one occasion did he meet with any of the natives. The official account of his chief excursion is dated the 23rd October, 1811, and is as follows:—

“Mr. Buchan went in the autumn, to the entrance of the River Exploits, and there anchored his vessel, which soon became fixed in the ice. He then began his march into the interior, accompanied by 24 of his crew and three guides, and having penetrated about 130 miles, discovered some wigwams of the Indians. He surrounded them, and their inhabitants, in number about seventy-five persons, became in his power. He succeeded in overcoming their extreme terror, and soon established a good understanding with them. Four men, among whom was their chief, accepted his invitation to accompany him back to the place, where, as he explained to them by signs, he had left some presents, which he designed for them. The confidence by this time existing was mutual, and so great, that two of Mr. Buchan's people, marines, requested to remain with the Indians; they were allowed to do so, and Mr. Buchan set out on his return to his depot with the remainder of his party and the four Indians. They continued together for about six miles, to the fire-place of the night before, when the chief declined going any further, and with one of his men took leave, directing the other two to go on with Mr. Buchan. They did so, until they came near the place to which they were to be conducted, when one of them became apparently panic-struck and fled, beckoning to his companion to follow him. But the tempers of the

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two men were different, the latter remained unshaken in his determination, and with a cheerful countenance, and air of perfect confidence in the good faith of his new allies, he motioned to them with his hands to proceed, disregarding his companion and seeming to treat with scorn Mr. Buchan's invitation to depart freely if he chose to do so. Soon afterwards the party reached their rendezvous—slept there one night, loaded themselves with the presents and returned again towards their Wigwams. The behaviour of the Indian remained the same—he continued to show a generous confidence, and the whole tenor of his conduct was such as Mr. Buchan could not witness without a feeling of esteem for him. On arriving at the wigwams they were found deserted, which threw the Indian into great alarm. Many circumstances determined Mr. Buchan to let him be at perfect liberty, and this treatment revived his spirits. The party spent the night at the Wigwams, and continued their route in the morning. They had proceeded about a mile, when, being a little in advance of the rest, the Indian was seen to start suddenly backwards; he screamed loudly and then fled swiftly, which rendered pursuit in vain. The cause of flight was understood when Mr. Buchan the next moment, beheld upon the ice, headless and pierced by the arrows of the Indians, the naked bodies of his two marines. An alarm had, it is evident, been given by the savage who deserted the party at the rendezvous, and it is supposed that to justify his conduct in so deserting, he had abused his countrymen with a tale which had excited them to what they perhaps considered a just retaliation. Thus ended an enterprise which was conducted with an ability, zeal, perseverance and manly endurance of extreme hardship, which merited a better success.—When the spring became sufficiently advanced Mr. Buchan returned with his vessel to St. John's, and at once sought and obtained permission from the Governor to return in the summer, in the hope that as the natives came in that season down the rivers to fish and hunt, he might the more easily fall in with them. In this expectation, however, he was disappointed, as he only succeeded in merely discovering some recent traces of them. Captain Buchan, still sanguine of success, requested permission to winter in St. John's, that he may be in readiness to take the earliest of the ensuing spring to go in quest of them again. This was acceded to; but of the movements of Captain Buchan, in consequence of this arrangement, there is no record, it is only known that no additional discoveries were made—but from the facts ascertained by Captain Buchan in his first excursion, the authorities felt satisfied the number of the Indians had been greatly underrated. Captain Buchan was of opinion they could not be less (in the whole) than three hundred persons. Now this is an important fact, as it goes far to disprove the generally received opinion that the tribe is extinct, inasmuch as that opinion was formed from the representations of the decreased numbers of her tribe, made by the Indian woman taken in 1823, but the accuracy of the whole statement there is much reason to doubt. In the course of this narrative we shall be brought to the details of her statement, when a closer comparison of the conflicting accounts can be made.



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The several proclamations issued, in favor of the Red Indian, seem to have been entirely disregarded—the work of extermination proceeded, and the Government again thought it necessary to express its abhorrence of the murders that were continually being perpetrated, and to threaten punishment to the guilty. Accordingly a proclamation, in the name of the Prince Regent, was issued by Sir R. Keats in 1813, to the same effect, and offering the same reward as the previous ones. For the next four years, or from 1814 to 1818, no additional efforts were made for the benefit of the Indians; but complaints were made by various persons during that period,—residents to the northward,—of thefts, which it was alleged were committed by the Indians. In consequence of these repeated losses, the person who had sustained the greatest injury, amounting to about L150, made application to the Government for permission to follow the property and regain it, if possible. This permission being given, a party of ten men left the Exploits on the 1st of March, 1819, with a most anxious desire, as they state, of being able to take some of the Indians, and thus, through them, to open a friendly communication with the rest. The leader of the party giving strict orders not on any account to commence hostilities without positive directions. On the 2nd March a few wigwams were seen and examined, they appeared to be frequented by the Indians during spring and autumn for the purpose of killing deer. On the 3rd a fire placed on the side of a brook was seen, where some Indians had recently slept. On the 4th the party reached a store-house belonging to the Indians, and on entering it they found five traps belonging to and recognized as the property of persons in Twillingate, as also part of a boat's jib—footsteps also were seen about the store-house, and these tracks were followed with speed and caution. On the 5th the party reached a very large pond, and foot-marks of two or more Indians were distinctly discovered, and soon after an Indian was seen walking in the direction of the spot where the party were concealed, while three other Indians were perceived further off and going in a contrary direction. The curiosity of the whole party being strongly excited, the leader of them showed himself openly on the point. When the Indian discovered him she was for a moment motionless, then screamed violently and ran off—at this time the persons in pursuit were in ignorance as to whether the Indian was male or female. One of the party immediately started in pursuit, but did not gain on her until he had taken off his jacket and rackets, when he came up with her fast; as she kept looking back at her pursuer over her shoulder; he dropped his gun on the snow and held up his hands to shew her he was unarmed, and on pointing to his gun, which was some distance behind, she stopped—he did the same, then he advanced and gave her his hand, she gave her's to him, and to all the party as

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they came up. Seven or eight Indians were then seen repeatedly running off and on the pond, and shortly three of them came towards the party—the woman spoke to them, and two of the Indians joined the English, while the third remained some one hundred yards off. Something being observed under the cassock of one of the Indians, he was searched and a hatchet taken from him. The two Indians then took hold of the man who had seized the Indian woman, and endeavoured to force her away from him, but not succeeding in this, he tried to get possession of three different guns, and at last succeeded in getting hold of one, which he tried to wrest from the man who held it; not being able to accomplish this, the Indian seized the Englishman by the throat, and the danger being imminent, three shots were fired, all so simultaneously that it appeared as if only one gun had been discharged. The Indian dropped, and his companions immediately fled. In extenuation of this, to say the least of it, most deplorable event, it is said, “could we have intimidated him, or persuaded him to leave us, or even have seen the others go off, we should have been most happy to have been spared using violence—but when it is remembered that our small party were in the heart of the Indian country, a hundred miles from any European settlement, and that there were in our sight at times, as many Indians as our party amounted to, and we could not ascertain how many were in the woods that we did not see, it could not be avoided with safety to ourselves. Had destruction been our object, we might have carried it much farther.”

The death of this Indian was subsequently brought before the Grand Jury, and that body having enquired into the circumstances connected with it, in its report to the Court makes the following statement:—“It appears that the deceased came to his death in consequence of an attack on the party in search of them, and his subsequent obstinacy, and not desisting when repeatedly menaced by some of the party for that purpose, and the peculiar situation of the searching party and their men, was such as to warrant their acting on the defensive.”

Now, taking the foregoing report as given by the leader of the expedition, and in which there can be no question but that the conduct of the English party is as favourably represented as it possibly could be, yet does the statement detailed afford no excuse for the Indian, and is the word “obstinacy” as applied by the Grand Jury, applicable to him?

It may not be forgotten that the Indian was surprised in the “heart of his own country”—treading his own soil—within sight of his home—that home was invaded by armed men of the same race with those who had inflicted on his tribe irreparable injuries—his wife was seized by them—his attempts to release her, which ought to have been respected, were violently resisted,—and then, maddened by the bonds and captivity of his wife, he continues, with a courage and devotion to her which merited a



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far different fate, singly his conflict with ten armed men—he is shot, and his death is coldly ascribed to his “obstinacy.” Had the Indian tamely permitted his wife to have been carried away from him—had he without feeling or emotion witnessed the separation of the mother from her infant child, then indeed little sympathy would have been felt for him—and yet it is precisely because he did show that he possessed feelings common to us all, and without the possession of which man becomes more degraded than the brute, that he was shot. Thus perished the ill-fated husband of poor Mary March, and she herself, from the moment when her hand was touched by the white man, became the child of sorrow, a character which never left her, until she became shrouded in an early tomb. Among her tribe she was known as “De mas do weet,”—her husband’s name was “No nos baw sut.”

In an official report Mary March is described as a young woman of about twenty-three years of age—of a gentle and interesting disposition, acquiring and retaining without any difficulty any words she was taught. She had one child, who, as was subsequently ascertained, died a couple of days after its mother’s capture. Mary March was first taken to Twillingate, where, she was placed under the care of the Revd. Mr. Leigh, Episcopal Missionary, who, upon the opening of the season, came with her to St. John’s. She never recovered from the effects of her grief at the death of her husband—her health rapidly declined, and the Government, with the view of restoring her to her tribe, sent a small sloop-of-war with her to the northward, with orders to her Commander to proceed to the summer haunts of the Indians; from this attempt, however, he returned unsuccessful. Captain Buchan, in the *Grashopper*, was subsequently sent to accomplish the same object. He left St. John’s in September, 1819, for the Exploits, but poor Mary March died on board the vessel at the mouth of the river. Captain Buchan had her body carried up the lake, where he left it in a coffin, in a place where it was probable her tribe would find her,—traces of Indians were seen while the party was on its way up,—and in fact, although unaware of it, Captain Buchan and his men were watched by a party of Indians, who that winter were encamped on the river Exploits, and when they observed Captain Buchan and his men pass up the river on the ice, they went down to the sea coast, near the mouth of the river, and remained there a month; after that they returned, and saw the footsteps of Captain Buchan’s party made on their way down the river. The Indians, then, by a circuitous route, went to the lake, and to the spot where the body of Mary March was left—they opened the coffin and took out the clothes that were left with her. The coffin was allowed to remain suspended as they found it for a month, it was then placed on the ground, where, it remained two months; in the spring they removed the body to the burial place which they had built for her husband, placing her by his side.



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A narrative of the circumstances which attended the capture of Mary March was published in Liverpool in 1829, and written, as is alleged, by a person who formed one of the party when the capture was effected. Although this narrative contains some inaccuracies, yet it bears internal evidence of being the production of a person who really witnessed the scenes he describes, and though differing in several particulars from the account as before detailed, yet it describes many events which the leader of the party may have omitted, and states nothing absolutely irreconcilable with his account—with some omissions, not necessarily connected with the main object of the expedition, this second record of the circumstances associated with it is now inserted, in so far at least as the same were published:—

*Tribe of red Indians.*

*To the Editor of the Liverpool Mercury.*

*Sir.*—Observing among the details in the *Mercury* of September 18, that of “Shawnadithit, supposed to be the last of the Red Indians,” or Aborigines of Newfoundland, I am tempted to offer a few remarks on the subject, convinced as I am that she cannot be the last of the tribe by many hundreds. Having resided a considerable time in that part of the north of Newfoundland which they most frequented, and being one of the party who captured Mary March in 1819, I have embodied into a narrative the events connected with her capture, which I am confident will gratify many of your readers. Proceeding northward, the country gradually assumes a more fertile appearance; the trees, which in the south are, except in a few places, stunted in their growth, now begin to assume a greater height and strength till you reach the neighbourhood of Exploits River and Bay; here the timber is of a good size and quality, and in sufficient quantity to serve the purposes of the inhabitants:—both here and at Trinity Bay some very fine vessels have been built. To Exploits Bay it was that the Red Indians came every summer for the purpose of fishing, the place abounding with salmon. No part of the Bay was inhabited; the islands at the mouth, consisting of Twillingate, Exploits Island, and Burnt Islands, had a few inhabitants. There were also several small harbours in a large island, the name of which I now forget, including Herring Neck and Morton. In 1820 the population of Twillingate amounted to 720, and that of all the other places might perhaps amount to as many more;—they were chiefly descendants from West of England settlers; and having many of them been for several generations without religious or moral instruction of any kind, were immersed in the lowest state of ignorance and vice. Latterly, however, churches have been built and schools established, and, I have been credibly informed that the moral and intellectual state of the people is much improved. While I was there the church was opened, and I must



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say that the people came in crowds to attend a place of worship, many of them coming fifteen and twenty miles purposely to attend. On the first settlement of the country, the Indians naturally viewed the intruders with a jealous eye, and some of the settlers having repeatedly robbed their nets, &c., they retaliated and stole several boats' sails, implements of iron, &c. The settlers, in return, mercilessly shot all the Indians they could meet with:—in fact so fearful were the latter of fire-arms, that, in an open space, one person with a gun would frighten a hundred; when concealed among the bushes, however, they often made a most desperate resistance. I have heard an old man, named Rogers, living on Twillingate Great Island, boast that he had shot, at different periods, above sixty of them. So late as 1817, this wretch, accompanied by three others, one day discovered nine unfortunate Indians lying asleep on a small island far up the bay. Loading the large guns[A] very heavily, they rowed up to them, and each taking aim, fired. One only rose, and rushing into the water, endeavoured to swim to another island, close by, covered with wood; but the merciless wretch followed in the boat, and butchered the poor creature in the water with an axe, then took the body to the shore and piled it on those of the other eight, whom his companions had in the meantime put out of their misery. He minutely described, to me the spot, and I afterwards visited the place, and found their bones in a heap, bleached and whitened with the winter's blast. I have now, I think, said enough to account for the *shyness* of the Indians towards the settlers, but could relate many other equally revolting scenes, some of which I shall hereafter touch upon. In 1815 or 1816, Lieutenant, now Captain Buchan, set out on an expedition to endeavour to meet with the Indians, for the purpose of opening a friendly communication with them. He succeeded in meeting with them, and the intercourse seemed firmly established, so much so, that two of them consented to go and pass the night with Captain Buchan's party, he leaving two of his men who volunteered to stop. On returning to the Indians' encampment in the morning, accompanied by the two who had remained all night, on approaching the spot, the two Indians manifested considerable disquietude, and after exchanging a few glances with each other, broke from their conductors and rushed into the woods. On arriving at the encampment. Captain Buchan's poor fellows lay on the ground a frightful spectacle, their heads being severed from their bodies, and almost cut to pieces. In the summer of 1818, a person who had established a salmon fishery at the mouth of Exploits River, had a number of articles stolen by the Indians; they consisted of a gold watch, left accidentally in the boat, the boat's sails, some hatchets, cordage, and iron implements. He therefore resolved on sending an expedition



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into the country, in order to recover his property. The day before the party set off, I arrived accidentally at the house, taking a survey of numerous bodies of woodcutters belonging to the establishment with which I was connected. The only time anyone can penetrate into the interior in the winter season, the lakes and rivers being frozen over; even the Bay of Exploits, though salt water, was then (the end of January) frozen for sixty miles. Having proposed to accompany the party, they immediately consented. Our equipments consisted of a musket, bayonet, and hatchet; to each of the servants a pistol; Mr. — and myself had, in addition, another pistol and a dagger, and a double-barrelled gun, instead of a musket: each carried a pair of snowshoes, a supply of eight pounds of biscuit and a piece of pork, ammunition, and one quart of rum; besides, we had a light sled and four dogs, who took it in turns in dragging the sled, which contained a blanket for each man, rum and other necessaries. We depended on our guns for a supply of provisions, and at all times could meet with plenty of partridges and hares, though there were few days we did not kill a deer. The description of one day's journey will suffice for all, there being but little variation. The snow was at this time about eight feet deep. On the morning of our departure we set off in good spirits up the river, and after following its course for about twelve miles, arrived at the Rapids, a deer at full speed passed us; I fired, and it fell; the next instant a wolf, in full pursuit, made his appearance; on seeing the party, he halted for an instant, and then rushed forward as if to attack us. Mr. — however, anticipated him; for taking a steady aim, at the same time sitting coolly on an old tree, he passed a bullet through the fellow's head, who was soon stretched a corpse on the snow; a few minutes after another appeared, when several firing together he also fell, roaring and howling for a long time, when one of the men went and knocked him on the head with a hatchet. And now, ye effeminate feather bed loungers, where do you suppose we were to sleep? There was no comfortable hotel to receive us; not even a house where a board informs the benighted traveller that there is "entertainment for man and horse;" not even the skeleton of a wigwam; the snow eight feet deep,—the thermometer nineteen degrees below the freezing point. Every one having disencumbered himself of his load, proceeded with his hatchet to cut down the small fir and birch trees. The thick part of the trees was cut in lengths, and heaped up in two piles; between which a sort of wigwam was formed of the branches: a number of small twigs of trees, to the depth of about three feet, were laid on the snow for a bed; and having lighted the pile of wood on each side, some prepared venison steaks for supper, while others skinned the two wolves, in order, with the dear skin, to form a covering to



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the wigwam; this some opposed, as being a luxury we should not every day obtain. Supper being ready, we ate heartily, and having melted some snow for water, we made some hot toddy, that is, rum, butter, hot water and sugar; a song was proposed, and acceded to: and thus, in the midst of a dreary desert, far from the voice of our fellow men, we sat cheerful and contented, looking forward for the morrow, without dread, anxious to renew our toils and resume our labours. After about an hour thus spent the watch was appointed, and each wrapped in his blanket. We vied unconvinced each other, with the nasal organ, which was in the soundest sleep; mine was the last watch, about an hour before daybreak. The Aurora Borealis rolled in awful splendour across the deep blue sky, but I will not tire my readers with a description. When the first glimpse of morn showed itself in the light clouds floating in the eastern horizon, I awoke my companions; and by the time it was sufficiently light we had breakfasted, and were ready to proceed. Cutting off enough of the deer shot the night before, we proceeded on our journey, leaving the rest to the wolves. Each day and each night was a repetition of the same; the country being in some places tolerably level, in general covered with wood, but occasionally barren tracts, where sometimes for miles not a tree was to be seen. Mr. — instructing the men in which way he wished them to act, informing them that his object was to open a friendly communication with the Indians, rather than act on the principle of intimidating them by revenge; that if they avoided him, he should endeavour to take one or more prisoners and bring them with him, in order that by the civilization of one or two, an intercourse might be established that would end in their permanent civilization. He strictly exhorted them not to use undue violence: every one was strictly enjoined not to *fire* on any account. About three o'clock in the afternoon the two men who then led the party were about two hundred yards before the rest;—three deer closely followed by a pack of wolves, issued from the wood on the left, and bounded across the lake, passing very near the men, whom they totally disregarded. The men incautiously fired at them. We were then about half a mile from the point of land that almost intersected the lake, and in a few minutes we saw it covered with Indians, who instantly retired.[B] The alarm was given; we soon reached the point; about five Hundred yards on the other side we saw the Indian houses, and the Indians, men, women, and children, rushing from them, across the lake, hereabout a mile broad. Hurrying on we quickly came to the houses; when within a shirt distance from the last house, three men and a woman carrying a child, issued forth. One of the men took the infant from her, and their speed soon convinced us of the futility of pursuit; the woman, however, did not run so fast. Mr. — loosened his provision bag from his back and let



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it fall, threw away his gun and hatchet, and set off at a speed that soon overtook the woman. One man and myself did the same, except our guns. The rest, picking up our things, followed. On overtaking the woman, she instantly fell on her knees, and tearing open the cassock, (a dress composed of deerskin lined with fur,) showing her breasts to prove that she was a woman, and begged for mercy. In a few moments we were by Mr. ——'s side. Several of the Indians, with the three who had quitted the house with the woman, now advanced, while we retreated towards the shore. At length we stopped and they did the same. After a pause, three of them laid down their bows, with which they were armed, and came within two hundred yards. We then presented our guns, intimating that not more than one would be allowed to approach. They retired and fetched their arms, when one, the ill-fated husband of Mary March, our captive, advanced with a branch of fir tree (spruce) in his hand. When about ten yards off he stopped and made a long oration. He spoke at least ten minutes; towards the last his gesture became very animated, and his eye "shot fire." He concluded very mildly, and advancing, shook hands with many of the party—then he attempted to take his wife from us; being opposed in this he drew from beneath his cassock an axe, the whole of which was finely polished, and brandished it over our heads. On two or three pieces being presented, he gave it up to Mr. ——, who then intimated that the woman must go with us, but that he might go also if he pleased, and that in the morning both should have their liberty. At the same time two of the men began to conduct her towards the houses. On this being done, he became infuriated, and rushing towards her strove to drag her from them; one of the men rushed forward and stabbed him in the back with a bayonette: turning round, at a blow he laid the fellow at his feet; the next instant he knocked down another, and rushing on ——, like a child laid him on his back, and seizing his dirk from his belt brandished it over his head; the next instant it would have been buried in him, had I not with both hands seized his arm; he shook me off in an instant, while I measured my length on the ice; Mr. —— then drew a pistol from his girdle and fired. The poor wretch first staggered, then fell on his face; while writhing in agonies, he seemed for a moment to stop; his muscles stiffened: slowly and gradually he raised himself from the ice, turned round, and with a wild gaze surveyed us all in a circle around him. Never shall I forget the figure he exhibited; his hair hanging on each side of his sallow face; his bushy beard clotted with blood that flowed from his mouth and nose; his eyes flashing fire, yet with the glass of death upon them,—they fixed on the individual that first stabbed him. Slowly he raised the hand that still grasped young ——'s dagger, till he raised it considerably above his head, when uttering a yell that made the woods echo, he rushed at



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him. The man fired as he advanced, and the noble Indian again fell on his face: a few moments' struggle, and he lay a stiffened corpse on the icy surface of the limpid waters. —The woman for a moment seemed scarcely to notice the corpse; in a few minutes, however, she showed a little emotion; but it was not until obliged to leave the remains of her husband that she gave way to grief, and vented her sorrow in the most heart-breaking lamentations. While the scene which I have described was acting, and which occurred in almost less space than the description can be read, a number of Indians had advanced within a shore distance, but seeing the untimely fate of their chief, halted. Mr. — fired over their heads, and they immediately fled. The banks of the lake, on the other side, were at this time covered with men, women, and children, at least several hundreds; but immediately being joined by their companions all disappeared in the woods. We then had time to think. For my own part I could scarcely credit my senses as I beheld the remains of the noble fellow stretched on the ice, crimsoned with his already frozen blood. One of the men then went to the shore for some fir tree boughs to cover the body, which measured as it lay, 6 feet 7 1/2 inches. The fellow who first stabbed him wanted to strip off his cassock, (a garment made of deer skin, lined with beaver and other skins, reaching to the knees,) but met with so stern a rebuke from —, that he instantly desisted, and slunk abashed away. After covering the body with boughs, we proceeded towards the Indian houses—the woman often requiring force to take her along. On examining them, we found no living creature, save a bitch and her whelps about two months old. The houses of these Indians are very different from those of the other tribes in North America; they are built of straight pieces of fir about twelve feet high, flattened at the sides, and driven in the earth close to each other; the corners being much stronger than the other parts.—The crevices are filled up with moss, and the inside entirely lined with the same material; the roof is raised so as to slant from all parts and meet in a point at the centre, where a hole is left for the smoke to escape; the remainder of the roof is covered with a treble coat of birch bark, and between the first and second layer of bark is about six inches of moss; about the chimney clay is substituted for it. On entering one of the houses I was astonished at the neatness which reigned within. The sides of the tenement were covered with arms, —bows, arrows, clubs, axes of iron, (stolen from the settlers) stone hatchets, arrow heads, in fact, implements of war and for the chase, but all arranged in the neatest order, and apparently every man's property carefully put together. At one end was a small image, or rather a head, carved rudely out of a block of wood; round the neck was hung the case of a watch, and on a board close by, the works of the



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watch, which had been carefully taken to pieces, and hung on small pegs on the board; the whole were surrounded with the main spring. In the other houses the remainder of the articles stolen were found. Beams were placed across where the roof began; over which smaller ones were laid: on these were piled a considerable quantity of dried venison and salmon, together with a little codfish. On —— taking down the watch and works, and bringing the image over the fire, the woman surveyed him with anger, and in a few minutes made free with her tongue, her manner showing us that she was not unused to scolding. When Mr. —— saw it displeased her, he, rather irreverently, threw the log on one side: on this she rose in a rage, and would, had not her hands been fastened, have inflicted summary vengeance for the insult offered to the hideous idol. Wishing to pacify her, he rose, and taking his *reverence* carefully up, placed him where he had taken him from. This pacified her. I must here do the poor creature the justice to say, that I never afterwards saw her out of temper. A watch was set outside; and having partaken of the Indian's fare, we began to talk over the events of the day. Both —— and myself bitterly reproached the man who first stabbed the unfortunate native; for though he acted violently, still there was no necessity for the brutal act—besides, the untaught Indian was only doing that which every *man* ought to do,—he came to rescue his wife from the hands of her captors, and nobly lost his life in his attempt to save her. —— here declared that he would rather have defeated the object of his Journey a hundred times than have sacrificed the life of one Indian. The fellow merely replied, “it was only an Indian, and he wished he had shot a hundred instead of one.” The poor woman was now tied securely, we having, on consideration, deemed it for the best to take her with us, so that by kind treatment and civilization she might, in the course of time, be returned to her tribe, and be the means of effecting a lasting reconciliation between them and the settlers. After the men had laid themselves down around the fire, and the watch was set outside, the door, Mr. —— and myself remained up; and, in a low voice, talked over the events of the day. We then decided on remaining to rest three or four days; and, in the meantime, to endeavour to find the Indians. I would I could now describe how insensibly we glided from one subject to another;—religion—politics—country—‘home, *sweet, sweet, home*’—alternately occupied our attention; and thus, in the midst of a dreary waste, far away from the haunts of civilized man, we sat contentedly smoking our pipes; and, Englishmen like, settled the affairs of *nations* over a glass of rum and water—ever and anon drinking a health to each *friend* and *fair*, who rose uppermost in our thoughts. From this the subject turned to “specific gravity.” Here an argument commenced.



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When illustrating a position I had advanced, by the ascension of the smoke from my pipe, we both turned up our eyes to witness its progress upwards: on looking towards the aperture in the roof what was our astonishment at beholding the faces of *two Indians*, calmly surveying us in the quiet occupation of *their* abode. In an instant we shouted—"The Indians!" and in a moment every one was on the alert, and each taking his arms rushed to the door—not a creature was to be seen; in vain we looked around;—no trace, save the marks of footsteps on the snow, was to be discovered, but these seemed almost innumerable. We fired about a dozen shots into the woods, and then retired to our dwelling. — and I then resolved to take alternate watch, and every half hour, at least to walk round the house. During the night, however, we were not again disturbed, save by the howling of wolves and barking of foxes.

E.S.

After the capture of Mary March, the next attempt, in order of time, to discover the Red Indians was made by JAMES CORMACK, Esq., in 1822, and for that purpose he crossed the whole interior of the Island—starting from Random Bar on the Eastward on the 6th September, and finding his way out at St. George's Bay, on the 2nd November following. During this excursion he suffered great privation,—which few men could have endured, and which few men indeed, would have undertaken with only one companion. Mr. Cormack did not succeed in the main object he had in view, yet was his trouble anything but profitless. We now possess through his means a general knowledge of the interior of our Island—together with a specific account of its soil—its geological and mineralogical aspect—its varied natural productions—of trees, shrubs, plants, flowers, &c., all named and methodically described—the kind of animals met with, and a variety of other useful information.

In the following year, 1823, and early in the spring of that year, three females, a mother and two daughters, in Badger Bay, near Exploits Bay, being in a starving condition, allowed themselves in despair, to be quietly captured by some English furriers who accidentally came upon them. Fortunately their miserable appearance, when within gunshot, led to the unusual circumstance of their not being fired at. The husband of the elder woman in attempting to avoid the observation of the white men, tried to cross the creek upon the ice, fell through and was drowned. About a month before this event, and a few miles distant from the spot where this accident occurred, the brother of this man and his daughter, belonging to the same party, were shot by two English furriers. The man was first shot, and the woman in despair remained calmly to be fired at, and incredible as it may appear, this poor woman, far from her tribe—helpless—with her back to her murderers,—excited in them no feeling of compassion—they deliberately shot her,—the slugs passed through her body, and she fell dead by the side of her father. The mind is slow to believe that so brutal an act as this could have been committed, and is willing to doubt the correctness of the report, but the proof of its accuracy is the statement of one of the ruffians who perpetrated the foul act.

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The three females were brought to St. John's, where they remained four or five weeks, and were then sent back to the Exploits with many presents, in the hope that they may meet and share such presents with their people. They were conveyed up the river Exploits to some distance, by a party of Europeans, and left on its banks with some provisions and clothing, to find their friends as they best might. Their provisions however were soon consumed, and not finding any of the tribe, they wandered down the right bank of the river, and in a few days again reached the Exploits habitations. The mother and one daughter died there shortly afterwards, and within a few days of each other. The Survivor known as "Nancy" here, but among her tribe as "Shaw-na-dith-it," was received and taken care of by Mr. Peyton, jun. and family, with whom she remained several years. She was then brought to St. John's, and as a Society called the "Boeothick Institution" had then been established, Shaw-na-dith-it became the object of its peculiar care and solicitude, and it is to this interesting woman we are indebted for much of the information we possess regarding her race. She remained under the care of the Boeothick Institution for about nine months, during the greater part of which period she was in bad health. Much attention was shewn her, and attempts were perseveringly made to communicate to her a knowledge of the English language, and this she so far acquired as to be able to communicate with tolerable ease. In person Shaw-na-dith-it was 5 feet 5 inches high—her natural abilities were good. She was grateful for any kindness shown her, and evinced a strong affection for her parents and friends. As she evinced some taste for drawing, she was kept supplied with pencils of various colors, and by the use of these made herself better understood than she otherwise could have done. In her own person she had received two gun-shot wounds at two different times from volleys fired at the band she was with by the English people at the Exploits—one wound was that of a slug through the leg. Poor Shaw-na-dith-it! she died destitute of any of this world's goods, yet, desirous of showing her gratitude to one from whom she had received great kindness, she presented a keepsake to Mr. Cormack, and there is something very affecting under the circumstances in which she was placed, as associated with the simple articles of which her present consisted—they were a rounded piece of granite—a piece of quartz—both derived from the soil of which her tribe were once the sole owners and lords, but which were all of that soil she could then call her own; and added to these, was a lock of her hair. This present has now a place in the Museum of the Mechanics' Institution, and will, it may not be doubted, be an object of interest to many. Shaw-na-dith-it lived in Mr. Cormack's house until he left the colony in 1829, when she was taken to the house of the then Attorney-General. She died in June following, and was interred in the burial

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ground on the South-side. A Newfoundland paper, of the 12th of June, 1829, notices her death thus:—"Died, on Saturday night, the 6th inst., at the Hospital, Shaw-na-dith-it, the female Indian, one of the aborigines of this Island. She died of consumption,—a disease which seems to have been remarkably prevalent among her tribe, and which has unfortunately been fatal to all who have fallen into the hands of the settlers. Since the departure of Mr. Cormack from the Island, this poor woman has had an asylum afforded her in the house of James Simms, Esq., Attorney General, where every attention has been paid to her wants and comforts, and under the able and professional advice of Dr. Carson, who has most liberally and kindly attended her for many months, it was hoped her health might have been re-established. Latterly, however, her disease became daily more formidable, and her strength rapidly declined, and a short time since it was deemed advisable to send her to the hospital, where her sudden decease has but too soon fulfilled the fears that were entertained for her."

Shaw-na-dith-it as before observed, gave much information as to the state of her tribe, and the following is the substance of the statement she made with reference to Captain Buchan's expedition to the Great Lake in the winter of 1811:—

The tribe, she said, at that time had been much reduced in numbers, in consequence of the hostile encroachments and meetings of the Europeans at the sea-coast. But they still had, up to that time, enjoyed, unmolested, the possession of their favorite interior parts of the Island, especially the territory around and adjacent to the Great Lake and Exploits River. Their number then it would appear barely amounted to one hundred and seventy two—and these were encamped in their winter quarters, in three divisions, on different parts of the margin of the Great Lake. The principal encampment was at the East end of the Lake, on the South-side. There were here three mamaseeks or wigwams, containing forty-two persons. A smaller encampment lay six or eight miles to the Westward on the North-side of the Lake, containing two mamaseeks with thirteen people, and another lay near the West end of the Lake on the South-side, and consisted of two mamaseeks with seventeen people. It was the principal encampment which Captain Buchan fell in with. He took it by surprise, and made the whole party prisoners. This occurred in the morning; after a guarded and pantomimic interchange for several hours, it was agreed that two hostages should be given on each side, for Captain Buchan wished to return down the river for an additional supply of presents, in order thereby the better to secure the friendship of the Indians.

Captain Buchan had no sooner departed with his men and hostages, than the Indians suspected he had gone down the river for an additional force, with which to return—make them all prisoners, and carry them off to the coast. Their suspicions induced them to break up their encampment immediately and retire farther into the interior, where the rest of the tribe were, and where they would be less liable to be again surprised.



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To ensure concealment of their proceedings, they first destroyed the two Europeans left as hostages, by shooting them with arrows—then packed up what clothing and utensils they could conveniently carry—crossed the lake on the ice the same afternoon, carrying the heads of the two Europeans with them—one of which they stuck on a pole, and left it on the north side of the lake; they then followed along the margin of the lake westward, and about midnight reached the encampment of their friends—the alarm was given, and next morning they all joined in the retreat westward. They proceeded a few miles in order to reach a secure and retired place to halt at, in the hope soon of hearing something of the two Indians whom Captain Buchan had taken with him. On the second day the Indians appeared among them, and stated to them that upon returning with the white men and discovering the first encampment destroyed, they fled instantly and escaped,—one of these was Shaw-na-dith-it's uncle. All now resumed the retreat, and crossed on the ice to the south-side of the lake, where the only remaining and undisturbed encampment lay. Upon reaching the shore, a party was despatched to the encampment which lay further to the westward to sound the alarm. This encampment was then likewise broken up, and the occupants came east to join the tribe. To avoid discovery, the whole retired together to an unfrequented part of the forest, situate some distance from the shore of the lake, carrying with them all the winter stock of provisions they possessed.

In this sequestered spot they built six winter wigwams, and remained unmolested for the remainder of the winter,—about six weeks. They had conveyed with them the head of one of the hostages; this was placed on a pole, around which the Indians danced and sang.

When spring advanced and their provisions were exhausted, some of them went back to the encampment at which they had been surprised, and there supplied themselves out of the winter stock of venison that had been left there.

After the disaster the tribe became scattered, and continued dispersed in bands frequenting the more remote and sequestered parts of the northern interior. In the second winter afterwards twenty-two had died about the river Exploits, at the Great Lake, and in the vicinity of Green Bay; in the following years also numbers died of hardship and want. In 1819 their numbers were reduced to thirty-one, and in 1823 it consisted of only a remnant of twelve or thirteen. Such is the substance of Shaw-na-dith-it's statement, and which it is said she never related without tears.



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In 1827 Mr. Cormack renewed his attempt to discover and open a friendly intercourse with the Boeothicks, and for this purpose with a small party, consisting of Europeans and a couple of Micmacs, entered the country at the mouth of the River Exploits, and took a north-westerly direction which led them to Hall's Bay. On the fourth day after their departure, at the east end of Badger Bay, at a portage known by the name of the Indian Path, they found traces made by the Indians, evidently in the spring or summer of the preceding year. Their party had been possessed of two canoes, and they had built a canoe-rest, on which the daubs of red ochre and the roots of trees used to tie or fasten it together appeared fresh. A canoe-rest is simply a few beams' supported horizontally about five feet from the ground by perpendicular posts. Among other things which lay strewn about here was a spear shaft, eight feet long, recently made and stained with ochre—parts of old canoes—fragments, of their skin dresses, &c. Some of the cuts in the trees, made with an axe, were evidently of not more than a year's date. Besides these signs, the party were elated by other encouraging marks. After some further search, but without meeting with any greater success, the party determined to proceed to the Red Indian Lake. On reaching this magnificent sheet of water, they found around its shores abundant evidence that this had been for a long time the central and undisturbed rendezvous of the tribe. At several places by the margin of the lake were found small clusters of summer and winter wigwams, but all in ruins—one large wooden building, presumed to have been used for the purpose of drying and smoking venison, was found in a perfect state. The repositories for the dead were found perfect, and in one of these the party discovered the remains of the ill-fated Mary March, whom the Indians had placed by the side of her unfortunate husband. On the north-side of this lake, opposite the River Exploits, were seen the extremities of two deer fences, about half a mile apart, where they lead to the water—and in gliding down the river, the attention of the traveller is arrested by a continuation of these fences which extend from the lake downwards on the banks of the river at least thirty miles. After spending several days in wandering round the margin of the lake, and having fully satisfied themselves that no encampment of the Indians was to be found there, they returned. Subsequently to this excursion, a party of men under the direction of an Institution termed the "Boeothick Institution," which was established with the view of benefiting the Indians, were sent on the same errand, but they too returned after a fruitless search, and with this attempt ends all efforts that have been made to open a communication with the Red Indians.

And now what opinion may be reasonably formed after a careful consideration of all the foregoing facts? Shall it be concluded as many, nay, as most people have done, that the Red Indians are wholly extinct? The mind is slow to entertain so painful a conclusion, and more especially as there is some reason to hope that the tribe, to some extent at least, yet survives.

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If indeed Shaw-na-dith-it's statement is to be taken as of unquestionable authority, and is not to be subjected to any scrutiny, then indeed but slight hopes can be entertained of the existence of any of her race; but if the information she supplied be compared with that conveyed to us through various other sources, then a very different conclusion may be most legitimately reached.

And first let Shaw-na-dith-it's recital of the circumstances connected with Captain Buchan's visit to the Great Lake in the winter of 1810 and 1811 be contrasted with that gentleman's own statement of the same facts.

Shaw-na-dith-it when entering into the particulars of the condition of her tribe at the period just referred to, said it consisted of no more than seventy two persons, and whom she thus further described: In the principal encampment, that which Captain Buchan surprised, there were in one mamaseek or wigwam four men, five women and six children—in a second mamaseek there were four men, two women and six children—in a third mamaseek there were three men, five woman, and seven children—in the whole forty-two persons. In the second encampment there were thirteen persons, and in the third seventeen persons, making in the whole seventy-two; the two smaller encampments being several miles distant from the larger one. Now, compare this account with what Captain Buchan saw, bearing in mind that it was only the larger encampment he surprised,—of the two smaller ones, it does not appear that he was at all aware, Shaw-na-dith-it states the encampment contained forty-two persons, of whom nineteen were children. Captain Buchan asserts in his official Report, that it contained seventy-five persons, and it is by no means clear that in this number he included any of the women or children, as in another part of his report, he estimates the number of the Red Indians as consisting at least of three hundred persons—an opinion formed solely from the appearances which the one encampment presented. Then we have the testimony of a writer, an anonymous one it is true, yet it is evidently the testimony of a person who was present at the scenes he describes, and he tells us that in 1819 he estimated the number of Indians he saw, at from three to four hundred, including women and children. Then again, we find Mr. Cormack, in 1827, declaring “that hundreds of Indians must have been in existence not many years ago,” otherwise it would be impossible to account for the great extent of deer fences which he found so late as the period above-named, yet in being. And lastly, we have the opinions of the Micmacs, who are so satisfied of the continued existence of the Red Indian tribe, that they can with difficulty be made to comprehend that it is possible to entertain a doubt of a fact, which to them appears so palpable. Their opinion is that the whole tribe of Boeothicks passed over to the Labrador some twenty or twenty-five years since, and the place of their final embarkation, as they allege, is yet plainly discernable.



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In the *Royal Gazette*, dated the 2nd September, 1828, there appears a statement referring to the Red Indians, of which the following is a copy:—"Nippers Harbor, where the Red Indians were said to have been seen three weeks ago, and where one of their arrows was picked up, after having been ineffectually shot at one of the settlers, is in Green Bay." This accumulation of facts, all of a widely different character from Shaw-na-dith-it's testimony, would seem, to render the latter more than doubtful, and it ought to be borne in mind that Shaw-na-dith-it acquired a knowledge of the English language very slowly; and though it is said that before her death she could communicate with tolerable ease, yet it would be incorrect to assume that she could, without fear of mistake, make such a detailed statement as that which is attributed to her; but even allowing that which is most uncertain,—allowing that she expressed herself with tolerable clearness, and admitting that the parties to whom she made her communication fully understood her broken English, and were acquainted with the Boeothick words, which it was her wont to mingle in all she said—admitting all this—yet even in this view of the case, it may not be difficult to suppose a reason for her giving an incorrect account of the state of her tribe. Shaw-na-dith-it knew from bitter experience, that all former attempts made by Europeans to open a communication with the Red Indians, had to the latter issued only in the most disastrous and fatal results. She knew too the antipathy her own people had to the whites,—so great was this, that she feared to return to them, believing that the mere fact of her having resided among the whites for a time would make her an object of hatred to the Red man.—Knowing all this, is it a violent deduction to draw from all the circumstances surrounding this subject, that Shaw-na-dith-it in very love for her own people, may have purposely given an incorrect account of the numbers of her tribe—lessening it, in the hope that by so doing no further search would be made for them. Supposing it possible that such may have been the case, then, it follows that Shaw-na-dith-it may not have been, as many persons have presumed her to be, the last of the Boeothicks.

Some account of the usages and habits of this people, and of such particulars as have special reference to them, will now close this narrative: and first it may be observed that the extensive works which they completed and kept in repair for a number of years, would seem to indicate, and that almost beyond a doubt, that the Boeothicks were once a numerous and energetic tribe.



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That they were intelligent, their buildings, store-houses, &c., would appear to be a sufficient evidence. Their mamaseeks, for such was the word they used to describe their habitations, were far superior to the wigwams of the Micmacs. The dwellings of the Boeothicks were in general built of straight pieces of fir, about twelve feet high, flattened at the sides, and driven in the earth close to each other, the corners being made stronger than the other parts. The crevices were filled up with moss, and the inside lined with the same material; the roof was raised so as to slant from all parts and meet in a point in the centre, where a hole was left for the smoke to escape—the remainder of thereof was covered with a treble coat of birch bark, and between the first and second layers of bark was placed about six inches of moss—about the chimney clay was substituted for the moss. The sides of these mamaseeks were covered with arms—that is, bows, arrows, clubs, stone hatchets, arrow heads, and all these were arranged in the neatest manner. Beams were placed across where the roof began, over which smaller ones were laid; and on the latter were piled their provisions—dried salmon, venison, &c.

That the Boeothicks were a bold, heroic, self-dependant tribe, few will be disposed to question, when it is remembered that they never courted the friendship of, neither were they ever subdued by, any other tribe, or by Europeans—by the combined efforts of both Micmacs and Whites, their numbers were greatly reduced, if not utterly exterminated, but they were never conquered.

### **BOEOTHICK DRESS.**

This was peculiar to the tribe, and consisted of but one garment—a sort of mantle formed out of two deer skins, sewed together so as to be nearly square—a collar also formed with skins was sometimes attached to the mantle, and reached along its whole breadth—it was formed without sleeves or buttons, and was worn thrown over the shoulders, the corners doubling over at the breast and arms. When the bow is to be used the upper part of the dress was thrown off from the shoulders and arms, and a broad fold, the whole extent of it, was secured round the loins, with a belt to keep the lower part from the ground and the whole from falling off, when the arms were at liberty. The collar of the dress was sometimes made of alternate stripes of otter and deer skins sewed together, and sufficiently broad to cover the head and face when turned up, and this is made to answer the purpose of a hood of a cloak in bad weather—occasionally leggings or gaiters were worn, and arm coverings, all made of deer skins—their moccasins were also made of the same material; in summer, however, they frequently went without any covering for the feet.

### **BOEOTHICK ARMS.**



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These, whether offensive or defensive, or for killing game, were simply the bow and arrow, spear, and club. The arrow-heads were of two kinds, *viz.*:—stone, bone or iron, the latter material being derived from Europeans, and the blunt arrow, the point being a knob continuous with the shaft—the former of these was used for killing quadrupeds and large birds, the latter for killing small birds—two strips of goose feathers were tied on to balance the arrow, and it has been remarked by many persons who have seen the Red Indians' arrows, that they have invariably been a yard long; the reason of this would seem to be that their measure for the arrow was the arm's length, that is, from the centre of the chest to the tip of the middle finger, that being the proper length to draw the bow—the latter was about five feet long, generally made of mountain ash, but sometimes of spruce.

Their spears were of two kinds—the one, their chief weapon, was twelve feet in length, pointed with bone or iron, whenever the latter material could be obtained, and was used in killing deer and other animals. The other was fourteen feet in length and was used chiefly, if not wholly, in killing seals—the head or point being easily separated from the shaft—the service of the latter being, indeed mainly, to guide the point into the body of the animal, and which being effected, the shaft was withdrawn, and a strong strip of deer skin, which was always kept fastened to the spear head, was held by the Indian, and who in this manner secured his prey.

### CANOES.

These varied from sixteen to twenty-two feet in length, with an upward curve towards each end. Laths were introduced from stem to stern instead of planks—they were provided with a gunwhale or edging which, though slight, added strength to the fabric—the whole was covered on the outside with deer skins sewed together and fastened by stitching the edges round the gunwhale.

### LANGUAGE.

The language of the Boeothicks, Mr. Cormack is of opinion, is different from all the languages of the neighbouring tribes of Indians with which any comparison has been made. Of all the words procured at different times from the female Indian Shaw-na-dith-it, and which were compared with the Micmac and Banake (the latter people bordering on the Mohawk) not one was found similar to the language of the latter people, and only two words which could be supposed to have had the same origin, *viz.*: Keuis—Boeothick—and “Kuse” Banake—both words meaning “Sun,”—and moosin Boeothick, and moccasin, Banake and Micmac. The Boeothick also differs from the Mountaineer or Esquimaux language of Labrador. The Micmac, Mountaineer, and Banake, have no “r.” The Boeothick has; the three first use “l” instead of “r.” The Boeothick has the diphthong *sh.*—the other languages, as before enumerated, have it not. The Boeothicks

have no characters to serve as hieroglyphics or letters, but they had a few symbols or signatures.



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### METHOD OF INTERMENT.

The Boeothicks appear to have shown great respect for their dead, and the most remarkable remains of them commonly observed by Europeans at the sea coasts are their burial places. They had several modes of interment—one was when the body of the deceased had been wrapped in birch rind, it was then, with his property, placed on a sort of scaffold about four feet from the ground—the scaffold supported a flooring of small squared beams laid close together, on which the body and property rested.

A second method was, when the body bent together and wrapped in birch rinds was enclosed in a sort of box on the ground—this box was made of small square posts laid on each other horizontally, and notched at the corners to make them meet close—it was about four feet high, three feet broad, and two-feet-and-a-half deep, well lined with birch rind, so as to exclude the weather from the inside—the body was always laid on its right side.

A third, and the most common method of burying among this people, was to wrap the body in birch rind, and then cover it over with a heap of stones on the surface of the earth; but occasionally in sandy places, or where the earth was soft and easily removed, the body was sunk lower in the earth and the stones omitted.

Their marriage ceremony consisted merely in a prolonged feast, and which rarely terminated before the end of twenty-four hours. Polygamy would seem not to have been countenanced by the tribe.

Of their remedies for disease, the following were those the most frequently resorted to:  
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For pains in the stomach, a decoction of the rind of the dogberry was drank.

For sickness among old people—sickness in the stomach, pains in the back, and for rheumatism, the vapor-bath was used.

For sore head, neck, &c., pounded sulphuret of iron mixed up with oil was rubbed over the part affected, and was said generally to effect a cure in two or three days.

Brief as the foregoing statement is, yet, so scanty are the materials which relate to the subject, that it contains substantially all the facts which can now be gathered together of that interesting people, the original inhabitants of Newfoundland—a people whose origin and fate are alike shrouded in mystery, and of whom, in their passage across the stage of life, but little is certainly known, beyond the cruel outrages, the bitter wrongs they endured at the hands of the white man—before whose power, so mercilessly used, the tribe sank, and was either utterly annihilated, or, as is more probable, a remnant—worn

out, harrassed beyond human endurance—left the homes of their fathers, and in another land sought that security for their lives which was denied them in this.

**FINIS.**

**FOOTNOTES:**

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[Footnote A: "Large guns." The guns in common use there are what are made for killing seals. The general size is a barrel of five feet long, with a bore from seven-eighths to an inch and a quarter.]

[Footnote B: What I saw I should estimate at from three to four hundred, including women and children: of this however hereafter.]