

were it only to correct a mistaken notion of a few modern sociologists concerning the respective rôles of the sexes in primitive society.

How many readers, or even professional ethnologists, are aware of the fact that, until little more than a century ago, the northerners had no dog-trains, and that women-sledges were their only means of transportation over the snowy steppes of the east and through the hilly forests of the west? Yet nothing is truer. Hearne never once mentions dog trains, but quite often speaks of sledges drawn by women, and the sketch he gives of the toboggan (reproduced in fig. 60) is evidently intended for human draught. Moreover, only fifty-five years ago Richardson expressly declared that "when to fur traders first penetrated to the Elk River, the Athabascans had only a small breed of dogs useful for the chase, but unfitted for draught; and the women did the laborious work of dragging the sledges<sup>1</sup>".

As to the make up of these sledges, it has little changed since Hearne's time. Owing to the fact that the boards of which they almost entirely consist were originally made with no other tool than a knife, they hardly ever exceeded five or six inches in width, rendering two, sometimes three, of them necessary.

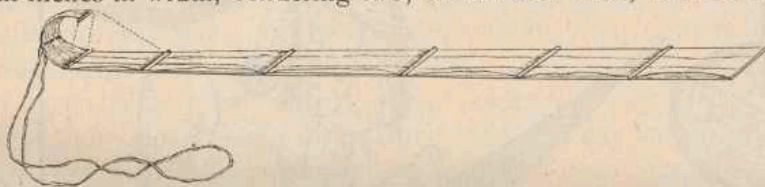


Fig. 60.

Nowadays the Déné sleighs are never made of more than two planks, and often one suffices.

Nothing simpler, it would seem, than the composition of these vehicles. Yet their construction demands some skill on the part of the workman. In the first place, it must be understood that, in order to prevent the possibility of friction with the frozen surface with which the toboggan is constantly brought in contact, not a nail enters into its make up. Babiche lines or leather thongs take their place, and the birch or larch boards are literally sewed together with that material, while several cross-bars are similarly secured on the upper side of the same. These bars serve at the same time to strengthen the vehicle and to fasten the ground-lashing to which the load is tied by means of other strips of leather.

Nor should we forget that, with a view to lessening all obstacles to easy traction, all the babiche stitches in the ground boards must be made so that they will not go through, thus leaving a perfectly smooth surface underneath. And then there is a certain knack of bending properly the forepart, so that the carriage will not dive into light snow, but, on the contrary, slide over the inequalities of the trail and the many hard snowdrifts encountered on the open plains and Barren Grounds.

<sup>1</sup> The late Dr. Brinton, for one, does not seem to have been aware of this fact when he wrote of the dog: "he aided somewhat in hunting, and in the north as an animal of draft" ("The American Race", p. 51).