August 28
Chief Curly Bear

Niaakason

The Indian tobacco or Niaakason was discovered a good many years ago as far back as memory can go. The first Indians that lived in this country discovered it. The man gave the seed the name of Niaakason and the word means "east". The man and his wife named it. The discoverer of this weed was a very poor Indian and he was very old and had nothing and didn't belong to the Beaver Society. It seems as if the man and woman that named this seed were husband and wife and the man's name was Very-Old-Man-Bear. He had no wife--I made a mistake--and he had no wife and no family and no property and he was a very good singer and he sang for the Beaver Society and in which he was classed as a very good singer. This man was classed as a good singer and as a good director of singing for the ceremony and he was one of the prominent singers among the people and it seems that this old man had two good friends who were very wealthly Indians. Ones name was Butte and the other was Old-Moon. They traveled with dogs in these days there were very few horses. In those days as far as we can remember way up in Canada where these Indians were and where they were wintering and the spring was near and we were preparing for the buffalo hunt when we kill a lot of buffalo . We shall dry the meat and have it stored away for the early spring and then we can come together again for the ocassion that we can sow this seed of the tobacco. The Beaver Society was to go ahead and preform the ceremony of the planting and drilling of this weed. We shall come together at a very nice place, somewhere along a river bottom where we can plant this weed. In the beginning there were three that really discovered this weed. The three men got it from Old-Man-Bear. When they came together the following summer on this river in Saskatchewan and they didn't wait for Old-Man-Bear. Old-Moon and Butte went to work and planted the weed and got through sowing it and after

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Old-Man-Bear sowed, meet some Indians on the prairie. He asked the way to Old-Moon and Butte's camp and he asked if they had started the tobacco for the coming winter. He said you are behind you didn't come in time for this planting and he asked the reason. Four friends said you were poor, only you were a good singer. Old-Man-Bear felt very bad because he had lots of dried meat packed on his dogs. He tells his mother who is very old and says "Mother let us camp because my friends have already planted this weed" and he felt very bad so they pitched their tepee and while the mother of Old-Man-Bear was busy he goes off and he was very tired from the days trip and he lies down for a while on a buffalo dome and puts his head on it to rest. On top of this dome was a birds nest and the little birds were in it. He goes to sleep. During the time he was sleeping the mother bird comes and wants to feed her young ones and couldn't because of the man. In his sleep a dream comes to him. He saw the spring birds crying and the bird said "Old-Man-Bear I know your troubles and you are hurt because you friends thought you were poor and had no means and they didn't wait for you and they have planted the seed and I will help you if you will get up. I will help you. I will see that the seeds your friends have sowed don't come up this year. You get some of that dung and buffalo dung and some gravel and lay your ground well." They didn't plow in those days they burned all the weeds off before they drilled. When he awakened he got up and then he feed the little birds before he left. Then he went to his camp. When he got to the camp he said to his mother that now they were going to plant some tobacco right here and I will preform the ceremony and I will plant my own seed. We don't have to go where the people are but his mother made fun of him and said he didn't know how to plant the seed but he said he had hopes from what the birds told him. I made a mistake the man had no family but his mother was traveling with him. This man didn't have any pelts of beavers like his friends but he was a good singer. It was his mother instead of

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wife. Finally his mother consented and said "Old-Man-Bear do you mean what you say we haven't any bundles of sacred beaver pelts, we can't plant the weed without the medicine man or the Beaver Society and she was very much against it but finally she said yes. The old man said he meant what he said and he went out and piled up the buffalo and cow dung and he burned a patch in which to plant the weed. It was a square oblong patch and they cleaned off the ashes. He sharpened a stick something like a cane and they make it very sharp. He sharpened two sticks made like pins and when they got the patch cleaned they drilled the holes three or four inches deep and he put the cow and buffalo dung and the gravel in the holes which were in even lines. When they were drilling it they went to camp which was after they were through drilling it. They had a ceremony but they didn't have a Beaver ceremony since the songs the bird sang are the one he sang. They went through the preformance and sang the bird songs. They camped here for several moons and then the plant began to come up. One day while they were there one of the braves comes out of the prairie looking for buffalo and ran into Old-Man-Bear's camp and asked him about his nice tobacco. He said that his friends over in camp had planted some but it didn't come up and that the ground had all dried up and they didn't have any tobacco. The Old-Man-Bear said look at my nice tobacco I didn't have any trouble with my tobacco the way your friends did, they drilled theirs before I did and the young brave returned to the camp to bring the news to his people that Old-ManBear had a nice tobacco patch. The first thing the young man did was to go to Old-Moon and Butte, who were Chiefs, and he said he just came from Old-Man-Bears camp and he has a very nice tobacco patch and it was wonderful tobacco. Old-Moon and Butte suggested that they move camp over to Old-Man-Bears and help him that they may get some tobacco and give him a bundle of Beaver pelts and make him a member of the Beaver Society and maybe they would get some tobacco. All this time Old-Man-Bear's friends Old-Moon

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and Butte had some hard feeling and when they got to camp they had a secret council in which Old-Moon said that they would fill a medicine pipe and let Old-Man-Bear smoke it and it would kill him because they would put something in it but if it didn't hurt Old-Man-Bear they would give him some pelts of beaver and make him a member of the Beaver Society. Old-Man-Bear was so powerful that he knew what these men were going to do with him and at the time they started for the camp he sang the songs the birds had given him and he kept singing his medicine song of power. He took the pipe and smoked it and when he inhaled the smoke came out of his ears, nose and mouth and this frightened his friends and they gave him some pelts and made him a member of the Society. Old-Man-Bear went out and told one of the chiefs to go out and tell the people not to steal any of the plant because he would know it and some punishment would fall upon them. You know there is always some on in the camp who wants to be smart. One young brave said he was going and get some of the plant and he didn't believe he would know because there were so many plants so he went one night and took one of thenweeds. The following morning Old-Man-Bear gets up and announces to have the weed returned to his camp. It was announces throughout the camp because he knew the person also but he doesn't want to tell and only asks that the weed be returned and there is a time when we can all enjoy it and in the meantime the young man had smoked it. The fourth time he announced it and there was no response and he was going to punish the young man for taking the weed. He told everyone to pile up stones around their tents. That night he goes through the medicine songs and he prays to the Great Spirit that the wind may come up very stong and the wind came up and in the second song he asks for rain and he gets both. There was not a tepee left only Old-Man-Bear's tepee stayed up and the people were very much afraid and they went to the hilss to try and put up their lodges and the children cried and the parents did also and all the valleys were flooded and finally some one

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came to him and ask him to stop the rain and wind and he answered that he could not stop the wind and rain but his mother could and he asked his mother four times and his mother sang the medicine songs which stopped the wind and rain and Old-Man-Bear changes his name to Bare-Planter.

(He takes it up to the present day. It has passed down to the present generation. How he came to join this Society etc.)
Thirty odd years ago and I received a letter from Calgary. You remember that I didn't know or intend to become a member of the Beaver Socity or didn't know how to plant the tobacco. No one of the Blackfeet ever had the courage to plant this tobacco. I started for the north for the Blackfeet Indians and I took seven head of horses,at that time I was pretty well to do. When I got to Mt. Cloud I bought ten sacks of flour, two-hundred pounds of sugar and other things that they had, candies etc. I also bought some other groceries so that they could have the medicine feast and I bought one-half of a beef. When I got to the Blackfeet camp I went to the people that had the Náaakason and I gave them a lot of these provisions and said this is your food and I am giving you three head of horses so the people wanted four of the young braves to go ahead and cut some medicine poles and get ready for this ceremony and then we moved camp. When we camped that night before we got to where the poles were put some one announced that the poles were already for placing. They also had some small willows cut. The crier announced that they would move camp early in the morning. The following morning travoises were put on dogs, babies were tied in the travoises and they started to move camp. When we came within a little distance or 500 or 600 yards of where the poles were put we put up our tents and here we camped along the river bank. Morning came and every one started to dress for the ceremony. War paint, weasel custumes and all the best dresses were all gotten out for the medicine ceremony and the Blackfeet Indians in Canda

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are noted for their dressing. They have buckskin dresses and my wife has one of those dresses now. Within a very short distance from where the poles were set they broke camp and advanced about two-hundred yards on the river bank and where they pitched camp and proceeded with the medicine ceremony and sang their songs. We sang our songs in connection with the Niaakason. All this time when we were approaching nearer the poles we were singing. We stopped four times and advanced four times and when we came near we sent every one out to get a few dry sticks for the fire and everyone went after dry wood. The reason why I was taking part was that they were transfering the Niaakason seed to me so I would be entitled to plant it for my tobacco. The location of this patch was very near. In the Beaver bundle which is the seared bundle there was tripe of all the animals such as the otter, weasel, squirrel, badger etc., and all the animals we can think of. The select thirteen garden patches to plant the Niaakason. The take the bundle of hides and place them where they are going to sow the seed. After that all come to the patches and by this time the children have come and the young girls have come with the small dry willows and they have thirteen patches in which to plant the Niaakason. Every child has one patch to go to and leave the wood and they pile it up so that they can burn it and you remember at this time we have the medicine ceremony and the burning of the ground and the burning of the grass and weeds. They did not use the match, it was against the ceremony. In lighting this fire we use flint, punk and steel and by striking the flint and holding this together it makes a light. We set fire to the patches, set fire to the wood and then there is a great smoke. We keep on singing our medicine songs so we might by successful with this plant. After all the fires have gone down it is most wonderful to see the patches just as if they were cut in square oblongs, burned out in that shape. The pathes are about fifteen or sixteen feet square. After the fire has died out we move up to the building of the medicine lodge. The ceremony is to

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take place. All this time during the ceremony the Niaakason was being transferred to me. It is quite a thing to build a medicine lodge. Four long poles were used and on top of these poles were placed different things, gifts to the Sun, bundles of willows and gifts and they used the tripe on the poles and there were two other pelts tied to very long poles and put through the center of this great lodge the same as if you were putting out a flag. In the center where the long poles are hoisted with the pelts there are small trees lined up in a row inside of the big lodge and behind this sets the medicine man and they went through the Beaver ceremony and in front of these places there was a place where they put live charcoals to make the holy smudge or the medicine smudge. This took place at night. They dug a long trench and placed two poles and here they hung their meat which they boiled all night and went through the ceremony all night. At this ceremony and the medicine feast these four of whom I spoke of in the early part of my story are the ones that waited on the people and when they waited on the people two went on each side and we sung and feasted that night. You understand that there are a great many kinds of pelts in the Beaver bundle or the scared bundle of the Beaver Society. In this bundle there is one chief animal that takes the lead in the ceremony and that is the robin and that night Coming-Over-In-The-Morning, the old man that was acting as the president, began to fear and there was no sign of rain and no clouds and it was known that there must be rain when this ceremony was going on. There was no sign of rain along about midnight. There was much fear so I told the people to be quiet and I would pray for rain and I asked Curly-Bear to strip down and they painted him with yellow paint and here and there with red and told him now we are going to sing the otter song and he asked Curly-Bear to go to the fire and get some coals and we will make a smudge. While the old man was singing the smoke came and it went upward about one foot and then scattered which indicated rain and everyong was glad they were to have rain that night and he continued

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their songs and in the songs were these words: "my medicine is very powerful and I want rain". Now we will have to try some other kind of a dance for the rain so we will be sure it comes. There were four men selected and I was one of them, and there were two otter. There were two seered pelts of mink so that when they had these they began to dance. The fire place was in the center and first they would dance on the north side of the fire and then on the east side and then on the south side. When we danced on the north side there was no sign of rain. The medicine songs continued but when we came to the south side the rain came. We had a good rain. We had on of the best rains we had ever had. There was rain, water a hail. We sat down there and it was still raining very hard. When they all sat down the rain continued. In the meantime there was a strange call outside. These were the persons that made the vow to feed this occasion. To feed the men that were taking part in the ceremony. They had dried meat and dried berries. They got wild berries and made a soup. After the soup was served we had thirteen poles that were covered with tripe. This was to make the weed come up. In the morning it cleared away and we all went out to drill the seed into the gwound. All this time there was a ceremony and songs that the Great Spirit might be good and they drilled the holes. Everyone takes part and then they expose the Niaakason and begin to sing some of the songs. After they got done seeding this seed they get on each side of the patch and they ask all the children to come and they tramp over it and tramp down the holes. They select four children for each patch and there were thirteen patches of this seed. These children have to be very careful in running over the patches . If they follow the lines successfully it is a sign they will live a long time. They run over these patches about four times. The patches are pretty well trampled down and then they all go back to the camp still going through the ceremony. No one must look back and they still sing the songs of the Beaver Society, and everyone is instructed to move camp and run away as if enemies were after them.

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They generally pick out a fast horse and they move camp and again they camp. They send back this fast horse and a fast rider with a little bit of Niaakason seed tied in a small bag attached to the end of a willow and they tell him to take it back and stick it in the ground and to hurry and go fast and also to come back real fast. This is the sign for it to have a good growth. In the morning they have the ceremony they have when they plant the Niaakason. They go through the songs and they pray and the young fellow gets on the horse in the direction the plant is and goes where they camped first and sticks up the pole and without looking in the direction of where the Niaakason is planted he returns to the camp. There was something very dangerous to look at the Niaakason. The Niaakason turns into persons when some one looks at them at the person that looks doesn't live very long. And these people are always dressed in calf robes. We go back to where we camped first and pray to the Great Spirit that we might be successful in raising good tobacco. The first twenty-five days we hold another ceremony and we select our braves who have fought several battles and has stolen a good many horses from other people and he is selected as the scout. The next twenty-five days we hold another ceremony or the same one we held when we planted the seed. This is the whole story of the planting of the Niaakason. In the month of October they are ready to pick the weed which is twelve or ten inches tall. It has twelve leaves on each stem. They get ready to harvest about the same time the wheat ripens. When they are ready to pick it they send scouts again to see if it is ready. The Indians go back again to where they camped the first time and go through their medicine ceremony again and then they harvest it. They pull it up by the root because it is on the root that the Niaakason is found. Then they dry it and smoke it.

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