



Grammar of the Choctaw Language (Classic Reprint)

Cyrus Byington

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Excerpt from Grammar of the Choctaw Language

The Choctaw, or properly Chahta nation, numbers at present about 17,000 souls, 4,500 of whom are Chickasaws. When first known to Europeans these allied peoples occupied the territory on the left bank of the Mississippi, almost from the Ohio river to the Gulf. They belong to the great Chahta-Muskokee family, which, in early days, controlled the whole country from the Mississippi to the Atlantic, and from the Gulf shore to the Appalachians.

The Choctaws have always been quick to adopt the instruction of their civilized neighbors, and at present have about seventy schools with nearly two thousand pupils on their reservation. During the French occupation of Louisiana, in the early part of the last century, efforts were made by the Roman Catholic missionaries to convert them, but without success. In 1818, Protestant missionaries were sent among them, who effected a permanent impression upon them, and were mainly instrumental in bringing about their present highly creditable condition. Their evil habits were reformed, they were instructed in agriculture, and their language was reduced to writing. In the latter, the alphabet suggested by the Hon. John Pickering, in his essay "On a uniform orthography of the languages of the Indians of North America," was employed. The first book printed was a spelling book, by the American Tract Society, in 1820. Since that time, besides a large number of tracts, almanacs, hymn books, and educational works, the whole of the New Testament and most of the Old Testament have been printed in the language, by the American Bible Society, New York city, after faithful translations by the Rev. Cyrus Byington and the Rev. A. Wright, assisted by educated natives. These can readily be obtained, and will be found of great service in elucidating the grammatical structure of the language, as it is for the first time explained in the present work by the hands of the Rev. Cyrus Byington.

This eminent scholar and missionary, whose name is inseparably connected with the later history of the Choctaw nation, was born at Stockbridge, Berkshire county, Massachusetts, March 11, 1793.

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