

Written for this Paper.

CHOCTAW INDIANS.

Having given a brief sketch of the Cherokees in a previous article, I will now give your readers the benefit of the information I obtained concerning the Choctaws during my recent labors among them. After spending a short time at Manard, we went to Briartown, the headquarters for the southern part of the territory, including the Choctaw Nation. There we were kindly received by Brother Seaborn G. Mabry and wife. Brother Mabry is a white man from Georgia, but his wife is part Cherokee, and was the first of her people to embrace the Gospel. She and her husband were baptized by Elder Joseph H. Felt while he was laboring in the Indian Territory with Elder M. W. Dalton in 1884. Since that time their house has been open to the Elders. At first the labors of the Elders were confined to the Cherokee nation, but the field has been constantly spreading into the surrounding nations.

Leaving Briartown we crossed the Canadian river, the dividing line between the nations, and found ourselves among the Choctaws. So far the Elders have not been as successful here as in the Cherokee nation, though some of the Indians have embraced the Gospel and are witnesses to the fact that the signs follow the true believer. Among this number is Sister Louisa Griffith, a half-breed Choctaw nearly seventy years of age, who was restored to health and has since done her own work to the surprise of her former acquaintances. Many others are investigating, and the prejudice is gradually disappearing.

It is a trait of the Indian people to be very cautious, and not to rush into anything hastily, therefore they are very slow about accepting the Gospel. This fact is easily accounted for. So many whites have gone among them for the express purpose of taking advantage of them, that the Indians have lost confidence in the whites, and will not have much to do with them until they become acquainted. There also have been many false reports circulated among them by the whites concerning the Mormon people, and when they once form an opinion it is difficult to change it. Some are very indifferent and do not care to listen to the Gospel, while others seem interested, and desire to learn all they can about their forefathers, as well as the plan of salvation.

As the Indians have kept no history of themselves it is difficult to obtain a correct account of them for many generations back. It is said by some of the principal men among the Choctaws that the four tribes—Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole—were at one time united as one tribe called "Muskogees." Others deny this, and as there is no record of it, we cannot prove either claim. But it is almost certain that the Choctaws and Chickasaws were originally the same people, and according to tradition their king died and left twin sons. These two sons both claimed the right to succeed their father, and as neither would relinquish his claim a war was the result. The names of the brothers being Choctaw and Chickasaw, their followers took upon them the name of

their respective leaders, separated into two tribes, and have since been known by these names.

The Choctaws at one time occupied what is now Alabama and Georgia, but afterwards removed to Mississippi, where they remained until they were brought west by the government. Prior to the Revolutionary war the kings were appointed by the British, and still farther back the French had the choosing of the crowned head. The next officers to the king were the chiefs, each "iksa" or clan having one principal and subordinate chiefs. Next in rank were the captains and warriors, who were dominant over the tillers of the soil, etc. There were six of these "iksas," and they lived apart from each other. They never married outside their own "iksa," as their laws prohibited them from so doing, until 1836, when this law was repealed. The most enlightened of the "iksas" was the Hyah-pah-tuk-kato. The royal house or house of kings was of this clan, and was called the "Hattak-i-hollatab" (Beloved of the people). None but those of royal blood were permitted to occupy the throne.

Before there were any missionaries among them the Choctaws believed in the Great Spirit, and their customs and habits are evidence that they are of Israelitish origin. Though many of them accepted the Christian religion, they did not relinquish their old customs and superstitions, in the shape of burning or otherwise torturing and killing those accused of witchcraft, until 1834, at which time laws were passed prohibiting such deeds.

After consenting to the allotment of their lands in Mississippi and the adoption of the United States laws, the Choctaw people saw the position in which they were placed, and at once petitioned the government to remove them to a new country, and give them the right of self-government. The treaty of Dancing Rabbit creek was accordingly made, providing for the sale of their lands east of the Mississippi, and the purchase of the tract now occupied by the Choctaws and the Chickasaws. The proceeds of the sale were to have been placed in the United States treasury for a certain length of time, and then were to be paid to the Choctaws with five per cent interest. But the payment was deferred for half a century and then only paid in part. Soon after the treaty was made the people prepared to remove to their new lands, many of the aged as well as the very young sharing in the hardships of the journey. Disease getting among them many died on the way and after arriving at their destination; others became discouraged and returned to Mississippi.

The removal was commenced in the year 1831, and was continued until 1834. It was again resumed in 1846 and ended in 1849, the majority of the Choctaws being at the time located on the lands now occupied by them in the Indian Territory.

Since coming west a change has been made in the form of government. Instead of having a king over them they now have a governor, or principal chief, as he is sometimes called, who is elected by the people for a term of two years. Next in importance are

the district chiefs, one for each of the four districts into which the nation is divided. Each district is divided into counties, and these are presided over by county judges, who, together with the sheriffs and other minor officers, are elected by the people.

The judicial power of the nation is vested in a supreme court composed of three district judges, one of whom is styled chief justice, and the circuit and county courts.

The senate is composed of sixteen members, four from each district. The representatives are sent from the counties, each ten adult citizens being entitled to one representative in the house. The legislature convenes annually in October at Tuska-homa, Wade county, where the capitol—a large stone building—has been erected. Each session usually occupies from five to seven weeks, and the members receive \$5 per day during this time. No person can become a member of this body except he have Indian blood in his veins. The principal chief is vested with the veto power, but is subject to a two-thirds vote of the legislature.

Their government has been well conducted, very little trouble having been experienced until the fall of 1892. At this time they were expecting money to be paid them by the United States government, and some trouble arose about this and other matters, which resulted in the loss of a number of lives. The difficulty remained unsettled and in the spring of 1893 more fighting was indulged in, though with less serious consequences, as no one was killed. United States troops were sent to the scene of trouble to preserve order until a settlement could be effected. The money has been since paid them, over \$100 per head, and the trouble is thought to be settled.

The royalties annually turned in by the national agent, permit and other collectors amount to about \$250,000. This sum is sufficient to pay all expenses of the government, as well as to carry on a very good school system. Small neighborhood schools are established in most of the settlements throughout the nation. There are also four academies where more advanced studies are taught; and if the Choctaw student desires to pursue his studies still further provision is made for sending him to the high schools in the states, all expenses being paid by the Choctaw government. Non-citizens cannot send their children to the Choctaw schools, but must provide schools of their own.

The cost is greater to become a citizen of the Choctaw nation than of the Cherokee, \$100 being the price of a license to marry a citizen. Fifty dollars was the price until the last few years, when it was raised for the purpose of keeping out those who marry for the sole purpose of gain. Couples frequently avoid paying for a license by crossing the line into one of the states to get married. In such case the wife still retains her rights as a citizen, and can hold property in her own name, but the husband has no more rights than any other non-citizen.

The Choctaws have the largest country of any of the five civilized tribes, their nation covering an area of 10,450 square miles. The population in 1890, including freedmen and