

INVENTION OF THE CHEROKEE ALPHABET.

Mr. Editor—The following statement respecting the invention of the Cherokee Alphabet, may not be altogether uninteresting to some of your readers. I have it from a particular friend of Mr. Guess, who lived near him at the time he made his invention.

Mr. Guess is in appearance and habits, a full Cherokee, though his grandfather on his father's side was a white man. He has no knowledge of any language but the Cherokee, consequently, in his invention of the alphabet, he had to depend entirely on his own native resources. He was led to think on the subject of writing the Cherokee language by a conversation which took place one evening at Santa. Some young men were making remarks on the superior talents of the white people. One said, that white men could put a talk on paper, and send it to any distance, and it would be understood by those who received it. They all agreed, that this was very strange, and they could not see how it could be done. Mr. Guess, after silently listening to their conversation for a while, raised himself, and putting on an air of importance, said, "you are all fools; why the thing is very easy; I can do it myself:" and, picking up a flat stone, he commenced scratching on it with a pin; and after a few minutes read to them a sentence, which he had written by making a mark for each word. This produced a laugh and the conversation on that subject ended. But the inventive powers of Guess's mind were now roused to action; and nothing short of being able to write the Cherokee language, would satisfy him.—He went home, purchased materials, and sat down to paint the Cherokee language on paper. He at first thought of no way, but to make a character for each word. He pursued this plan for about a year; in which time he had made several thousand characters, He was then convinced that the object was not attainable in that way: but he was not discouraged. He firmly believed, that there was some way in which the Cherokee language would be expressed on paper, as well as the English: and, after trying several other methods, he at length conceived the idea of dividing the words into parts. He had not proceeded far on this plan, before he found, to his great satisfaction, that the same characters would apply, in different words, and the number of characters would be comparatively few. After putting down, and learning all the syllables that he could think of, he would listen to speeches, and the conversation of strangers, and whenever a word occurred which had a part, or syllable, in it, which he had not before thought of, he would bear it on his mind, until he had made a character for it. In this way he soon discovered all the syllables in the language. In forming his characters, he made some use of the English letters, as he found them in a spelling book, which he had in his possession. After commencing upon the last mentioned plan, I believe he completed his system in about a month.

During the time he was occupied in inventing the alphabet, he was strenuously opposed by all his friends and neighbours. He was frequently told that he was throwing away his time and labour, and that none but a delirious person, or an idiot, would do as he did. But this did not discourage him. He would listen to the expostulations of his friends, and then deliberately light his pipe, pull his spectacles over his eyes, and sit down to his work, without attempting to vindicate his conduct. After completing his system, he found much difficulty in persuading the people to learn it.—Nor could he succeed, until he went to the Arkansas and taught a few persons there, one of whom wrote a letter to some of his friends in this Nation, and sent it by Mr. Guess, who read it to the people. This letter excited much curiosity. Here was a talk in the Cherokee language, which had come all the way from the Arkansas sealed up in paper, and yet it was very plain. This convinced many that Mr. Guess' mode of writing would be of some use. Several persons immediately determined to try to learn. They succeeded in a few days, and from this it quickly spread all over the nation, and

the Cherokees, (who as a people had always been illiterate,) were in the course of a few months, without school, or expense of time, or money, able to read and write in their own language.

This astonishing discovery certainly entitles Mr. Guess to the warmest gratitude of his country; and, should the Cherokee language continue to be spoken, his fame will be handed down to the latest posterity. G. C.