

## ORIGIN OF "O. K."

### Why and How General Jackson Came to Use the Sign.

In the language of the Choctaw Indians one of the most frequently recurring expressions is the emphatic oke, with which an affirmation or denial is concluded. This oke (pronounced with strong accent on the last syllable) is one of the substitutes for the copulative verb to be, which is wanting in Choctaw. Oke, as pronounced in Choctaw, has exactly the same sound as the alphabetic pronunciation of the letters O. K. in English.

The meaning of the expression, as nearly as it can be conveyed in English, is: "That is true;" "That is all so." A few examples, out of many that might be cited, will illustrate this. "The Choctaw Indian is a good fellow" is expressed thus: Hattak api huma Chakta achukmah oke, in which hattak api huma means "Indian" (literally, man-body-red), achukmah means "good," and oke is the copulative expression, "It is so." In the Rev. Cyrus Byington's Choctaw New Testament the first sentence, Matthew v: 13: "Ye are the salt of the earth," is: gakni in happl huchchia hoke; literally: "The earth its salt ye, that is so."

To Gen. Andrew Jackson is attributed the introduction of the Choctaw word into our Anglo-American speech. Before the war of 1812, in voyages up and down the Mississippi and in trading expeditions overland from Nashville, Tenn., to Natchez, Miss., through the Choctaw Nation, he was brought into frequent communication with the Choctaws.

General Jackson, as everybody knows, was prone to the use of downright and energetic methods of assertion. Hearing this emphatic oke so frequently uttered by the Choctaw people, he learned the meaning conveyed by it to the Choctaw mind and appropriated it, out of hand, to his own purposes. From him it passed over to the multitude. This account of the origin of O. K. has been current in the South for years. If not true it is, to say the least, *ben trovata*.

No one who has ever read an autograph letter of General Jackson's will easily credit the story that he was in the habit, when he was President of the United States, of indorsing, in kaltem blute, applications to office, with the letters O. K., under the belief that these were the proper initials for "all correct." Jackson was no scholar, but he was not so grossly ignorant of English orthography as to fall into a blunder of that sort. He may have indorsed documents with the letters O. K. as a jocular symbol of his favorite Choctaw expression. The story that these letters were seriously intended by him as an abbreviation of "oil korrekt" was, probably, as Mr. George Bancroft suggests, an a posteriori invention of the enemy—to wit, the Whigs—during the hot political contests of the days of the roaring '40s.

That the abbreviation O. K. was coined by Jackson himself and used by him long years before it passed into current slang finds curious confirmation in an extract from the court records of Sumner county, Tenn., quoted by Parton in his "Life of Jackson," vol. 1, p. 136.

"October 6, 1790. Andrew Jackson, Esq., proved a bill of sale from Hugh McGary to Gasper Mansker, for a negro man, which was O. K." ["A common Western mistake," adds Mr. Parton, "for O. R., which means Ordered Recorded. Hence, perhaps, the saying O. K."]

It is not more likely that the O. K. of this entry was suggested by Jackson himself, as a brief way of saying, after the Choctaw fashion, that the claim had been legally made out.—*American Magazine of History.*