"I said to some ladies the other day, as I showed them a beautiful volume, 'I have just had the crowning joy of my life in receiving the Muskokee New Testament entire.' But I immediately added as I thought of the four children, all of whom God had made earnest workers for himself, 'Should a mother say that?'" So questioned Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson, writing in 1887 when she was sixty-one years old, looking back over her life as teacher, mother, wife of the superintendent of the Tullahassee Presbyterian Mission to the Creeks, and translator of the Bible into the Creek tongue.

After almost thirty years of work with the Creek, or Muskokee language, she had become a scholar of recognized authority in this field, and her great linguistic ability and untiring devotion to the task of giving the Bible to the Creeks in their own language had enabled her to complete the monumental work of translating all of the New Testament, as well as a large number of hymns, tracts, vocabulary studies, and short articles for the Indian Journal and other similar publications. For almost twenty years more she was to go on with this work, completing the translation of the historical portions of the Old Testament, the Psalms, much of Isaiah, the Song of Solomon, more hymns, many religious tracts, parts of the Discipline

*Hope Holway is the author of two books in Harper's Town and Country series: The Story of Water Supply and The Story of Health. She is a graduate of Radcliffe College, and her present interest is historical research for a bibliography of early teachers in the Oklahoma region, undertaken for the Women's Archives of Radcliffe College, of which she is a national consultant. She is co-chairman of the Library Committee of Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art at Tulsa, and is giving time to the organization of the Alice Robertson Collection in the University of Tulsa. Mrs. Holway is a partner with her husband and two sons in the engineering firm of W. R. Holway and Associates of Tulsa.—Ed.

1 From "The New Testament in Muskogee," Woman's Work for Woman, August, 1887. The magazine was an American Bible Society publication.

of the Methodist Church, part of the Baptist Manual, and all the time continuing the vocabulary studies, although she never finished her dictionary after the letter 'E'.

As the oldest daughter of Samuel Austin Worcester and his wife, Ann Orr, both imbued with the New England traditional respect for the intellectual life, Ann Eliza was well equipped to take advantage of the education they desired for her. She was born at Brainerd Mission to the eastern Cherokees in Georgia, and her father's strong conviction that the Indian tribes must hear of the new Gospel in their own languages was a part of her childhood certainties.

When the family traveled the hard journey to the west with the Cherokees, she was old enough to appreciate the terrible catastrophe when the printing press sank with the boat and her father's Cherokee Grammar was lost in the Arkansas River on their way to their first location at the Union Mission in the Osage country; and she could share in the satisfaction of the final establishment of the recovered press (and the family) at the Park Hill site, selected by her father, even though she grieved because her father never had time to write the Grammar again.

When she was fifteen years old she was sent to her uncle's home in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, where the Academy had just been opened under Prof. James K. Colby, graduate of Dartmouth and a classical scholar and unexcelled teacher, who persuaded the uncle to allow Ann Eliza to study Greek as well as Latin. In after years she wrote to a Seminole preacher: "How little did she then know that the future possession of the New Testament in their own tongue (the Muskokee and the Seminole tribes both speak the Creek language) was depending on her course of studies."

She would gladly have continued her studies at St. Johnsbury, but there was great need of her as a teacher of the Cherokees at her father's Park Hill station; and in 1846 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions gladly accepted her services. There she learned at first hand the need of being able to communicate with the Indians in their own language and saw with her own eyes the outstanding work of her father's Mission Press.

---

3 It is difficult to determine the exact nature and dates of glossaries, vocabulary studies, dictionary pages, etc., in the manuscripts. This study of words and phrases evidently occupied Mrs. Robertson during most of her active life.

4 From Chaperone Magazine, August, 1894, Vol. 12, No. 6, and from what may be a first draft of this article, even though written in a disconcerting third person, in the Notebook.
Her stay here was short, for a young Presbyterian minister and teacher, William Robertson, carried her away as his wife to the Tullahassee Mission for the Creek Indians, not far from what is now the City of Muskogee in Oklahoma. Except for the sad interval of the Civil War when the family had to flee to the north, Ann Eliza lived and worked here for thirty-five years as the wife of the superintendent of a mission boarding school, sometimes with over a hundred pupils and a large staff, which meant for her a heavy burden of sharing in the administrative work and of teaching. At one time according to her husband, she was teaching classes in Latin, Arithmetic, and "Watts on the Mind"; at another he speaks of six hours a day of class work. Hers was at least oversight of the laborious physical householding chores of those days, making the soap over outdoor fires, dipping the candles, drying the apples, smoking the meat, and washing and ironing the clothes for the whole school. Besides all this, she had four small children to care for. William remarks in one letter to his parents in Wisconsin that Ann Eliza's amusement is the study of Creek.

All through these years, she contended with ill health. From only a few of many references in her husband's letters to his parents we learn in 1852 that "Ann Eliza has not been able to teach this week; she is better this morning" and she adds, as she always did when he wrote his parents, ".... sad time with my throat; for more than a week swallowing no food but the finest gruel—lanced twice"; (in 1856), "Ann Eliza is far from well; so unwell that I am going to send her home to Park Hill tomorrow in hopes that she will recruit," and in the same letter, "Ann Eliza has made great progress in the Creek this year; she is now out of sight of the rest of us"; and two years later (1858), "Ann Eliza continues far from strong; has a slight chill every once in a while .... she has too much to do." It all sounds as if a tonsillectomy would have made a vast difference in Ann Eliza's health, as well as a reliable supply of quinine for the ever-present malaria. There were seven pregnancies, also. In 1868, Leonard Worcester writes his brother-in-law a strong letter saying that he "would not place his wife in a position where she would break herself down, as Ann Eliza has and is still doing", and there is much more about overwork and Ann Eliza.

---

5 William Robertson was one of the seven children of Rev. Samuel Robertson and Dorcas (Platt) Robertson of Winneconne, Wis., where Rev. Robertson was the Presbyterian minister. All the letters quoted in this article are in the Alice Robertson Collection, given to the University of Tulsa in the early 1930's by Alice Robertson and her sisters. There are approximately 3,000 letters in the collection, of which this is No. 44, written in 1859. Since Ann Eliza spent her last years with her daughter Alice (see note in "Cold Water Army" article in this number of The Chronicles), her papers and many of her father's were in Alice's possession and came to the University of Tulsa.
In the latter years of her life, after the closing of Tullahassee, which broke her husband’s heart and hastened his death, she lived with her daughter Alice in Okmulgee and Muskogee, Indian Territory, in much more comfortable health, except for her fractured hip caused by a fall from a cable car while on a visit to a daughter in Chicago, necessitating a six months’ stay in the Presbyterian hospital there, with never an entire recovery. Even then she says, in an undated, unaddressed letter, “. . . . still there was little of that time when I could not do something each day on the work I loved, being especially anxious to finish revising my first New Testament work [Gospel of John] for a new edition, before I should be called away.”

The fifth edition of the New Testament was almost ready, each version made more nearly perfect by her careful revision, when she died in 1905, leaving behind her a prodigious amount of work produced by her skill, patience, industry, and concentration, difficult enough for a person who had had nothing else to do all her life. It is gratifying that she received recognition in her lifetime suitable for such achievement. To quote her own words; 

“Little idea she had of this work ever bringing her into public notice until the receipt of a letter from her friend, Dr. A. A. E. Taylor, for so many years the loved President of Wooster University, Ohio, reminding her of the quickly forgotten incident of her presenting him with a copy of the Bibliography? and saying that he had at last found time for looking it through and that the result had been the conviction that such an amount of literary work as it told of should receive merited acknowledgment, even though it had been done by a woman.

Shortly afterward Mrs. Robertson received a letter, dated June 18th, 1892, from the Secretary to the Board of Trustees, University of Wooster, Ohio, which read: 

Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson
Muscogee, I. T.
Dear Madam:

It affords me great pleasure to inform you officially that at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the University of Wooster, held on the 15th inst., the honorary degree of Ph. D. was conferred upon you. This was done on the recommendation of the Faculty of the University, and as a recognition of your superior attainments, especially in linguistic studies, and of your enlarged usefulness as the result of your studies and writings.

6Chaperone Magazine, Alice Robertson Collection.
7Bibliography of the Muskogean Languages, by James C. Phillips (1889).
8This official notice of the honorary Ph.D. degree is signed by Thomas K. Davis, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, Wooster University. The letter is No. 909 in the Alice Robertson Collection.
May I be permitted to express the hope that it will be accepted by you not only as a reward for diligence and success in the past—but as a stimulus to greater efforts, and larger attainments and accomplishments in the future.

Ann Eliza deserved this honor, unprecedented at that time, for she was a true linguist with an instinctive feeling for the function of language, and, in addition, an imaginative comprehension of how to adapt the modes of one language to those of another so that the translation is easily comprehensible. Some of her comments, mostly from her *Notebook*, are illuminating:

"... the great but natural mistake of writing Indian languages for the benefit of English-speaking people, whereas they should be constructed for the Indians in the simplest way possible.

"I did consider syllabic characters but soon found the number of syllables closing with consonant sounds was so large that it would multiply indefinitely the number of such characters.

"... I am interested in every effort to increase knowledge of the Indian languages for I think them very wonderful and at the greatest remove from being a mere jargon. Indeed, I do not look upon them at all as the work of man but the Creator's gift to man.

"... so much more (than in English) expressed in nouns and verbs, making the other Parts of Speech so much fewer in proportion—especially true of the Cherokee.

She remarks once that she translated directly from the Greek when possible, because that language was more like Creek than was English.

Ann Eliza sometimes speaks of "help in the Hebrew" given to her by that Presbyterian missionary to the Choctaws, the Reverend John Edwards, who had translated much of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. In her desire to come as close as possible to the original meaning of the text, she went through a laborious process, explained by a letter in 1896 to a Sabbath School group just after the Book of Psalms in Creek had gone to press. She says that a Creek translation was first written from English, then read psalm by psalm with Mr. Edwards, as opportunity permitted, probably in literal English which he compared with the Hebrew; or, as some manuscripts in the Alice Robertson Collection indicate, he may have interlined the Creek with literal English. Twice more it was translated into Creek and revised by Creek interpreters.

Ann Eliza had a lively visual imagination for she showed great facility in translating our abstract nouns into Creek image phrases, even handling fine distinctions of degree or quality. Her memory was prodigious. She tells of using a notebook at first in which she jotted down every new word,

*See description of *Notebook* in Appendix at end of this article.*
but soon she was able to carry these words in her memory. Her ear was sensitive and accurate, and she was keenly aware of the niceties of pronunciation, accent, and stress which distinguish primitive languages the world over. In working with her interpreters, she had them speak the words over and over until she had caught the inflection, and then used her linguistic ingenuity to approach the meaning as closely as possible, and approach it simply. Aware of the fact that her Creek readers considered careful pronunciation a mark of superior standing, she always took the oral phrase into consideration. In retranslating the Reverend J. R. Ramsay’s Gospel of Luke, the interpreter whom she valued most highly, N. B. Sullivan, was ill and lying in a darkened room. She would read the Greek, the English, and Ramsay’s Creek to him, verse by verse, and together orally they would work out their translation. Sullivan helped her with most of the New Testament and once he commented that the work took twelve years, but it was a wonder that it was done at all: “If we finish a page a day we do well. We worked on one verse three hours.” Ann Eliza’s passion for accurate detail was another quality that lifted her work above the mediocre. No small distinguishing variation was ever neglected. There are letters in the Alice Robertson Collection where she discusses with other translators the shaded meaning of certain very small changes in a word. Reading these, though one knows nothing about the Creek, there comes the realization that here is an authority. She knows what she is writing about.

In 1901, Pleasant Porter writes to the Secretary of the Muskogee Presbytery which was preparing to pass a resolution against Mrs. Robertson being approved as the translator of the Book of Genesis, because she was planning to make changes in Mr. Ramsey’s former and admittedly imperfect translation. Porter reminds the Presbytery that they have accepted and preached her New Testament in Creek as the Word of God, and why not the Old Testament? Then Porter itemizes the reasons why she should be the person to translate Genesis: (1) she has made the Bible a life study; (2) she has a natural aptness for language and understands the Creek language far better than any other of its translators; (3) she is intellectually the superior of them all and has a more analytical mind,—is a more profound thinker. "The charge that she obstinately holds peculiar views can only have reference to differences of opinion

10 Rev. James Ross Ramsay was a Presbyterian missionary to the Creeks and Seminoles and translator of the Scriptures. He was a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (1849) and commenced work among the Creeks immediately after the Civil War. After his ministered for many years to the Seminoles, returning to his home in Pennsylvania to end his labors. He was one of Mrs. Robertson’s assistants and always conceded her ability to translate into Creek.
between herself and Dr. Loughridge in regard to the structure of the Creek language and the proper spelling of certain words; and, as I have already intimated, she is by far the most competent to discover the true structure and orthography."\(^\text{11}\)

Ann Eliza was fulfilling her destiny when she became the outstanding authority on the Muskokee language, but one sees that it is not her motivation that lends value today to her work, sincere and honest as her motive was\(^\text{12}\). She firmly believed that the American Indians, and all heathen peoples, must be able to understand the wonderful Bible truths; for without clear knowledge of them they must perish, and perish eternally. Ann Eliza was dedicated to the cause of giving the Bible to the Creeks and Seminoles, and she speaks once of the necessity of the translators and assistants also being dedicated to the same great cause of saving souls. She never wavered in this faith. And then there is the great essential, she possessed scholarship as well as faith.

Ann Eliza managed her life, handicapped by difficulties, to do what she desired. She gained eminence that must have pleased her though she tried to conceal her pride. She had a sympathetic husband, for William S. Robertson was as zealous as she to reach the Creek people through their own language, for he himself was a scholar in his own right. Much of their work was done together, and she speaks of his constant encouragement to her as "remarkable." Both of them must have felt great discouragement when they received a letter\(^\text{12}\) from John C. Lowrie, secretary of the Presbyterian Foreign Missionary Board, saying that it is "... not likely our Board will consent to incur this expense (payment of interpreters), for there is one consideration of much weight ... . the prob-

\(^{11}\) The quotation is from Letter No. 902 of the Alice Robertson Collection. Gen. Pleasant Porter was born in 1840, the oldest child of Benjamin Edward and Phoebe Porter of the Creek Nation. He attended school at the Kowetah and Tullahassee Missions. He served four years as a Confederate soldier and twelve years as a member of the Creek Council, in which he became presiding officer of the House of Kings. During the "Sands Rebellion" of 1871, the Creek Council assigned him the leadership of the Creek light horsemen to quell the insurrection, and again he was the commander of the light horsemen during the "Green Peach War," 1882-3, services for which he was popularly addressed as "general." He served as delegate from the Creek Nation to Washington many times. Always interested in education, he served as Superintendent of Schools for a long period. His friendship with the Robertson family was of long duration, and Ann Eliza more than once appealed to him for help in giving the words of the Bible to the Creeks. For reference see John Bartlet Meserve, "Chief Pleasant Porter," Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. IX, No. 3 (September, 1931), pp. 318-34.

\(^{12}\) See Notes and Documents in this number of The Chronicles for the listing of Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson's work in the Creek language.—Ed.

\(^{12}\) From Letter No. 299 in the Alice Robertson Collection, University of Tulsa.
ability that most, if not all the Creeks will after a while understand English, rendering it no longer necessary to use the native language, and the sooner this can be brought about, the better." And Ann Eliza must have called on all her powers of Christian forbearance when eighteen years later (1883), she received the following from the same Secretary:13

I am under the impression that you will not find it best to be all the time at work on your translations, but with your knowledge of the Creek language and people you can be very useful in visiting among them, reading and talking of the Bible to them; and so the evening of your life will be useful and happy, perhaps to a greater degree than in any other way. The Lord direct you and bless you in all your way.

There are suggestions from the Board that the Song Book might be published in smaller type and some hymns left out. "I fear he [Mr. Robertson] does not appreciate the embarrassed financial condition of the Board."14 Even members of the family who might be expected to be sympathetic and proud of their kinfolk, write, "I tell you, it really seems of little use to expend money and toil and life upon the Indians. Where is the lasting fruit? Witness the sad immoralities of some of your most esteemed and trusted members."15

Then, too, there are whispers that she was neglecting her children for the sake of the Indians. Son Samuel minces no words on that subject in his autobiography. Undoubtedly Ann Eliza was sometimes uneasy about this matter; wondering whether the children or the New Testament in Creek should be the crowning glory of her life. But she and William never faltered in their faith that what they were doing was for the glory of God and the salvation of the Creek Indians.

Her ill health, too, even that handicap was turned to good use. She certainly gives it credit for much of her accomplishment as she looks back in her later years. In articles, letters, and in the Notebook she speaks of her hours "on the lounge" as productive ones. An autobiographical sketch in the Notebook says:

Much of this work was done around the cares and labors of the large boarding school, and such a degree of knowledge of the language would never have been gained but for frequent prostrations and resort to the lounge, where every means of learning was improved.

John's Gospel lay in manuscript when he [Mr. Robertson] reopened the school,16 neither he or his interpreter having the time

13 From Letter No. 670, loc. cit.
14 From Letter No. 277, loc. cit.
15 From Letter No. 228, loc. cit.
16 Tullahassee Mission and School suffered much from raiding parties during the Civil War. The buildings had to be practically reconstructed when the Robertson family returned from Kansas.
for finishing it. It was unwillingness to let this Gospel lie unfinished when the people had so small a portion of the Bible that led Mrs. Robertson [she herself wrote this in the third person] to improve some of the time spent on the lounge in finishing it.

Who took Ann Eliza's place in the kitchen and dining-room while she lay on the lounge, making notes in some previous translation or adding to the piles of manuscript around her? Who was making the butter and taking care of the milk and baking the bread? There again, when Ann Eliza looks back on those years, she has no evident qualms about the burdens which others carried for her. Those helpers were serving the Lord, too, and bringing salvation closer to their fellow Creeks by releasing her from physical labor. In the Notebook she writes of Miss K. Winslett, the Rev. David Winslett's daughter, and remarks about several others on this at different times:

She added to her own duties help for me in my school duties so as to give me time for my Creek work. Another young teacher from Ohio did the same, giving me help in like spirit for beyond her duties. When I protested that she must do so no longer, she answered, 'Oh, Mrs. Robertson, you must let me do that much toward giving the Creeks the Bible!'

So all had worked together for good in the service of God and there need be no regrets for the means that had been used to give Ann Eliza time for the work she loved to do. The irony is that the value of this service as she saw it, will never be known until God gives up all his secrets. There is no answer now as to how many Creeks were saved by the Bible in their own language and what the nature of this salvation was. This is a question that Ann Eliza never asked. Faith was enough for her, and the pure joy of gaining mastery over this language was not clouded by any doubt as to the value of her work. She reached the eminence of scholarship not merely because she managed her life to attain it; natural endowment and the power of dedication to a great cause raised her up. Her energy and patience and her true regard and affection for her Indian pupils contributed much. Once in her Notebook she writes: "... rejoicing to give encouragement to any work which shall either benefit or perpetuate the name of the tribes to whom God gave this country before Columbus's great discovery. I sympathize with all my heart in their feeling that they have rights in this country and do not need to count themselves beggars.'

There are many women today who would greatly admire Ann Eliza for what she did with her life to give her personal satisfaction and would sympathize with her in her "crowning joy." Yet these same women would find it very difficult to have any meeting of minds with her. They would feel it peculiar that she considered "My Gracious" and "By the Eternal" as profanity and that the word "bless" forms too
precious; a part of our Bible to be degraded to such a use as "Bless my soul," or even "Bless your dear heart." Her idea is now old-fashioned, because few, if any, carry implications of words as far as that. In her, one admits that there is the linguist. For her, words have definite implications; they have history as well as meaning; there is purity in language as well as in conduct.

When we read in the Notebook a draft of a letter to Dr. Lyman Abbot, editor of The Outlook (October, 1901) that she is grieved because his writings have an influence towards scepticism because he does not take the Bible literally; and another letter to a church society disapproving of gifts of jewelry to ministers' wives as too costly and worldly, she moves a little farther from us. We read of her destroying a whole package of the Sunday school magazine Sunbeam because it contained a print of Raphael's "Alba Madonna." She is shocked because the baby Jesus has on no clothes, and she writes scolding the editor for printing a picture that maligns Jesus's mother, making Mary seem "worse about clothing her child than the 'wild Indians'."

Ann Eliza, by virtue of her patient industry, her understanding and imagination, and the unusual power of her mind, entered into the company of scholars. Today she would be comfortably at home in the halls of the Smithsonian Institution and its Bureau of American Ethnology. And, if there is conversation beyond the stars, Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson and James C. Pilling, and John Eliot, and perhaps even Albert Pike17 are never lacking converse and fellowship, for they are all members of that ageless company who are eternally contemporary.

17 Albert Pike, (1809-1891), school teacher, newspaper editor and owner, lawyer, Confederate soldier, author, linguist, and exponent of Freemasonry. He was born in Boston, educated at Framingham Academy, and was holder of an honorary degree from Harvard College. He was commander of a cavalry regiment in the Mexican War, and negotiator with Indian tribes in 1861. His was a colorful life but full of trouble. He disappointed Ann Eliza greatly, because his "Vocabulary of Indian Languages" was never published according to promise. Ann Eliza had contributed much hard work to this Vocabulary, "in the kitchen, the dining-room, the door-yard, and elsewhere," as she describes (in the Notebook), her efforts to correct the 1500 slips of paper on which Creek and other words in other Indian languages were written to be submitted to the linguists close to the daily users of these words.