

TRUMAN MICHELSON

By JOHN M. COOPER

TRUMAN MICHELSON, linguist and ethnologist, of the Bureau of American Ethnology and Smithsonian Institution, passed away on July 26, 1938, at his home in Washington, D. C.

Michelson was born at New Rochelle, New York, on August 11, 1879. He received the doctor's degree at Harvard in 1904, continuing his work at the universities of Leipzig and Bonn in 1904-05, and studying privately under Boas in 1909 and 1910. In the latter year he came as ethnologist to the Smithsonian, where he remained until his death. From 1917 to 1932 he also occupied the chair of ethnology at George Washington University. In 1923-25 he served as president of the Anthropological Society of Washington.

He was married July 18, 1903, to Katherine Harrison, who survives him.

Michelson's earlier interest was in Indo-Aryan, an interest maintained until his death, at which time he was a member of the Indic Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies. Some twenty papers on various Indo-Aryan problems were published by him, the most important ones being concerned with the inscriptions of Açoka. With his appointment to the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1910 began a long series of about one hundred and ten contributions to American Indian linguistics and ethnology, largely in the Algonquian field, in which field he was at the time of his demise a foremost international authority. His most significant Algonquian studies were the first scientific classification of the Algonquian languages, which appeared in 1913, and, beginning in 1921, the splendid group of monographs on Fox ethnology. He was a pioneer in applying Indo-European techniques to the analysis and reconstruction of primitive languages, the Algonquian in particular.

Michelson's work was marked by meticulous exactness, keen penetration, and scrupulous attention to detail. In private chats he would freely discuss the larger issues of ethnology and linguistics, but his published papers, many of them very brief, are, with rare exceptions, constructive or critical treatments of specific aspects of such larger problems, treatments presented in a characteristic terse, laconic style, with no word wasted. Of the great mass of linguistic and ethnological material gathered by him on his numerous field trips, each season since 1910, to the widely scattered Algonquian peoples, the larger proportion still remains in manuscript. To all his work he brought alert insight, noteworthy originality, and exacting standards of scholarship.

As friend, host and colleague, he will be remembered by all of us who

had the privilege of knowing him and associating with him, for his high-minded integrity, his kindness, and his unfailing geniality. Not least will he be remembered, with deep gratitude, by the many younger ethnologists and linguists to whom he was always ready to give unsparingly and unselfishly of his time, his counsel, and his wide range of knowledge.

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The following abbreviations are used:

- AA American Anthropologist
 AES-P American Ethnological Society, Publications
 AJP American Journal of Philology
 AJPA American Journal of Physical Anthropology
 BAE-B Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin
 BAE-R Bureau of American Ethnology, Report
 ICA-P International Congress of Americanists, Proceedings
 IJAL International Journal of American Linguistics
 JAFL Journal of American Folk-Lore
 L Language
 NAS-P National Academy of Sciences, Proceedings
 S Science
 SI-EFW Smithsonian Institution, Explorations and Field-Work
 SI-MC Smithsonian Institution, Miscellaneous Collections
 WAS-J Washington Academy of Sciences, Journal
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