

CHAPTER I.

PHONETICS AND GRAPHIC SIGNS.

And first a word concerning the Déné Alphabet. To be complete, it should count—apart from reduplicated but phonetically unchanged letters—no less than 60 graphic signs, 13 of which to represent vowels, 39 for simple and 8 for double consonants.

The vowels are *a*, *â*, *æ*, *e*, *é*, *è*, *i*, *î*, *o*, *ô*, *u*, *û*, *ü*. They are all pronounced as in French except *æ* which corresponds to the French *e* in *je*, *te*, *le*; *é* which is sounded as the *e* in the French word “*mets*”; *è* as that of the English “*ten*”; *e* and *u* which have the Italian and *ü* the German sound. The use of the latter is confined to a few insignificant bands of Aborigines who have made the Rocky Mountains their home.

The 29 simple consonants are *b*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *j*, *k*, *χ*, *ḳ*, *l*, *ḷ*, *m*, *n*, *ñ*, *N*, *p*, *q*, *q̣*, *r*, *ʀ*, *s*, *ṣ*, *t*, *ṭ*, *v*, *w*, *y*, *z*. They are all sounded as in English with the exception of the following: *h* is strongly aspirated; *j* is pronounced as in French; *ñ* as in Spanish*; *N* is nasal; *ḷ* is a linguo-sibilant which is obtained by the emission of a hissing sound on both sides of the tongue curved upwards previous to its striking the lingual letter; *ʀ* is the result of uvular vibrations; *χ* and *ʀ* are respectively *ḳ* and *r* pronounced with a very guttural inflection; *R* is the common *r* of the Romance languages, and is proper to a handful of Rocky Mountain Dénés; *q̣* corresponds to the hard *c* in the words “*cœur*, *curé*” such as pronounced by North-western Frenchmen: it can be described as approaching the sound of *ty* both letters being consonants and sounded simultaneously. The dot in *ḳ*, *ṭ*, *q̣*, adds to the regular pronunciation of those letters the exploding sound peculiar to most Indian languages. *ṣ* is phonetically intermediate between *s* and *sh*. The *f* and its co-relative *v* are found only in the speech of a few Eastern tribes.

By double consonants I do not mean the mere succession or grouping of two or more of the above letters retaining their original value as *tl*, *kw*, *kfw*. I have in mind those consonants which, either are differently pronounced when agglomerated, as *ch*, or represent sounds which, though phonetically one, cannot be expressed by any of our consonants taken separately. There are eight such double consonants: *sh*, *ch*, *th*, *kh*, *kr*, *kṛ*, *ts* and *tḷ*. The first two are pronounced as in English; *th* and *kh* are equivalent to *t+h* and *k+h* but are produced by a single emission of voice.

* It is proper to a few Northern Dénés.