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THE CREEK NATION AND HER PEOPLE

Of the five once powerful tribes of Indians that now dwell in peace and harmony in Indian Territory, and are known as the most advanced of their race, the Creeks, or properly, the Muskogeas, are especially interesting. Before the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes from their old homes east of the Mississippi, the Creeks were considered the most powerful and aggressive of the Indians occupying that section of the country, and they subjugated many smaller tribes.

Briefly, the history of the Creeks, so far as is known, prior to their removal is given in D. C. Gideon's History of the Indian Territory, as follows:

"The Creeks formed a separate republic in the Northeast of Mexico, and during the war between Cortez and Montezuma, were allies of the Mexican Emperor and assisted in protecting that country against the invader; but, Cortez finally overpowering the Mexicans, and the Creeks not being willing to submit to Spanish rule, they decided to move Eastward and form a government of

their own."

They settled on the Ohio river and there dwelt contentedly. They subjugated all the tribes about them and formed the great Muskogee Confederacy. Their prowess in war was known far and wide, and many of the less powerful tribes made treaties of peace with them, whereby they lost their identity and became a part of the Muskogee tribe, rather than combat with them in war.

Thus, by their own courage and daring, and by the accession of so many other tribes, the Muskogee Nation was indeed a power to be reckoned with, and numbered many thousands of warriors. They were divided into clans, composed of the Wind, the Bear, the Tiger, the Deer, the Bird, the Raccoon, the Snake and the Fox, all governed by one Chief, chosen from the mother tribe. According to Col. Hawkins, in his "Sketches of the Creek Country," in 1798 there were seventy-seven towns in the Muskogee Nation, forty-nine of which were termed upper towns and twenty-eight were lower towns. Some of the former were Tulsa, Tuskegee, Hillubie, Okfuskie and Eufaula. Among the most prominent lower towns were Coweta, Cussetah, Hichitee, Wetumpka and Okmulgee. Each town had its own under chief or king, who represented his town at the general council. This

subordinate chief held office for life and was succeeded by a nephew.

The primitive government of the Indians was unique and decidedly just, and this was particularly true of the Creek tribe. The Indian's sense of honor was very pronounced and his idea of fairness one of his strongest characteristics. Accordingly, among the Creeks were many "unspoken" laws that were adhered to as strictly as any of the strictest laws imposed by the council. For instance: suppose a hunter's arrow should pierce a deer or other animal, wounding but failing to kill it, and the animal escaped. Another hunter was shortly afterwards able to kill the same deer quite easily on account of the injury inflicted by the former hunter. The successful hunter, true to his native born justice, traced if possible, the hunter who had first wounded the deer, and divided with him the meat. If an Indian found a desirable spot in which to make his home, he marked it, by notching the trees around it, or in some manner recognizable to the Indian. He might not return to make his home in that spot for months or years, yet he knew it was securely his, and that when he did return to it he would find it untenanted by any of his own tribe. Such was the "unspoken" law of the

forest--no honorable Indian would take for his own a piece of land that another had marked.

Unfortunately, very little reliable data can be secured concerning the customs and laws of the Creeks at the time of the discovery of this country, but it is certain that in their early life, before they were molested by the advent of the Europeans, the Indians acted upon their native sense of right, rather than from any fear of punishment. But as laws are the result of the intercourse of a people; the embodiment of their sense of right and obligation, so, as time went on and the Indians progressed in civilization and knowledge, written laws were enacted, and the Creek people are law-abiding and peaceful citizens. A few of the peculiar laws in force among the Southern Creeks prior to the civil war are quoted herewith:

"If any negro kills an Indian, he or she shall suffer death, and if an Indian kills a negro he or she shall pay the owner his value otherwise suffer death.

"Should one slave kill another, the slave killing, shall receive one hundred lashes on the bare back, and the slave killed shall be valued by disinterested men, and the owner of the surviving negro shall pay the owner of the deceased negro one-half his value.

"If any person get killed in a ball play, the person shall not suffer, but if any person shall kill another with a stick, kick or stamp, he shall suffer death.

"Should any person be guilty of stealing a horse, mule, jack, jenny or cow, for the first offense he shall receive fifty lashes, for the second offense, one hundred lashes and one ear cut off, and for the third offense, suffer death.

"Should two persons swap horses, and either of the party prove that he was drunk, the bargain shall not be good, provided he makes this known within five days.

"From and after the passage of this law no town or towns, person or persons, shall have power to keep any woman in widowhood exceeding twelve months from the death of her husband, and no male shall be kept in widowhood exceeding two months from the death of his wife.

"It shall not be lawful for any Indian man citizen of Creek Nation to take a negro woman to wife, and any citizen who may be found guilty of the violation of this law, shall be striped with one hundred lashes on the bare back."

THE REMOVAL

One of the saddest events in the ever pathetic history of the down-trodden Indians, was the removal of the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws and Seminoles from their old homes East of the Mississippi to the wilderness to be known as the Indian Territory. Very, very few of the Indians who emigrated West are now living. The old men and women of the tribes have passed away, like flowers in autumn, when the chilling frosts of winter approach. Many perished on that memorable trip and were buried by the wayside without the solemn rites that would have been observed in their old homes. On foot, on horseback, in wagons, or in whatsoever manner they could, the Indians came, and the emigration, commencing in 1830, was, not fully completed until 1840.

Only a small percentage of the Indians favored the removal, the great majority bitterly opposing the signing of the Agreement whereby they sold their oldhome-land to go into a new and untried wilderness. Col. Wm. McIntosh, a highly educated, advanced half-breed Creek, was Chief of the Cowetas, or Lower Towns at the time of the Agreement transferring the land of the Creeks in Alabama

for the present Creek Nation in Indian Territory. McIntosh, with Etomie Tus-ten-nug-gee and thirteen inferior Chiefs, signed the treaty of conveyance on Feb. 12, 1825, at Indian Springs. For this act, the signers of the treaty were shortly afterwards assassinated, at their homes.

McIntosh was known as one of the bravest and most loyal of Creeks, and in signing the fatal paper, he doubtless believed he was providing for the future happiness and prosperity of his people, but made the mistake of signing the treaty before it was ratified by the people.

Illustrating the sorrow of those poor Indians in leaving their homes, H. B. Cushman, in his "History of the Choctaws and Chickasaws," thus describes their departure:

"I was an eye-witness to that scene of despairing woe, and heard their sad refrain. I frequently visited their encampment and strolled from one part of it to another. While from every part of their wide-extended camp as I walked, I gazed and wondered at the weird appearance of the scene; there came, borne upon the morn and evening breeze, from every part of that vast encampment, faintly, yet distinctly, the plaintive

sounds of weeping, rising and falling in one strangely sad and melancholy chorus, then dying away in a last, long-drawn wail. It was the wailing of the Choctaw women--even as that of Rachel for her children. Around in different groups they sat with their children, from whose quivering lips sobs and moans came in subdued unison; now, in wild concert united, their cries quivered and throbbed as they rose and fell on the night air, then dying away in a pathetic wail, proclaiming in language not to be misunderstood, the pressure of the anguish that was crushing their souls--hidden from human eyes and told only to the night winds. Truly, their grief was so deep, so overpowering, that even reason seemed to reel, blighted beneath its withering touch too great to admit the comfort of human sympathy. The venerable old men, who had long retired from the hardships and fatigues of war and the chase, expressed the majesty of silent grief; yet there came now and then a sound that here and there swelled from a feeble moan to a deeply sustained groan, rising and falling till it died away as it began. True, a few encouraging smiles of hope, though utterly void of sincerity, would not have been out of place, but they were unlearned in such subtle arts; therefore

their upturned faces mutely but firmly spoke the deep sorrow that heaved within, as they sat in little groups, their gray heads uncovered in the spray of dancing sunshine that fell from above, through the verdant foliage, while pitiful indeed, was the feeble semblance of approval of the white man's policy!"

IN THEIR NEW HOME

Looking at this fair country to-day, with its wealth of fertile farming lands, watered by the chrystal Grand, the majestic Arkansas, the limpid Verdigris and other noble streams; its busy cities and growing towns, its plentiful coal-beds, inexhaustible marble quarries, marvelous oil-fields--indeed every natural resource that is found in the United States; its magnificent schools, churches, and palatial homes, and all these are enjoyed by refined and educated people-- considering all this, it is difficult to realize that when the Five Civilized Tribes arrived here, seventy-five years ago they found little more than a vast wilderness. Its treasures were hidden then from the eyes of man. Its wooded mountain slopes, green valleys and picturesque rivers gave little promise to the weary and foot-sore Indians who had left comfortable and loved homes behind,

where for many generations they had held undisputed possession. In that loved land lay the sacred dust of their forefathers--there were their hearts also, and it is small wonder that the Indian Territory of that time did not beckon with the alluring hands that she now holds out to the eager public.

With characteristic selfishness the world **has** regarded the Indian as only one more difficulty to be conquered--one more stumbling-block to be removed from the path of the on-rushing white man. The Indian that we have with us to-day is only a remnant of that great and powerful race-- a race that has ever fought a losing fight, and fought it bravely, stoically, fulfilling the destiny of the Red Man, with courage, dauntless and firm.

The tragedy is nearly played to a close. Their removal was the beginning of the end-- and now the end is in sight. As one has said, "Every full-blood Indian can look into the face of his brother and see the last of his race."

The same stoic courage that characterized the Indian under all trying circumstances caused him to make the best of the change of homes. Along the rivers or beside a flowing spring the emigrants camped or

built rude log houses. Game was plentiful and corn grew quickly. Civilization, with all its influences was upon them. Missionaries, preachers, teachers, came among them to Christianize and civilize the Indian. To the Territory flocked all classes of whites --for even here the Indian was not destined to hold his home separate and apart. While many that were of the better class came, many came also that belonged to a low class--the flotsam and jetsam of creation--and often their crimes were laid at the Indian's door.

The Five Tribes advanced rapidly. Their Councils appropriated money for the education of their children; school buildings were erected, and the younger generation of the tribes developed into splendid types of American manhood and womanhood. All trace of savagery was gone now--education has placed the Indian upon a new footing among his fellowmen.

That the old Indians relished the new order of things is scarcely to be believed possible. Many of the "old men" of the tribes lived to witness the swift evolution of their race-- the tepee abolished for the cabin; the cabin torn away for a modern home; the musical mothertongue forgotten for the smooth

"talk of the white man"; the bow and arrow laid aside forever, the free, wild life gone, and existence now surrounded by the white man's laws and conventionalities. The old Indians shook their heads and literally "took to the mountains," to live out their lives in dreams of the past, for to them there was no future.

In this article the history of the Creeks can be but briefly touched upon. The characteristics, peculiar beliefs, traditions, personal traits, domestic life and old-time customs would require volumes, but they are of the distant past now, generally speaking, for the Creek Indian of to-day knows little himself of the ancient customs and observances of his tribe.

THE CREEK LANGUAGES

Early teachers and missionaries among the Muskogees had great difficulty to overcome in mastering the Creek language. The words of the Creek are pretty and musical, but not easy of comprehension for the white man or Indians of those tribes, save those closely allied with the Creeks. The Creeks had no alphabet nor written language. By rude paintings on bark or stone, the Aborigines recognized messages from each

other. The sun, the moon, vegetation, the coming and going of fowls of the air, climatic conditions--these in place of calendars, were closely observed and gave to these children of Nature, their knowledge of time and the change of seasons.

The following "Muskogee Alphabet" was adopted by many interpreters and missionaries in 1853 and published in a "Muskogee-English Dictionary" in 1890 by Rev. R. M. Loughridge, a missionary to the Creeks:

- A. Always broad, as in far, as aha.
- C. Che for ch, as ceme, Cesus.
- E. E; long, as in meet, as, like-es, we sit.
- E. Short, as i in pin as este, a person.
- F. F as in English.
- H. H as in English.
- I. Always long, as i in pine.
- K. K as in English.
- L. L as in English.
- M. M as in English.
- N. N as in English.
- O. O always long as in note, ofv, opv.
- P. P as in English.
- R. R, hle, for hl, as, rvro for hlohlo.
- S. S as in English.

T. T as in English.
U. U as oo in mood; as , hoktuce.
V. V as u in but; as ekvnu.
W. W as in English.
Y. Y as in English.

DIPHTHONGS

Ae. As in aeha, aela.
Au. As ou in out.
Eu. As in veakateu.
Ou. As in cukou.
Ue. As in Uewv.

THE CREEKS' WAR HISTORY

There were numerous lesser wars or "uprisings" of the full-blood element after the Creeks were settled in their new Nation, but the next great breaking up of homes and peace was the Civil war.

A majority of the Creeks were in favor of co-operation with the Confederacy, notwithstanding the refusal of the old and prominent Creek councillor, O-poth-le-yo-hola to lend aid to any such measure. Many argued that the South was their birth-place and

to the South they would be faithful. The loyal portion of the Seminoles, Kickapoos, Delawares and others joined the followers of O-poth-le-yo-ho-la and then began a war between the loyal and disloyal Creeks, the former finally retreating to Kansas in December 1861.

The Indian troops on both sides gave excellent service and were heroes in many engagements. The archives of the War Department show the numbers of men and organizations raised among the Five Tribes in Indian Territory to have comprised three Regiments of Indian home guards in the service of the United States, and about twenty organizations in the Confederate States' Army.

Of the Creek organizations that served in the Confederate States, were the First Creek Cavalry Battalion, Lieut. Col. Chilly McIntosh; First Creek Regiment, Colonel D. N. McIntosh; Second Creek Regiment, Col. McIntosh; First Seminole Cavalry Battalion, (Creeks and Seminoles) Lieut. Col. John Jumper.

One-third of the 182 officers in the Union Territory forces were Indians.

CHIEFTAINCY

From 1827 until the present, the succession of Chiefs in the Creek Nation has been as follows:

Chilly McIntosh; Fuahutchu-Micco; Roley McIntosh; Moty Kanard; Samuel Chicote (who served twelve years as the Principal Chief); Lecher Harjo; Ward Coachman; J. M. Perryman; Legus C. Perryman; Isparhecher, and Pleasant Porter, the present Chief.

A long list of distinguished warriors and orators belong to the Creeks. The great William Weatherford, that fierce enemy to the whites who fought General Jackson, until, out of nearly one thousand warriors, only a score were left, and who at last offered himself, as a hostage for his people. Tecumseh, too, belonged to the Creek tribe--that renowned chief, warrior and orator, concerning whose daring deeds the pages of history are filled. McIntosh, the patriot who lost his life at the hands of his own people, for signing away their old homes, East of the Mississippi; McGillivray, the noted statesman; Samuel Chicote, the Creek reformer who was one of the noblest and most noted men the Creek Nation has ever produced; O-poth-le-yo-ho-la, the

dignified Speaker of the Councils; Menawa, a confederate of Tecumseh when the latter planned to destroy the white settlers at the Battle of the Horse-shoe; Isparhecher, the sagacious Chieftain and leader of the Creeks in the "Green Peach War,"--the man who for fancied wrongs caused a civil war among his people, but who, withal, was a good man and a wise chief.

These and many others might be mentioned as having won distinction and renown; but of them all, none deserves higher praise than the present Chief of the Creeks, Pleasant Porter. Coming from a long line of distinguished ancestry, educated, broad-minded, noble-spirited, commanding, General Porter stands today as the "grand old man" of the Creeks. In the final absorption of the Muskogees as a nation by the United States, with the allotment of their lands in severalty, the Creeks secured a leader who by his sagacity and superior education will bring them to the end without fraud or error.

General Porter's message to the Creek Council in October, 1900, will be preserved in history as the most able, most comprehensive speech ever delivered before a legislative body of Indians in the Indian Territory. A quotation from this speech gives an

insight into the character of the man who uttered the words:

"The vitality of our race still persists. We have not lived for naught. We are the original discoverers of this continent and the conquerers of it from the animal kingdom, and on it first taught the arts of peace and war, and first planted the institutions of virtue, truth and liberty. The European nations found us here and were made aware that it was possible for men to exist and subsist here. We have given to the European people on this continent, our thought forces. The best blood of our ancestors have been intermingled with their best statesmen and leading citizens. We have made ourselves an indestructible element in their national history. We have shown that what they believed to be arid and desert places were habitable and capable of sustaining millions of people. We have led the vanguard of civilization in our conflicts with them for tribal existence from ocean to ocean. The race that has rendered this service to the other nations of mankind cannot perish utterly.

"Though our tribal organization is fading away, we will be transformed as a potent factor, an element within the body of Christian civilization. The philosophy of the history of the future shall trace many

of the principles of government and institutions so dear to them to those they found among us.

"Now that we have demonstrated that we have the ability to make for ourselves and our children homes, and having the sanction of every law, let us make for ourselves, this firm and fixed resolution: Let our every act speak it forth; let the elements or forces of nature carry our resolutions to our fellow-men the world over; let them in their senses know and feel it and enter upon the performance of our high mission. Many of you have accomplished it already; many have begun it; and those that have not yet begun it, begin at once and devote all of your energies of soul, mind and body to the task set before us, even if it takes years--yes, a lifetime--to carry it out.

"When we have thus resolved to make for ourselves and our children homes, we will have indited in and upon ourselves, a law for our guidance which all divine and human law will protect and sustain us in its maintenance. No statutory law will ever annul it, and we shall then have risen to the plane of our high destiny."

Such, briefly, is the history of the Creeks. From many thousands they are now comparatively a small tribe.

They are a power in Indian Territory, and among them are many shrewd and wealthy business men, and several writers of prose and poetry, who have gained a wide reputation.

The last Council fire has been lit in the Creek Council house, as well as in that of the others of the Five Civilized Tribes. But, when the Indians are no longer wards of the Government; when in their faces we can no longer find a trace of Indian origin--when the noble Red Man shall exist no more--on the pages of history, in song and story, we will still hear of his deeds of valor, and, forever down through the years to come, by the countless generation, will be felt the influence left by the real discoverers of the vast American continent.