

COL. PETER PITCHLYNN, CHOCTAW DELEGATE.

REMONSTRANCE

OF

COL. PETER PITCHLYNN, CHOCTAW DELEGATE,

AGAINST

*The passage of the bill to unite under one government the several Indian tribes west of the Mississippi river.*

FEBRUARY 3, 1849.

Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

*To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States :*

The undersigned has seen, with feelings of the deepest anxiety, that a bill is now pending before Congress to combine under one territorial government all the Indian tribes in the region west of Missouri and Arkansas, south of the Platte river, and north of Texas, known as the Indian Territory.

This seems founded, no doubt, in the purest philanthropy, and in an earnest desire for the best interests of the Indians ; is beautiful in theory, but in practice, would be destructive to all the long cherished hopes of the friends of the red men, as it would introduce discord, dissensions, and strife among them.

To a full appreciation of the objections here urged, a thorough knowledge of the various tribes proposed to be embraced by the bill, with their present condition, habits, modes of living, prejudices, &c., is essential, an outline of which I propose here to give.

Each of these tribes hold the country they occupy by tenures differing from the others, and according to the terms of the several treaties by which they have acquired them from the United States, and all independent of each other.

They have been separate and independent of each other from time immemorial, and are exceedingly sensitive in relation to any matters that may affect this independence.

They occupy different platforms in civilization ; some being nearly wholly civilized, others partially so, and others, again, retaining the wandering habits of their fathers, may properly be termed hunter tribes.

Their languages are wholly different ; most of the tribes do not understand each other.

There is no community of interest among them, as must be manifest from the foregoing statements; for that which will promote the interest of the hunters, induces the agriculturists to idle their time and neglect their farms. Nor is there any commercial intercourse among them; and indeed there is but little intercourse of any kind whatever.

Their laws and customs are wholly different—that which is regarded as a virtue by the civilized Indians, being considered as a weakness by the hunters; and those actions which are regarded as manly and heroic by the wandering tribes, are vices of the darkest character among the others.

There can be no system of judiciary established in which all these tribes would unite, even if one suitable to the condition of the whole could be devised.

With these facts before you, gentlemen, I would respectfully ask, how could a legislature be organized in which the whole were represented? and from which tribe or nation could the delegate be selected to represent them on the floor of Congress?

If each nation had an equal representation, it would be clearly inconsistent with the first principles of a republican government, and would not be tolerated by the well informed; and if they had not, the populous and civilized would be regarded with jealousy and envy by the others, and the whole plan would be regarded as a scheme to bring the latter under subjection to the former, and the harmony and good understanding that now generally prevail, would be broken up, and discord and jealousy grow up which would extend through many ages. By whom would the delegates from the wandering tribes be elected? Could the ballot box be introduced among them? or would they relinquish the pleasures or profits of the chase for a moment to exercise the right of franchise, so dear to the civilized man, but the value of which is wholly unknown to the savage.

But suppose this legislature elected and assembled, then comes the strife for precedence, and most likely the whole would break up without organizing, with ill blood excited, never to re-assemble. Should the spirit of forbearance enable them to organize, and the transaction of business be commenced, every article read, and every speech made, even the very call for order would have to be repeated by eight or ten interpreters in as many different languages, producing endless delay and confusion. Next would come legislation; and as the protection of persons and property would be the question of the greatest importance among the civilized Indians, the first bill introduced would probably be to suppress and punish piracy—that is, in plain English, to prevent murder and robbery—as soon as this was interpreted to the delegates from the wandering tribes, they would consider it in the same light as your honors would a proposition to punish honesty and truth; and if the bill did not produce the very crimes it was intended to prevent, they would, at least, at once and forever quit the legislature.

Thus far, gentlemen, I have addressed you on the general subject, and I hope I have convinced your judgment of the evils of this scheme. But, gentlemen, I am a Choctaw, and while I deprecate this scheme as fruitful of evil, and only evil, to all the Indian tribes, in behalf of my own people, I earnestly beseech that this calamity may not be visited upon them.

We have ever been the friends of the Americans, and have fought for them in both their wars with England, and were ready and willing to fight again in their recent conflict with Mexico, had our services been desired. From the time that our fathers took the great Washington by the hand, we have followed his counsels. For a mere pittance we yielded to you our country in Mississippi, the most beautiful and productive, rendered dear to us by the associations of our youth, the traditions of our people, and the graves of our fathers. We had learned the great truths of Christianity, and the arts of agriculture and civilized life, yet we gave up all, sought a new home in the far-off wilderness, and with the perseverance and industry which are the characteristics of our people, have made of that wilderness rich and fruitful farms and flourishing villages. We will not attempt to depict the trials, tribulations, and misfortunes that attended us in our emigration. Your time will not permit it, nor could the talents of man accomplish it unless aided by divine inspiration. "We were broken, but not consumed, cast down, but not dismayed." We immediately encouraged the mechanical and agricultural arts, built churches, established schools, and enacted laws for the encouragement of virtue and the suppression and punishment of vice. Our constitution is purely republican, the gospel ministry is well sustained, and our schools are of a high order. Our people are increasing in numbers. Peace dwells within our limits, and plenteousness within our borders.

Schools, civilization upon Christian principles, agriculture, temperance and morality are the only politics we have among us; and adhering to these few primary and fundamental principles of human happiness, we have flourished and prospered: hence we want none others. We wish simply to be let alone, and permitted to pursue the even tenor of our way.

We look with gloomy forebodings to the passage of this bill, and should it be the pleasure of Congress to enact it we earnestly pray that we (the Choctaws) may be excluded from the operations of it. Bad men will use it as a means of introducing discord and confusion among our people, and finally driving them from their present happy home to wander on the shores of the Pacific, or sink in its deep waters.

This scheme, as I have remarked, may be beautiful in theory; but it is the beauty of the summer cloud that rises in the west, its borders tipped with golden sunlight, and ascending in majesty it towers to the zenith, filling the beholder with wonder and awe; but the forked lightening is within that cloud, and its bolts scatter death around; the wild hurricane is within its bosom, and it is let loose to scatter the blast, and to destroy! O, let not the red men be smitten by its fury! Remember what they were, and what they are! and grant, Heavenly Father, that whatever offence may have been committed by our ancestors, for which our people have been so scattered and peeled, that it may be atoned for before this last and worst judgment shall be visited upon us.

It may be thought that I write with too much feeling; but let it be remembered, that the history and character of nearly all these tribes are familiar to me—that I have spent my life among them, and hence my anticipations of the future are based upon the history of the past, and not upon mere speculation, and my country, my people, my home and my children, all that can stimulate a man, are at stake in this matter.

Let me again earnestly entreat that the bill now before you may be *carefully* considered, and that the happiness, nay, the very existence, of

my own people and these tribes, may not be jeopardized, if not sacrificed, without the most careful consideration and the fullest inquiry.

And your memorialist will ever pray, &c.

P. P. PITCHLYNN,

*Choctaw delegate to the United States government.*

WASHINGTON CITY, D. C., January 20, 1849.