

Cherokee Memorial

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Monday, January 19

Mr. E. EVERETT presented the memorial of a council held at Running Waters, in the Cherokee nation, State of Georgia, November 28, 1835, and accompanied it with the following remarks:

Mr. Speaker: I hold in my hand, and have been requested to present to the House, a paper, purporting to be the memorial of chiefs and head-men of the Cherokee tribe of Indians, assembled at Running Waters, in that part of the Cherokee country which lies in the State of Georgia, towards the close of the month of November. This council was organized, on behalf of that portion of the Cherokee tribe of Indians who are unwilling, on any terms, to submit to the jurisdiction of the States in which they live, and are desirous of removing, under the protection and by the aid of the United States, to the country already in possession of that portion of their tribe which has crossed the Mississippi.

The original signatures belonging to this memorial are to be found in the original, which is to be presented in the other branch of the Legislature. An authenticated transcript of them is attached to the duplicate of the memorial, which I have now the honor to submit to the House. They are fifty-seven in number, twenty of which are certified to have been written by those to whom the signatures belong. The other thirty-seven are made in the usual manner of persons unable to write. Of how large a portion of the whole tribe the council at Running Waters may represent the opinions, I am not informed.

The memorial, I am satisfactorily assured, is the production of John Ridge, a distinguished member of the Cherokee tribe, and one of the delegates now present in this city from the council at Running Waters. It is at his request, and that of his associates, Elias Boudinot and Archille Smith, that I now present this memorial to the House. It is accompanied by a series of resolutions, adopted at the same council, expressing, in a more condensed form, the opinions and feelings of that portion of the Cherokee nation who are

represented in the council, and on whose behalf these papers are now submitted to the House. These documents are too long to be conveniently read in *extenso*, and, for the sake of economizing the time of the House, I beg leave briefly to state their purport:

They set forth, in strong language, the right of their people to the soil on which they live, and their sense of the wrong done them in the measures taken to dispossess them. And in these views, sir, I feel it my duty to say that I fully concur. They represent the progress they have made in the arts of civilization—a progress, no doubt, well calculated to excite admiration. It has excited the admiration of the friends of humanity, both here and in Europe. They express, however, the sorrowful conviction that it is impossible for them, in the present state of things, to retain their national existence, and to live in peace and comfort in their native region. They therefore have turned their eyes to the country west of the Mississippi, to which a considerable portion of their tribe have already emigrated; and they express the opinion that they are reduced to the alternative of following them to that region, or of sinking into a condition but little, if at all, better than slavery, in their present place of abode. They announce this conviction with that bitterness of language which might naturally be expected from men placed in their situation, and which I think will neither surprise nor offend any member of this House. In contemplating the subject of removal, they cast themselves upon the liberality of Congress to extend to them the means of transportation, more consistent with health and comfort than they have hitherto enjoyed; objects which, I fear, have been too much neglected hitherto; a pecuniary allowance as an immediate resource on their arrival in the West; and adequate assurance of a right of property in the soil, and the enjoyment of political privileges in the new abode in which they may then be placed. I have stated to them that a part of these objects are such as, in the usual mode in which the policy of removal has been pursued, would naturally be first provided for by a treaty between the United States and persons authorized to contract on the part of the tribe. They consider, however, that, in the present unhappy state of the tribe, divided as it is by parties warmly opposed to each other on the subject of emigration, it may be at present difficult, if not impossible, to conclude a treaty generally satisfactory. It is also the opinion of the memorialists that, in the present disorganized state of their people, it may be difficult for the Government to recognize parties, with which it could advantageously act in the negotiation

of a treaty. On this subject I do not profess to be able to judge. I have not the means of forming a confident opinion, and I do not wish to take any part in the divisions which may exist between the different portions of the tribe.

I have now, I believe, sir, stated in sufficient detail the purport of the documents which I hold in my hands. I shall, before I sit down, ask their reference to the Committee on Indian Affairs, not doubting but that committee will consider the matters embraced in the memorial with the most favorable feelings towards a class of men who, I must say, have, in my opinion, just cause of deep dissatisfaction with the Government and people of the United States. I believe all sides of the House are fairly represented in that committee; and the two bills reported from it, which passed into laws at the last session of Congress, are, I am informed, satisfactory to the Indians; and the provisions of the third bill, which is still before the House, are spoken of by the memorialists with decided approbation. They are willing to leave their cause to the consideration of the committee.

If this committee, sir, possessing, as I think it does in an unusual degree, the confidence of the House, shall find, in this memorial, any proper subject of legislation: if they can devise, as I can trust they can, any means to avert from the remaining portions of the Cherokee tribe the destruction which seems to hang over them; if they can offer any suitable increase of comfort to those who emigrate, and if they can facilitate the work of removal to those who remove, without prejudice to the interests of those who stay, I think the House and the country will sustain them in so doing. For myself, sir, I certainly never expected to present a memorial in this House in favor of the removal of Indians, but I as little expected to be requested by Indians to do so. I have performed this duty at the request of a delegation of three, two at least of whom were among those most active and influential among their brethren, at the time the great stand was made on this floor against the Indian policy of the Government. You cannot, sir, have forgotten those discussions; you took a prominent part in them. I have changed no opinion then expressed by me. But it is the lesson of practical wisdom to yield, when it can no longer be helped, to the force of circumstances. I have long since come to the conclusion, in common I believe with all the friends with whom I acted on that occasion, that the best advice we could give to our Indian brethren was, to yield to the hard necessity of their condition. That advice, sir, in conjunction with members of this and

the other House of Congress, whose opinions are of much greater weight than mine, was decidedly expressed three years ago, I letters written at the request of the intelligent and benevolent counsel of the Indians, (Mr. Chester,) and read in council at New Echota. I believe it would have been better for the Indians had it then been followed. I am firmly persuaded that the social, political, and moral condition of this interesting tribe strongly invites them to the West. I fear that swift and certain destruction impends over them, if they much longer delay their removal. I believe that they can now make better terms with the Government than they will be able hereafter to make, and that the longer they remain in their present abode, the more of that which they most wish to preserve—their national identity—will perish. If Congress can do any thing (and I believe they can do every thing) to enable them to make their removal in a manner consistent with life, health, and comfort: to heal their dissensions, to sooth their feelings, to mitigate their sufferings, and establish them advantageously in their new abodes, I hope it will be done; it ought to be done; for when all is done, I fear a heavy debt will lie against us in the court of conscience. I move you, sir, that the memorial and resolutions be referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs, and printed.

The memorial was disposed of accordingly.