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SPHEX CLUB PAPERS
of
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SUBJECT: S E - Q U O - Y A H
And a Bit About the Cherokees

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S E - Q U O - Y A H ,

And a Bit About the Cherokees

In books of fact and in books of fiction, the characteristics of the American Indian and the deeds of daring or deviltry performed by individual warriors on battle field and hunting field have been made known to us. The parts played in the drama of American development by Powhatan and Sitting Bull, Red Cloud and many another redskin chief were, in my boyhood, a familiar story to at least the male portion of Young America; while the mythical Hiawatha and the Mohican braves of Cooper's novels seemed as real as did Robinson Crusoe or the Swiss Family Robinson.

But how many American boys know much, if anything, of Sequoyah, the Cherokee, who, unable to read or write in any language, and speaking only his tribal tongue, invented an alphabet so perfectly suited to that tongue that almost overnight the Cherokees were transformed from an illiterate into a literate people. For that matter, how many adults know more than that he invented some sort of alphabet and that in his honor were named the conifers of which the red wood and the big trees of California are two species?

Of literature from which the facts of Sequoyah's interesting life and remarkable accomplishments may be obtained there is a scarcity. In a book on the American Indians which I obtained from the Jones Memorial Library, I found about two pages devoted to this unusual Indian and that little was hardly more enlightening than the few paragraphs to be found in an encyclopedia. References given in the Encyclopedia Americana and in the International Encyclopedia are to two books, "Sequoyah, the American Cadmus and Modern Moses," written by Foster, a New Hampshire editor, published in 1885 and long ago out

of print; and the nineteenth annual report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, published by the government in 1902, though written several years prior to that, and containing an article on "Myths of the Cherokees." In it are given many facts concerning the subject of this paper. Mention is made in each of these books of an article upon Sequoyah appearing in Harpers Magazine, for September 1870, a copy of which I was able to consult at the Library of Randolph Macon Woman's College.

Since no man may be properly understood separated from the times in which and the conditions under which he lived, I shall, before relating the events of Sequoyah's life, briefly sketch the history of his tribe. According to their myths they once lived in the northern part of what is now the United States, near their kinsmen, the Iriquois, with whom they had a disagreement and by whom they were defeated. Taking refuge in the Appalachian mountains, the Cherokees gradually drifted southwestward and must at one time have inhabited the mountain and the Piedmont sections of Virginia.

Thomas Jefferson in his "Notes on Virginia," tells of an Indian burial mound near Monticello which was visited one day by a passing body of Indians, who left the highway and went straight through the woods to the mound without asking directions. Cherokees were the only Indians known to have frequented that section at that time. It seems probable, too, that the Indians who at a much earlier time suddenly appeared at the Falls of the James, site of the present city of Richmond, and threw a scare into the Virginia colonists, who had only just succeeded in subduing the Powhatans, were a large Cherokee hunting party. And in 1846 an aged Cherokee chief told a missionary to his tribe that it had been handed down to him that his

forefathers once lived near the Peaks of Otter.

However, by the time the English colonies were well established along the Atlantic seaboard, the Cherokees visited this section only on hunts. Their villiages were in the mountains and mountain valleys which now compose extreme Southwest Virginia, eastern Tennessee, the western Carolinas and north Georgia. There they lived by hunting and fishing and rude agriculture, fighting their old enemies, the Iriquois, when they met them on hunting trips into Kentucky, and constantly at odds with neighboring Indian tribes, particularly the Creeks.

Those restless souls among the English colonists who chaffed under civilization and went westward hunting and trapping and trading with the red men seem to have found the Cherokees peacably disposed toward them. In any event a number of white men, marrying Indian girls, were adopted by the tribe and many of the Cherokee chiefs and warriors, among the Sequoyah, were of mixed blood and were known both by the English names of their fathers and by their Cherokee names.

It was a different matter, however, when the westward drift of white men was occasioned by no desire merely to hunt and trap, but was urged on by land hunger. The Cherokees, like other Indians, wanted no settlements of whites upon their lands, clearing the forests and ruining the hunting. They felt that the deed given them to the land by the Great Spirit was a much more valid one than the grants authorized by a king of England. As a result there were frequent clashes between the Cherokees and white settlers seeking new homes.

In consequence of these clashes, plus the fact that the French in Louisiana treated the Indians with more consideration than

did the English colonists, the Cherokees sided with the former in the French and Indian war. Beaten in that struggle, they sued for peace, and a treaty was arranged between them and the colonies under the terms of which the lands to be occupied by the Indians were designated, and promise made that those lands would not be opened to white settlers.

Little cared the pioneers, however, for a treaty made with Indians. They did invade the Indians' lands, selecting of course the most fertile portions; and again there were frequent and bloody minor clashes between white man and red. Representatives of the British crown, resident among the Cherokees, did their ineffectual best to maintain the Indians' rights; but the land hungry pioneers respected British authority in those remote mountains little more than they did a treaty made with savages.

The result was, however, that when the Revolutionary conflict broke out, the Cherokees sided with the nation whose representatives had attempted to defend their rights and against the colonists who had outraged them. That was natural, but, as it proved, inexpedient; for again they were on the losing side and again when their white allies admitted defeat they were forced to sue for peace with the colonists. The result was a treaty taking away from the Cherokees a considerable part of the lands given them under the earlier treaty, but guaranteeing them unmolested possession within the designated boundaries. On the part of the newly-born white nation this treaty was negotiated by commissioners from the States concerned, Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia. Tennessee was at that time a part of North Carolina.

In passing it should be noted that the State of Georgia formally protested the ratification of this treaty upon the ground that it gave to the Cherokees lands which had been set apart by Georgia as homesteads for Georgia volunteers in the fight for independence. It was, however, ratified by the federal government.

Again it was a case of history repeating itself. The whites respected the boundaries set up by this treaty no more than they had the boundaries set up by the earlier one. Georgia particularly was constantly complaining to the federal government.

These complaints were not without justification. Georgia, like North Carolina and Virginia, ceded to the federal government lands westward of their present boundaries. In so doing Georgia had stipulated and the federal government had agreed, that as expeditiously as possible the Indians would be removed from Georgia soil to new land in the west. Consequently the Georgian position was logical, while the federal government seems to have been in the position of having promised to one of the States which composed it a performance not compatible with a solemn treaty previously entered into with the Cherokees. Because of such conditions, and also because they thought their tribe was becoming too civilized through contact with the whites, Cherokee bands had from time to time left their lands of their own free will and settled west of the Mississippi in what is now the State of Arkansas. Before the final clash of Cherokee and white man in the east, about one third of the Cherokees had migrated west of the Mississippi, where they had set up their own tribal organization, independent of the eastern Cherokees, but with whom they kept in communication.

The final crisis came for the eastern Cherokees when gold was discovered on their lands in north Georgia. A situation was created where if the federal government did not act, the State of Georgia would. Washington was not ready for a test of strength between federal and State authority. It was easier to regard a treaty made with Indians as a scrap of paper. A few individual Cherokee were persuaded, without authority, to sign a treaty exchanging the Cherokee lands in the east for new lands in the west. This agreement was repudiated by the Cherokee Council. Then Washington sent soldiers. Marching upon the Cherokees from all sides, the Indians were rounded up into stockades built at various points, and 1838 they were forcibly transported to the new lands set apart for them.

Utterly inadequate preparations were made for this migration, called "The Trail of Tears" in Edna Ferber's recent novel, *Cimarron*. Of sixteen thousand Cherokee men, women and children who under compulsion left the lands guaranteed them by solemn treaty, four thousand perished en route to their new home. A Georgian who volunteered for service in the troops which drove the Indians out, and who later was a Colonel in the Confederate army, said: "I fought through the civil war and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever saw." The temper of the whites may be judged by the fact that hardly had the removal begun before they were digging up the Indian burial mounds to rob the dead of their ornaments of silver, among which doubtless were many pieces designed by Sequoyah, who was a silversmith.

Of course not all the Cherokee were rounded up. Many escaped to the mountains of the Great Smoky ranges. Others escaped during removal and made their way back. Later these few hundreds

were given a reservation in western North Carolina, upon which their descendants live today; and in passing it is interesting to note that this small remainder of the eastern Cherokee nation contributed its full fighting strength to the Confederate army, four companies of infantry.

The main body of the Cherokee nation, forcibly reunited in what is now Oklahoma, became a very prosperous and civilized people, who during the War Between the States divided as between North and South, and as result of that conflict were not again able effectually to perpetuate themselves as an independent nation. Early in the present century they abandoned the attempt and became citizens of the United States.

Born but a few years before the War of the Revolution, the subject of this paper lived during a great part of the stirring times I have outlined and must have had some share in the conflicts between his people and the whites. That his aspirations for himself and his people were not principally shaped by the events of his day and the tales he had been told of the equally tempestuous times immediately preceding his birth seems impossible.

Among the early settlers in Georgia were German Lutherans who came to the new world to escape religious persecution at home. A descendent of one of these German families was George Gist, whose character may be judged by the fact that he was denied a peddler's license. Nothing daunted, he had two pack horses laden with such goods as would appeal to Indians and set out to trade with the Cherokees, a sort of bootleg trader as it were. He spoke no Cherokee and very little English, but in that language of love common to all peoples he won the heart of a Cherokee maiden of a prominent and influential family, marrying her according to the Indian rites. This was in 1768.

Apparently Gist was influenced to this marriage by the fact that, in addition to providing him with a home and housekeeper, it gave him a status among the Cherokees highly desirable for a trader who had no status as such with his own race. His Indian wife became with child, whereupon he deserted her and he was never heard of again.

The mother named the baby, in the musical tongue of her tribe, Se-quo-yah, though in later life he was frequently called by his father's English name, George Gist. From his mother Sequoyah learned the religion, customs and myths of the Cherokees, and how to distinguish valuable furs from those less so. He took to hunting and fishing naturally, just as did other Indian boys, from whom he differed in no way except that he did not regard it as beneath his dignity to aid his mother with those tasks which among Indians are done exclusively by the women. He helped her till her small farm and tend her few cows. Developing a skill in carving, he first exercised his mechanical genius by making for his mother an improved kind of wooden milk pan and a skimmer.

As a young man he frequently went on hunting expeditions with other members of his tribe, his mother remaining at home to tend the crops and cows and a small store she had set up for trading with her own people. On such expeditions the knowledge he had gained from his mother of how to judge the worth of furs stood him in good stead. Many furs he traded for the English, French and Spanish coins of the day, which were in large part the source of the silver from which he later made beautiful ornaments of various kinds. Native artificers were common among all Indian tribes and the Cherokees were particularly noted for the excellence of their arrow

heads, many of which they made from beautifully colored stones. It is not surprising therefore that Sequoyah's mechanical skill, first evidenced in wood carving, led him into the highest branch of art known to his people and that he became their greatest silversmith, his workmanship excelling all similiar work among his countrymen. The silver coins secured in exchange for furs were beaten into ornaments of many kinds, and doubtless many a Cherokee flapper of that day with "rings on her fingers and bells on her toes" obtained the silver trinkets from Sequoyah.

Sequoyah's next ambition was to become a blacksmith. Scorning to ask any white man to teach him, he went to see the white blacksmiths at work, asking no questions but using his great powers of observation to good effect. When he decided he had learned enough he bought the necessary materials and went to work, first making his own bellows and other tools, and making them well.

Sequoyah also developed some ability at drawing. His perspective was not like that of white men, but neither were his drawings totally lacking in perspective as among some Aisiatics.

It was during this period of Sequoyah's life that there occurred an incident which later gave rise to the doubts as to the exact name of his father. Sequoyah desired an identifying mark upon his silver work. He consulted a kinsman who was partially educated - Sequoyah himself did not speak a word of English - and that kinsman wrote in English what he thought was Sequoyah's English name. The Cherokees pronounced Gist as though it were Guest, and the friend remembered an English word sounding like that, Guess. He wrote it down on paper. Sequoyah made a die, a fac-simile of what his friend had written, and stamped it upon his silverware, in consequence of

which early writers spell his name three ways; Gist, Guest and Guess.

Sequoyah inherited his mother's farm and small store. He did a flourishing business in silver ornaments. He ran his blacksmith shop. Consequently he became well-to-do and prominent among his people, his opinions being received with respect by them. But the red man, like the white, is sometimes unable to stand prosperity, and so it nearly proved with Sequoyah. He learned to drink, and, being thrifty, he bought his liquors by the keg because it was cheaper per gallon that way. Having it in quantity, he consumed it in quantity. In this he was ably assisted by other Cherokees. Cherokee custom required the well-to-do to be generous with their less fortunate brothers, and Sequoyah's home became the rendezvous for many a convivial party.

Unlike the average Indian, stimulants did not make Sequoyah wildly excited. The warming effect of the liquor in his veins merely overcame the natural reserve of his Indian blood and gave free rein to the philosophical tendencies inherited from his German father. Indian in his opinions and prejudices, he was German in his thorough manner of thinking, and while the flowing bowl was passing he discussed for the edification of his visitors the laws and social problems of his race, and weighed the merits of Indian theism and pantheism against the religious doctrines taught by the missionaries, who never succeeded in converting him to Christianity. In short order he became a drunkard and was in danger of losing both his worldly goods and his high standing with his people. It speaks volumes for his will power that when a kinsman showed him plainly what a fool's part he was playing, Sequoyah resolved to abandon the habit and never thereafter indulged in stimulants.

It was about the year 1809 that Sequoyah first became interested in the problem of imprisoning speech on paper. In one of the clashes between Cherokees and white men, a prisoner was made by a party of young Cherokees. In his pocket the white man had a letter from a friend, and, being a man of wits, he used this to his advantage, making the Indians think it was a message from the Great Spirit. When this was told Sequoyah he at once understood that the "talking leaf", as he called the letter, was not of divine inspiration. "Much that the red men know, they forget; they have no way to preserve it." That was his comment. He sensed that in the struggle between the two races the whites were given a great advantage by their "talking leaves," not only in preserving knowledge but in communication. It became his ambition to enable the Cherokees to imprison their speech on paper.

Scorning to attend a white school, as he had scorned instruction from a white man in blacksmithing, he hung around the mission schools hoping to learn to read and write from observation just as he had learned to shoe horses and make rude plows. It was useless. Finally he secured, perhaps by appropriation, an English spelling book which he carried to his home and examined carefully. But for him the talking leaves would not even so much as whisper.

During the war of 1812 the Cherokees fought on the side of the Americans. Doubtless Sequoyah, who some time before for some brave deed had been made a warrior, took a part in that war. Perhaps it was in that conflict that he received an injury which lamed him for life, so that he could no more engage in battle or in hunt. I do not find it stated how his injury came about, only that it happened to him. In any event it was a fortunate injury, since it gave him

much time to think about his great ambition. His first effort was to represent individual Cherokee words by pictures of familiar birds and animals because of some noise they made resembling a Cherokee word. Thus had he been a white American he might have used the quail to represent the word, white, because of its familiar cry, Bob White.

Soon he realized the futility of his plan, so he exchanged his pictures of birds and animals for arbitrary characters. This effort was, of course, doomed to failure also, because of the limitations of human memory. Sequoyah did not at once perceive this, however. He made hundreds of characters, each representing a word. Chancing upon some young men one day when they were discussing the fact that white men could write and expressing belief that it was a special gift to white men from the Great Spirit, Sequoyah indignantly proclaimed that it was not a divine gift but something human. He became boastful. "I can do it myself," he asserted, and proceeded to scratch on a stone with a pin some of the characters he had chosen to represent Cherokee words. He got only ridicule for his pains, and the sting to his Indian pride but served to intensify his ambition.

Abandoning the methods he had been following, he gave up nearly everything else to devote as much of his time as possible to studying his tribal language. He would sit in front of his cabin in silent contemplation for hours at a time. This angered his family, all except a daughter; and his wife was on the point of leaving him. His neighbors thought him insane and to his face called him fool. But Sequoyah only smiled and kept on with his thinking, scratching curious marks on bits of bark.

In his studies Sequoyah found that there were two kinds of sounds in speech, the soft ones which we call vowels and the connecting ones we call consonants. He determined that of the former there were six in the Cherokee language, roughly corresponding to our a, e, i, o, u and a guttural unlike anything in English. Of connecting sounds he ascertained there were twelve in Cherokee, and that adding a vowel to a consonant made a Cherokee syllable. Thus he determined upon seventy two Cherokee syllables, the product of six vowels times twelve consonants. For each of these syllables he created or adopted a symbol. He found, too, that each vowel except the guttural was itself a syllable, and for each of these he made a symbol, thus having seventy seven. But even then he could not represent all Cherokee speech for there were sounds in Cherokee other than those which his seventy seven symbols stood for. One such was the hissing sound like our s. Of such sounds he found there were nine. For each he made a symbol, having there an alphabet of eighty five symbols each of which represented a Cherokee syllable; and by combining them Cherokee words could be represented. So thoroughly did he do his work that subsequently only three infrequently used Cherokee syllables were found unrepresented in his alphabet.

In determining upon his symbols, Sequoyah used that old English speller to which reference has been made. Many of the letters he borrowed just as we have them, though without slightest idea of their English sound. Then he turned some of them upside down to increase the number of characters. Others he modified or added to. He also used some of our numerals as symbols representing Cherokee syllables.

When he had completed his alphabet another task faced him. His daughter was of course his pupil and along with her father had learned to use the alphabet; but how convince the others! He first sought out Colonel Lowry, the Indian agent, who naturally was skeptical and who suggested to Sequoyah that he was fooling himself. But because his daughter also had learned, Sequoyah was able to convince Colonel Lowry. The latter brought the matter to the attention of the Cherokee Council. They too were Doubting Thomases, but agreed to a test. Several bright young Cherokee boys were sent to Sequoyah for instruction. They quickly and easily learned and were publicly put through tests in 1821 which dispelled all Indian doubts.

Of course it took a little time to learn an alphabet of 85 characters, but once mastered that was all there was to it, because each character was a syllable, leaving no perplexing questions in orthography such as puzzle our children. One writer recorded that "a child will learn in a month, by the same effort, as thoroughly, in the language of Sequoyah, that which in ours consumed the time of our children for at least two years."

Because it was something of their own; because they realized its possible aid to them in the conflict with the whites, learning Sequoyah's alphabet caught on like wild fire with the Cherokees. It was the fad of the day. Almost every rude Cherokee cabin became a public school, and in amazingly short time the majority of eastern Cherokees, young and old, were able to read and write their own language in characters of Cherokee invention.

Opposition to this new learning soon came, however. The Church, ever skeptical of new things, frowned upon Sequoyah's achievement. The inventor was not a Christian, and because he was

influential with his people the missionaries perhaps felt that his failure to accept their faith had influenced others not to accept it. This new alphabet was a pagan thing, consequently it must be evil. And, too, their pride was injured. In mission schools they had for years been attempting to teach the young Cherokees to read and write in English, and were making no great success of it. Then had come an ignorant savage who still held to the beliefs of his fathers and had done completely in miraculously short time that which they had spent long years in vain effort to accomplish.

Fortunately there were missionaries of vision, whose intellects were not beclouded by their prejudices and who soon saw that God in his own way had placed in their hands an instrument for spreading His gospel. They perceived that it was the divine intent not that the Cherokees should learn their language but that they should learn the Cherokee language and how to write it in Sequoyah's alphabet; after which they would quickly be able to spread Bible translations and religious tracts among the Indians.

But not alone from Christian missionaries did opposition come. As soon as these saw the opportunity afforded them by the new invention, opposition to the alphabet came from another religious source, the priests of the Cherokee religion, who opposed it because it was a means of making hundreds of members of the tribe desert the gods of their fathers. Then they, too, had a change of heart, and seized upon the alphabet as a means of preserving the rituals of their religion which theretofore had been preserved with great difficulty by being handed down by word of mouth.

Thus Sequoyah's alphabet was used by two religions; by one to extend its dominion, by the other to preserve itself.

The results of Sequoyah's invention were many, all of them contributing to the civilization of his people. Type of his characters was cast at Boston, a press, paper and ink were purchased, two white printers employed, and the first Indian newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix, began publication on February 21, 1828 at New Echota, capital of the Eastern Nation. The printing plant was used for many other purposes, however. Hymn books and Bible translations, arithmetics and other school manuals were printed and distributed among the Cherokees. The Cherokee laws were put into print, for even before Sequoyah's alphabet the eastern Cherokees had abandoned the tribal form of government and organized themselves into a nation with a paid legislature and a code of laws.

To me one of the most interesting things to which the invention led was putting the Cherokee myths into print. I was impressed by the fact that several of them are strikingly like our own myths and fables. Where we have the tale of the race between the hare and the tortoise, they had a tale of a race between the rabbit and the terripin, in which the fleeter animal lost not because he went to sleep on the job but because his slower footed but faster witted opponent played a trick on him. There is among the myths another tale, not very long, a translation of which I shall read. It is entitled:

THE RABBIT AND THE TAR WOLF

"Once there was such a long spell of dry weather that there was no more water in the creeks and springs, so the animals held a council to see what to do about it. They decided to dig a well, and all agreed to help except the Rabbit, who was a lazy fellow, and said 'I don't need to dig for water. The dew on the grass is enough for

me.' The others did not like this, but they went to work together and dug their well.

They noticed that the Rabbit kept sleek and lively, although it was still dry weather and the water was getting low in the well. They said, 'That Rabbit steals our water at night.' so they made a wolf of pine gum and tar and set it up by the well to scare the thief. That night the Rabbit came, as he had been coming every night, to drink enough to last him all next day. He saw the queer black thing by the well and said, 'Who's there?' but the tar wolf said nothing. He came nearer, but the wolf never moved, and he became braver and said, 'Get out of my way or I'll strike you.' Still the wolf never moved and the Rabbit came up and struck it with his paw, but the gum held his foot and it stuck fast. Now he was angry and said, 'Let me go or I'll kick you.' Still the wolf said nothing. The Rabbit struck again with his hind foot, so hard that it was caught in the gum and he could not move, and there he stuck until the animals came for water in the morning. When they found who the thief was they had great sport over him for a while and then got ready to kill him, but as soon as he was unfastened from the tar wolf he managed to get away."

I quote this fable, not for any literary merit it may possess, but because I am sure every one will recognize its similarity to Uncle Remus' tale of 'Bre'r Rabbit and the Tarbaby.' As with most Cherokee fables, told for entertainment at nights around the camp fires, it had more than one version. In another, the Rabbit did not escape, but by trickery persuaded his captors to throw him in a briar patch. That tale you will likewise recognize as similiar to one we read our children.

The Cherokee myths are perhaps of no great literary merit, their legends may be of but slight historic value; but the similiarity of their myths to our fables, and the fact that like the old Greeks and other early white nations they preserved the names of ancient heroes through the means of fantastic legends, brings to my mind the assertion of Kipling that the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady were sisters under the skin. I feel that underneath the veneer of exterior characteristics, the passions and emotions of red man and white were quite as near alike as were their fables or their desires to perpetuate the names and glorify the deeds of their great men. We accustom ourselves to thinking that Indians and other savages do not possess the same love of home and family as we; do not have for their religions and customs the same devotion we entertain for ours; do not entertain our exalted feelings of patriotism; but I venture to believe that Sequoyah and his fellow Cherokees felt the same despondency over leaving their hearthstones that we would feel if forced from ours; that when they reluctantly abandoned the graves of their fathers it was with as much sorrow and as much resentment against those responsible as we would feel in similiar circumstances.

But to return to my subject. Sequoyah did not wait to witness the result of literacy upon the Eastern nation. Perhaps he felt sure what it would be. Before the end of the year in which he convinced his fellows that he had discovered an easy way to preserve Cherokee speech upon paper, he left to join his kinsmen in the west. By them too his alphabet was kindly received, and he soon became a leader among them, as evidenced by the fact that when the Western Nation sent a delegation to Washington in 1828, Sequoyah was one of the delegates.

When the eastern and western Cherokees were forcibly united in the old Indian Territory in 1838, Sequoyah was of great value in averting a clash between the newcomers and the Old Settlers, as the earlier arrivals were called; and after having aided them in composing their differences, he took a prominent part in the development of the united Cherokees and was one of those who signed the document which declared them "one body politic, under the style and title of the Cherokee Nation."

With peace made between the two factions, they began organizing a government. They first adopted a written constitution, somewhat similiar to ours. Sequoyah was one of the signers; and as illustrating how little the instrument resembles our ideas of a savage government I quote Section 1.

"No person who denies the being of a God, or future state of reward and punishment, shall hold any office in the civil departments in this nation."

The head of their nation they called the Principal Chief; they had a legislative body of two branches, the nation being divided into nine districts each of which was represented in both the Council and the Senate; and they created a judiciary system divided into supreme, circuit and district courts. The laws made and enforced by their government were quite as civilized as are our own.

Of course none of this would have been possible without Sequoyah's invention, and of that the Cherokees were keenly aware. It is not surprising therefore that they put great stress upon education, being the first tribe of aborigines on this continent to establish a free system of schools, presided over by a board of three members, one from each of the three school districts into which the nation was divided.

As I have said, Sequoyah played his part in instituting this enlightened government; but when it was under way he returned to thinking about the problems of language. In 1840 he made a visit to numerous other Indian tribes in the west, some of them hostile to his own people, his purpose supposedly being to study their languages and ascertain if it were not possible to reduce all Indian speech to a common written language. Everywhere he was kindly received, other Indians doing their best to aid him in his studies. He returned home, however, without having accomplished his purpose.

Among the Cherokees there was a myth to the effect that before white men came to this continent a large body of their tribe had split off and gone to the Far West, and they were supposed to be living somewhere in northern Mexico. In 1840 Sequoyah set out to find his lost bretheren, being then just passed his seventieth year. He traveled in an ox-cart and was accompanied by a Cherokee boy. Escorts were given him by other tribes as he passed through their territories. When he reached what is now the State of New Mexico he became ill, suffering from rheumatism, but with true Indian fortitude pressed uncomplainingly onward toward his goal. Finally he reached a spot near San Fernandino, northern Mexico, where weakness and excruciating pain forced him to halt. A few days later he died and was buried nearby. One authority says in a cave. The exact spot is now unknown, but perhaps some day in that locality someone will unearth an Indian's skeleton and find among the bones a silver medal bearing, in English and in the Sequoyan alphabet, this inscription:

"Presented to Se-quo-yah by the General Court of the Cherokee Nation, for his ingenuity in the invention of the Cherokee alphabet."

This token of his nation's appreciation Sequoyah carried suspended around his neck, and doubtless it was buried with his body. Had he lived to return home he would have learned of another, tribute to his genius, for during his absence the Cherokees voted him an annual pension, which they paid to his widow during her life time - the first instance of a government pension for literary accomplishment. It should be mentioned, too, that earlier the United States government gave Sequoyah five hundred dollars in recognition of his invention, and in recent years the State of Oklahoma placed his statue in our national capitol.

Recently I read "The Raven," an account of the life of Sam Houston, native of Rockbridge county, Virginia whose varied and stormy career let him to be first president of Texas. In early life Houston went to live with the Cherokees in the east. He was adopted by an influential chief and given an Indian name the meaning of which furnished the title of the book to which I refer. After Houston's unfortunate first marriage and the tragically abrupt termination of his career as Governor of Tennessee, he went to join his Cherokee foster father, who was among those who had voluntarily migrated to the west. This was in 1829 some years after Sequoyah had joined the western Cherokees.

It is stated in "The Raven" that Houston found a decided feeling among western Cherokees that they should make some effort to effect a federation with other Indians of the west in order to put up a united opposition to further westward migration of the whites. Unquestionably that feeling must have persisted and must have been intensified by the cruel manner in which the eastern Cherokees were removed beyond the Mississippi. Who can doubt that Sequoyah shared the feeling?

This has made me wonder whether Sequoyah's two western trips were not motivated by more than a thirst for knowledge of other Indian languages.

Sequoyah never learned the white man's language. He rejected the white man's religion. He would not even let a white man teach him to use the bellows and hammer and anvil. His great invention was inspired by a realization of the fact that the white's ability to read and write gave them an advantage over the red man. Remembering these things, I ask myself whether it is not possible that if Sequoyah actually did entertain the hope of a common Indian tongue, it was not as a means to an end - the uniting of all red men to resist the whites. And if his tour of 1840 convinced him of the futility of that hope, is it beyond the bounds of likelihood that this Indian Moses who led his people out of the Egypt of illiteracy went on that ill fated search for the lost tribes as a last effort to find a Promised Land somewhere in the far west where all Cherokees could be re-united, develop a civilization of their own, and make preparations to defend it against the encroachments of a ruthless and alien race?

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