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THOMAS CAMPBELL to
LORD DEANE GORDON
An Account of the Creek Indian Nation, 1764
On Board the Dragoon
Portsmouth Harbour 14 June 1767

My Lord

Agreeable to my promise I send your Lordship a short account of my journey among the Indians with the situation of their country and some of their customs. With Sir John Lindsay's leave the twentieth Novemr Sixty four, in company and conjunctly with Mr. John Hannay, I sett out from Penzacola intrusted with talks from the Governor Johnstone and the Superintendent of the Indian affairs to the Kings, Chiefs, and leading men of the upper and lower Creek nation. We were eleven days upon the Path every evening putting up by some River or creek about sunset, turned out our horses, made a fire, dressed as much provisions as served us that night and next morning, spread our blankets and went to sleep. Earlie in the morning our guides would search, bring in, and pack our horses. We generally set out about eight in the morning, were obliged to travel slow and continue it all day as our horses were very bad. Thus we traveled till we came to the Muchlassah Village, which bears north from Penzacola two hundred and thirteen miles. As we went from the sea, the land improved in a slow and equal proportion, most perceptible by the sides of creeks and gullies, where both the trees and the canes as we

Note.-The original of this letter is preserved by Sir Arthur Grant of Monymusk, Scotland; to whom, and to Mr. George Cole Scott of the Virginia Historical Society, grateful acknowledgment is made for copies of this and other documents relating to British Florida. The rarity of extant letters of this period and territory adds to its already high value as source historical material.

advanced into the country increased in strength and number. Near the sea Your Lordship knows is pine barrens with a few dwarf oaks, and in the swamps there are a variety of Laurels, vines live oaks and cedars others. We got about thirty miles from Pensacola Fort where we halted. The second night we found the swamps filled with Reeds, the leaves of which our horses fed upon very well. In shape they resemble the Palmetto but of a much livelier green colour ; at the same we found a few chestnut trees and great deal of Sassafras and Golden Rods. We found many large pine trees lying across the road which kept us from traveling above twenty miles a day, they seemed to have been blown down as the roots were torn out of the ground. About fifty miles from Pensacola there is a pine barren, two or three miles of which is entirely clear above and many pine trees which grew, lay most irregularly upon the ground, where they appear to have been driven by some violent hurricane or earthquake. We crossed a great number of creeks, but only swam our horses over two, and found a large tree laid across each on which we carried over our provisions and blankets. When we got about an hundred miles up the country, we passed over several hills some pretty steep, but none high. We then passed through some large thick cane swamps, near a mile abroad, the canes near thirty feet high, with leaves and small branches from the root to the top. The horses and black cattle feeds entirely upon them all winter, in the Creeks nation, and keeps very fat. We passed different sorts of land, large tracts pretty clear of under wood & filled with red and white large oak trees, the scaly and smooth Heat berry, Dogwood & Sassafras, Chestnuts Spruce and yellow Pine tree, Sweet Maple or the Sugar trees, Mulberry and Plum trees, large gum trees, Cedar & Cypress generally in the swamps, the last very large, and the bark is used for covering of

houses. Between these & the cane swamps are Pine barrens and about fifty miles before we came to the first village we passed through a most delightful country. The fields large even and open and surrounded with their strips of Planten & varied by large avenues running from East to west, of which we could never see either end. When we went up the grass was all burned, but coming down it appeared most Beautiful. Upon our arrival at the Muckleassah the Wolf Kings village, they had up English Colowers, and he & the old men came to the traders house we put up at. A man who had been long among them spoak their language well, and was appointed one of our interpreters. After the Chief first, and the rest in turn had taken us by the hand, we all sat down, and after remaining silent for some minutes in order to rest and recollect, a custom they never neglect, the Wolf told us as we had traveled & must, be fatigued, he would ask no questions that night to trouble us, but would go home & send us some Refreshment. He took his leave and the rest followed, & immediately sent us some very fine boiled corned beef with sweet potatoes roasted, which were very acceptable ; next morning they came to us, and after being acquainted with the intent of our coming among them, said they were glad to see us, but that most of their Chiefs and other head men were bunting in the woods, and that there were none left in their towns & villages but old men & women & those unable to beare the fatigue of traveling and it would be some time before they would come in and we should have an opportunity of calling them together. We remained til the first of May and in that time traveled through most of their villages, & found what they told us to be true. When the head men were all come in we called two publick meetings, & delivered them what we had in charge, with which they were very much pleased, and most of the Chiefs & Princi-

pal men of Both the uper and lower Creek villages came down with us to the Congress at Penzacola the June following. The upper Creek villages lays mostly between and upon the Tallypoose and Coose Rivers, which form a bite of about forty miles broad, and joined little below the Alabama Fort, from which place they run into the head of Mobbille Harbour ; by this river the French sent up a large Canoes and supplied their Fort with gunes ammunion and men. The Banks of these Rivers are in many places high and steep and those parts which are low are mostly thick cane swamps. The ground is in general rich. The nation is bounded by our settlements upon the East, by the Cherrokees on the north East, the Choctaws on the west, the Chiccasaws on the north, and north west, and East and west Florida on the South. They have a great many small creeks that run across the country. Their villages & plantations are always near a running water. They begin to plant corn, Beans and Sweet potatoes the beginning of Aprile and the end of March, all the men and women gos into the field together without distinction and hoe and inclose for the use of the Village, which is distributed when ripe to the different families, in proportion to their number. Their Grounds are very rich as they seldom change and never manure them and have generally good crops and they depend so much upon it, as to Plant no more than just serves from one year to another. When they have a bad crop they must be in great distress, as Indian corn is their chief food all summer which they use in many different ways ; by beating to fine flower in a large wooden mortar they make bread of it ; by parching before it is made into flower they make homeny or Potage ; and by preparing it not quite so small, and Boiling it with oak or Heckerry ashes, they make their drink which. is mostly used all summer, the salts which is in the ashes makes it ferment after boiling which gives it an agree-

able tartness, makes it cool, refreshing wholesome and fit for that hotte season. About the beginning of Aprile the fields begins to look very agreeable. The peach trees plum trees of many different sorts are in Blossom. The dogwood trees, the Sweet Smelling Shrubs, of which they have great variety are in full bloome, the Red birds, Blue birds and nightingles sing sweetly all day and in the night the woods re-sound with the most wild noise of beasts birds & reptiles; the beginning of May they are obliged to weed from the Indian corn the wild onions which grow very thick among them. At this time the wild strawberries are ripe of which fruit they have great plenty. They are very near as large as our common garden ones, very sweet and have a delicious flavour. They have very good horses between the English and Spanish breed and a great many of them run wild about the woods and increase fast. The black cattle, sheep and goats increases fast. They have not many at present as they got them but lately among them. The Wolf has got about two hundred head of Black cattle most of which he has given to his children for fear they should be killed after he dyes. They have great plenty of hogs of a good kind which are best in December when they live intirely in the woods upon acorns, Chesnuts and roots. In every village they have fowels, and during the winter the River & ponds are filled with wild fowls. Their meats are many, but what they live mostly upon when hunting in the woods is Dear, Bear, Beaver, Buffalo and wild Turkeys, but when they are hungry they will put up with: possums squirrels, racoons, Foxes or any other creature comes in the way. Their meats must be very much boiled or Roasted before they will eat of it; the most common way they dress it is upon a stick put up before the fire and some distance from it, which dries out the juice gradually and makes it keep for monthes. They sometimes boil

it into Broth with Indian corn. The men are in general middle size well limd and clean, made with features serious, manly and agreeable. The women are short thick and strong in proportion, and some of them very handsome. They give their children great indulgence ; their sons they teach to bear with patience cold, heat, hunger and to dispise all fatigue, to live without fire or any other food except a little parched Indian corn for several days, when they have the least expectations of surprising an Enemy for attack as their Game, by stealth ; when at ware they generally are in parties of twenty or thirty, sometimes fewer. They never ask any but their own family or clan to go with them and these they only acquaint they are going out against such a nation and will remain a certain time at such a creek or hill where those who have a mind will find them. Their prisoner they often kill in a very cruel manner, and the wemen assists and are worse then the men. This seems not however to be their natural disposition for they are compationate and asist each other when in distress and are hospitable to strangers where they have no suspition of their having desins against them. They are jealous of our growing power from the quick increase of inhabitants on our settlement, and cultivation of their neighbouring lands. They have been for several years past laying up stores of powder, Balls and other necessaries, knowing it is impossible they can continue long in peace, for no Indian is looked on as a man til he has killed and scalped. They have within these few years killed several of our subjects and never given the least satisfaction. This makes the young men presumptuous and the old provide cautiously against the evil they cannot avoid. It lays with the family injured to revenge their own quarrel. If a man is killed his family will revenge it upon him who committed the murder, but if he escapes they will kill one of his fam-

ily and none of the rest of the tribes will offer to interfere. The customs and superstitions among them are many, the Laws few, but tho in an irregular and confused manner yet almost always put in execution. The women before marriage have a right to do or act with the men as they please, but if they should transgress after bound in wedlock the parties concerned have their ears and hair cutt off and beat often till left for dead. At a certain time the women neither eat sleep or live in the same house with their husbands. When they go out to hunt none asks where they are agoing or how long they intend to stay, that depends intirely upon the success they have; they take horses sufficient with them to carry their provision, Blankets & nives. The head man may call a publick meeting, but any tribe may go to warr without consulting the nation, none but near Relations enquire after the Sick, and the name of the deceased is never mentioned ; when a man dyes they bury his gun, shot, pouch and blankets with him, Shoot his horses & dogs and put from their sight any thing that was his. They have publick square in every village where all councils are held, the sides are about forty five feet, and each is divided into their cabins covered with cane mats, they sit on these according to their different Ranks, which they acquire by the number of scalps they have taken. They do not begin to speak immediately when they sit down in the square & never upon publick business til they have smoacked & handed about a certain Black drink called cassina ; never but one speak at a time, the rest give silent and serious attention. They have a great feast called the Busk some time in July to prepare for which they fast, Phisic, and keep from their wives four days; they then burn of the new corn and of Venison & put out all the old fire & make anew before they will eat of the first fruits. The new, fire is made by rubing two dry sticks against each other. There are many

other ceremonies attending this great feast. man may put away his wife and a woman her husband but she is not at liberty whatever time she and her husband parted til after the Busk ; a woman must remain four years single after the Death of her husband & her freedom begins from after the Busk, the fourth year. I will tire your Lordship no more about the Indians. I received a letter from Mr. Ried by the active Is dated the 23rd of March in which he mentions Capt. Murray being very well and that Mr. Goold has got ten shillings & a servant added to his former salary for Surveying. I desine bark from my Gaurd Ship the first of July next, and expect to remain some time on, shore as it is just ten years since I first came into the marines, nine I served on board of ship, seven of which was in the West Indies, and got my Corn. Several officers have been put over my head, one lately who had been at Patagonia, if that was the certain road to promotion in our service I should be very happy in going, but I believe it entirely depends upon interest of which I have very little or none.

I beg your Lordship will not be at the trouble of writing to me but if it is in your power to assist in my promotion without taking from your own friends I should be layed under the greatest obligation. I wish your Lordship all health and happiness and remain with true respects and esteem.

Your Lordship
Most obedient and most
humble servant
Thomas Campbell

Lord Deane Gordon