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THE END OF THE NATCHEZ

By JAMES MOONEY

When LeMoyne d'Iberville sailed into the Mississippi in 1699, just two centuries ago, he found the Na'tsi or Natchez Indians, from whom the modern town takes its name, settled in nine villages, with a total population of perhaps 2500 persons, along what is now St Catherine creek, in Adams county, Mississippi. Thirty years later their villages had been destroyed, their chiefs and hundreds of their people killed or sold into slavery, and the survivors were fugitive refugees with other tribes. Today there may exist twenty of the name.

For several reasons a peculiar interest attaches to the Natchez. Their language seems to have had no connection with that of any other tribe, excepting possibly the neighboring Taensa of Louisiana. Their strongly centralized government and highly developed religious ceremonial gave them commanding influence among all the tribes of the region, while their heroic resistance to the French, and their final destruction as a nation, lend their history a tinge of romance which writers have been quick to appreciate. The interest is in no degree diminished when we learn that, contrary to the ordinary idea, they were not exterminated, but rather extirpated, which after all is but another word for the same process. Pénicaut, Dumont, Dupratz, and Gayarré, have told us of their religion, government, and primitive home-life. In this short sketch we shall endeavor to throw some light on their history subsequent to 1730, prefacing with a brief statement of the causes which led to their dispersal.

In 1699 the French under d'Iberville made their first permanent establishment on the gulf coast at Biloxi, Mississippi, eighty

miles eastward from the present New Orleans, which was founded in 1717, and became the capital of the new province of Louisiana a few years later. In 1716 the French governor sent an officer with goods to the Natchez to establish a trading post among them, but found already on the ground some English traders from Carolina who were trying to form the Natchez, Yazoo, and Chickasaw into a syndicate for the purpose of making slave-hunting raids upon the neighboring tribes, a business which the Carolina people had found extremely profitable in their late wars with the Apalachi and Tuskarora. The Englishmen were arrested and sent to Mobile, whereupon the Natchez killed several Frenchmen and seized their property. A force was sent to demand satisfaction, and the Natchez were compelled to deliver up several of their men to death and to consent to the erection of a French fort in their principal village.

With a garrison thus forcibly established in their very midst, the Natchez were soon in a condition of smothered revolt, a feeling which the English traders resident among the Chickasaw strove by every means to nurse into active rebellion. The French were well aware of these intrigues, and Adair, himself a British trader, says, that as the Natchez had "always kept a friendly intercourse with the Chikkasah, who never had any good will to the French, these soon understood their heart-burnings, and by the advice of the old English traders carried them white pipes and tobacco, in their own name and that of South Carolina, persuading them with earnestness and policy to cut off the French." He adds that the embassy succeeded in its purpose.¹ It is the old story of rival commercial nations using the native as a cat'spaw until he is finally crushed between the millstones.

In 1722 a quarrel occurred at the post, in which several were killed on both sides. The French commander attempted to punish the Indians by levying a fine upon the whole population of three villages, with the result that they retaliated, when the

¹ Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 1775, p. 353.

French burned one village and beheaded the chief. It is probably this circumstance to which Adair alludes when he says that the old men of the tribe had told him that the French had demanded "from every one of their warriors a dressed buckskin without any value for it," which made their hearts grow very cross, because they loved their deerskins.¹ The climax came in 1729, when the French commander coolly ordered them to abandon their principal village, that he might clear the ground for his own purposes. Engaging the Yazoo, Koroa, and Tioux to their support, and supplying themselves with arms and ammunition by means of a shrewd stratagem, at a given signal they fell upon the garrison on November 28, and massacred two hundred men—only about twenty escaping—besides capturing all the women, children, and negroes, with a loss to themselves of but twelve warriors. While the bloody work was going on, the Natchez chief was calmly seated under a shed giving directions for piling the severed heads in heaps about him as they were brought in.²

The war was now on. A smaller garrison was massacred by the Yazoo, boats descending the river were fired upon, the Koroa joined forces with the hostiles, and even the Choctaw grew restless. To terrorize the weaker tribes and to remove the imminent danger of an alliance between the Indians and the negro slaves, the governor at New Orleans compelled a party of negroes to massacre the entire small tribe of Chaouacha, and, later on, when some negroes who had fled to the hostiles were retaken, they were given over to the Choctaw to be burned. In January, 1730, a force of several hundred Choctaw, led by a French officer, attacked a Natchez stockade, killing eighty men, capturing eighteen women, and releasing a large number of captives taken at the first massacre. The next month a strong force, with field guns,

¹ Adair, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

² Charlevoix, *History and General Description of New France*, Shea's translation, 1872, VI, p. 83.

arrived and summoned another of the Natchez forts to surrender. The Indians twice rejected the summons with defiance and followed it up with a sortie, which was repulsed only after a hard fight. The whole body finally managed to escape across the river into Louisiana, the French finding it convenient not to intercept them. Says the historian, "The Natchez were not destroyed; they could in the future be regarded only as irreconcilable enemies."¹ Their allies, the Yazoo, Koroa, and Tioux, were less fortunate. According to the same contemporary historian, the French Indians fell on them and "made a perfect massacre: of the two former nations only fifteen Indians remained, who hastened to join the Natchez; the Tioux were all killed to a man." From later evidence, however, it appears that the destruction was not so complete as was at first thought.

Toward the end of the year it was learned that the Natchez and their allies, who were still a constant thorn in the flesh of the French, were stockaded in three forts in the neighborhood of Black river, Louisiana, and a force of seven hundred French, negroes, and Indians were sent against them. In January, 1731, the first fort, which Gatschet locates near the present town of Trinity, was invested. The chiefs having been taken by treachery, a part of their followers surrendered, but the others refused all offers, and when told that if they still held out no quarter would be given to man, woman, or child, they replied that "we might fire when we chose—that they did not fear death." On the night of the 15th, during a terrible rainstorm which obliged the French to keep under cover, they made their escape, to the number of about seventy warriors with their women and children, and when the besiegers entered the stockade they found only one man and a woman with a new-born babe. The French Indians refused to pursue them, and the expedition returned to New Orleans with their prisoners, being the principal chief or Sun, several sub-chiefs, forty warriors, and three hundred and eighty-seven women and

¹ Charlevoix, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

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children, all or most of whom were sold as slaves in the island of San Domingo.

Says Charlevoix :

The war was far from being finished. Le Sueur had ascertained from the Head Chief that the whole nation was not by any means in the fort that we had besieged ; that it still comprised two hundred warriors including the Yazoos and the Corrois, and as many youth who could already in an emergency handle a musket ; that one of their chiefs had gone to the Chickasaw with forty men and many women ; that another, with sixty or seventy men, more than a hundred women, and a great number of children, was three days' journey from his fort, on the shore of a lake ; that twenty men, ten women, and six negroes were at the Ouatchitas ; that a band discovered by the army on the 18th of January comprised twenty men, fifty women, and many children ; that some twenty warriors were prowling around their old village to cut off the Frenchmen ; that the Yazoos and Corrois were in another fort three days' march from his ; that all the rest had died of hardship or dysentery. We were finally informed that the Flour Chief might have assembled sixty or seventy men, a hundred women, and a great number of children.

This itemized statement would seem to give the Natchez 240 warriors, or perhaps a total of 1200 persons, still remaining, exclusive of the Yazoo and Koroa.

The survivors were desperate men, and the French historian continues: "We were not slow in perceiving that the Natchez could still render themselves formidable, and that the step of sending the Sun and all who had been taken with him to be sold as slaves in San Domingo, had rather exasperated than intimidated the remnant of that nation, in whom hatred and despair had transformed their natural pride and ferocity into a valor of which they were never deemed capable."

In June the Flour Chief with over one hundred warriors and their families, having come to the town of the Tonika, a tribe in the French interest, made a treacherous attack upon them, killing and wounding a large number, but losing thirty-six of his own warriors. About the same time some others, who had surren-

dered to the commander of the French fort built in their old country, seized some stacked muskets with which they fought until they were all killed, men, women, and children, to the number of thirty-seven. Another party of sixteen warriors, including a chief, having been captured and put in irons, broke their chains and were all killed while trying to escape. Finally, the scattered remnants, including probably also the Yazoo and Koroa, united under the Flour Chief, and in October, 1731, to the number of two hundred warriors, besieged the fort at Natchitoches, Louisiana, from which the French and their Indian allies were compelled to retire, until reënforced by a body of over four hundred Spanish and Indian allies from the west, when the Natchez in turn were obliged to retreat after a hard-fought battle in which they lost all their chiefs and about eighty warriors killed. This was the final blow. "So many losses, and especially the loss of their chiefs, reduced the Natchez to a mere tribal band; but there were enough left to harass the settlers of Louisiana and to interrupt trade."

From the first outbreak in 1729 to the final repulse at Natchitoches, two years later, we have a record of about 240 Natchez warriors killed and 40 warriors and about 400 women and children taken and sold into slavery, with no knowledge as to how many died of hunger and disease in the swamps or were picked off from time to time by the French Indians. It is safe to assume that not half the tribe remained alive, and they were homeless refugees. They could not return to their own country, for it was now in the hands of their enemies; neither could they seek an asylum among the Choctaw, Tonika, Attakapa, Caddo, Akansa, or Illinois, for all of those were in the French interest, while the smaller tribes that might have befriended them had been brought as low as themselves. They could go only to the tribes in the English interest, the Chickasaw, Creeks, and Cherokee, or to the English settlers themselves in Carolina.

As we have seen, a considerable body was already with the

Chickasaw, their old friends and instigators in the war, and it is probable that most of the others soon joined them. They seem to have found their new position insecure, as the Chickasaw were themselves hard pressed at this time by the French, and in 1736 a delegation of twenty-six "Natchee" Indians applied to the government of South Carolina for permission to settle their tribe on Savannah river. This seems to be their first appearance in Carolina history. Adair, the historian of the southern tribes, was at this time living among the Chickasaw. Their request was evidently granted, and they removed to the frontier of South Carolina, as did a portion of the Chickasaw at another time, on the persuasion of the English traders.¹ The "Natchee" are mentioned by Adair as one of the smaller tribes living with the Catawba in 1743, but retaining their distinct language. The next year the "Notchees," having killed some Catawba in a drunken quarrel, fled down to the white settlements to escape the vengeance of the injured tribe, and the colonial government was compelled to interfere to settle the affair. It is probable that the result of the quarrel was to separate them permanently from the Catawba, as in 1751 we find the "Notchees" again noted as one of the small tribes living in the South Carolina settlements. Soon after they seem to have moved up again and joined the Cherokee, for in 1755 they are twice mentioned as concerned with that tribe in the killing of some Indians near the coast settlements. This appears to be the last reference to them in the South Carolina records.²

Just here Cherokee tradition takes them up, under the name of *Anintsī*, abbreviated from *Ani-Ná'tsī*, the plural of *Ná'tsī*. From a chance coincidence with the word for pine-tree, *na'tsī*, some English-speaking Indians have rendered this name as "Pine Indians." The Cherokee generally agree that the Natchez came

¹ Adair, op. cit., p. 224.

² Mooney, *Siouan Tribes of the East* (Bulletin of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1894), pp. 83-84.

to them from the Creek country. It is probable that the first refugees came from South Carolina, while others say that they came from Carolina, and were joined later by others from the Creeks and Chickasaw. Some of them, we are told by Bienville, went directly from the Chickasaw. They seem to have been regarded by the Cherokee as a race of wizards and conjurers, probably due in part to their peculiar religious rites and in part to the interest which belonged to them as the remnant of a broken tribe.

The venerable James Wafford, a prominent mixed-blood Cherokee who was born in 1806 near the site of Clarkesville, Georgia, when it was all Indian country, and who afterward removed with his tribe to Indian Territory, informed the writer in 1890 that the "Notchees" had their town on the north bank of Hiwassee river, just above Peachtree creek, on the spot where a Baptist mission was established by the Rev. Evan Jones about 1820, and a few miles above the present Murphy, Cherokee county, North Carolina. On his mother's side he had himself a strain of Natchez blood. His grandmother had told him that when she was a young woman—say about 1755—she had occasion to go to this town on some business, which she was obliged to transact through an interpreter, as the Natchez had then been there so short a time that only one or two spoke any Cherokee. They were all in the one town, which the Cherokee called *Gwalgwá'hí*, "Frog place," but he was unable to say whether or not it had a townhouse. In 1824, as one of the census enumerators for the Cherokee Nation, he went over the same section and found the Natchez then living jointly with Cherokee in a town called *Gú'lániyí* at the junction of Brasstown and Gumlog creeks, tributary to Hiwassee river, some six miles southeast of their former location and close to the Georgia line. The removal may have been due to the recent establishment of the mission at the old place. It was a large settlement, about equally made up from the two tribes, but by this time the Natchez were indistinguishable in

dress or general appearance from the others, and nearly all spoke broken Cherokee, while still retaining their own language. As most of the Indians had come under Christian influence so far as to have quit dancing, there was no townhouse. Harry Smith, father of the late chief of the East Cherokee, and born about 1815, also remembers them as living on the Hiwassee and calling themselves *Ná'tsi*.

From Gansé'ti, or Rattling-gourd, another mixed-blood Cherokee, who was born on Hiwassee river in 1820 and went west at the removal eighteen years later, it appears that in his time the Natchez were scattered among the Cherokee settlements along the upper part of that stream, extending down into Tennessee. They had then no separate townhouses. Some, at least, of them had come up from the Creeks, and spoke Creek and Cherokee as well as their own language, which he could not understand, although familiar with both the others. They were great dance leaders, which agrees with their traditional reputation for ceremonial and secret knowledge. They went west with the Cherokee at the final removal of the tribe to Indian Territory in 1838. In 1890 there were a considerable number on Illinois river a few miles south of Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, several of them still speaking their own language, among whom were Groundhog, John Rogers, and a woman named Kehaka. Some of these may have come with the Creeks, as by an agreement between the Creeks and Cherokee, before the time of the removal, it had been arranged that citizens of either tribe living within the boundaries claimed by the other might remain without question if they so elected. Among the East Cherokee in North Carolina, about 1890, there were several who claimed Natchez descent, but only one of full Natchez blood, an old woman named Alkíní, who spoke with a drawling tone said to have been characteristic of that people, as older men remembered them years ago.

Haywood, the historian of Tennessee, says that a remnant of the Natchez lived within the present limits of the State as late

as 1750 and were even then numerous. He refers to those with the Cherokee, and tells a curious story which seems somehow to have escaped the notice of other writers. According to his statement, a portion of the Natchez, who had been parceled out as slaves among the French in the vicinity of their old homes after the downfall of their tribe, took advantage of the withdrawal of the troops to the north, in 1758, to rise and massacre their masters and make their escape to the neighboring tribes. On the return of the troops after the fall of Fort Duquesne they found the settlement at Natchez destroyed and their Indian slaves fled. Some time afterward a French deserter seeking an asylum among the Cherokee, having made his way to Great Island town, on Tennessee river, just below the mouth of the Tellico, was surprised to find there some of the same Natchez whom he had formerly driven as slaves. He lost no time in getting away from the place to find safer quarters among the mountain towns.¹ Notchy creek, a lower affluent of the Tellico, in Monroe county, Tennessee, evidently takes its name from these refugees. Haywood states also that, although incorporated with the Cherokee, the Natchez continued for a long time a separate tribe, not marrying or mixing with other tribes, and having their own chiefs, and holding their own councils, but their nation had now (1823) yielded to the canker of time and hardly anything was left but the name.²

We hear little of those who had taken refuge with the Chickasaw. Bienville, writing in 1742, says that, finding themselves an incumbrance to the Chickasaw, who were sorely pressed by the French, they had retired to the Cherokee.³ Haywood states that the Chickasaw received and protected them, refusing to give them up even on the demand of the French, and that some had remained with the Chickasaw ever since, while others

¹ Haywood, *Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee*, 1823, pp. 105-106.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

³ Bienville in Gayarré, *Louisiana*, 1851, p. 525.

had joined the Creeks.¹ We may be sure that they took an active part in the wars which the Chickasaw waged with the French for nearly twenty years. On Bowen's Indian map of 1764 is found a town with the legend, "Remainder of the Natches," marked on the eastern bank of the Mississippi, about 34° 50', or northwest of the present Austin, Mississippi. The Chickasaw towns are placed somewhat to the southwest, while the present city of Natchez is shown as "Nautches."² Adair in 1775 speaks of "the Nanne Hamgeh old town inhabited by the Mississippi—Nachee Indians," in the westernmost part of the Chickasaw country.³ It is quite possible that investigation would discover some of the name still living with the Chickasaw nation in Indian Territory.

Those of the Natchez who joined the Creeks seem to have constituted the greater portion of the broken tribe. We have no exact knowledge as to when they first arrived, or by what route, but it is probable that they came by way of the Chickasaw after the persistent hostility of the French rendered the future of the latter tribe precarious. This is the statement of Milfort, who lived among the Creeks about 1780, and says that the Natchez were assigned lands on Coosa river, upon which they built the towns of Nauchee and Abicoochee.⁴ Adair says that the "Nachee Indians" constituted one town among the Creeks in 1775.⁵ They formed an important element of strength in the mixed confederacy of the Creeks, being estimated at 150 warriors in 1764,⁶ and again, with probably more correctness, at 50 to 100 warriors in 1799.⁷ By way of comparison it may be stated that Adair puts the Catawba at about 100 warriors in 1775. Swan, who visited the

¹ Haywood, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

² Bowen map, 1764, in Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, 1855, v, at p. 252.

³ Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 1775, p. 195.

⁴ Milfort, quoted in Gatschet, *Creek Migration Legend*, 1884, p. 229.

⁵ Adair, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

⁶ Bouquet's estimate, 1764, in Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, 1802, p. 140 et passim.

⁷ Hawkins (1799) quoted in Gatschet, *Creek Migration Legend*, 1884, p. 139.

Creeks in 1791, speaks of the "Natchez villages" (plural) and says that "the Natchez, or Sunset Indians, from the Mississippi, joined the Creeks about fifty years since, after being driven out from Louisiana, and added considerably to their confederative body." At this time their chief, the Dog Warrior, was one of the most influential chiefs of the Creek confederacy.¹ Their town, Nauchee or Natchee, was on Natchee, now Tallahatchee creek, an affluent of Coosa river, about fifteen miles southwest of the present Talladega, in Talladega county, Alabama. Others were living in the neighboring Creek town of Abicoochee.² Being a warlike people they probably suffered their full share of loss in the Creek war of 1813-14, and when the Creeks finally sold their last remaining lands in Alabama in 1832 and removed to their present territory west of the Mississippi, the Natchez went with them, and the few survivors are now there, excepting such as have joined the Cherokee to the northward. From one of their principal men, John Lasley, of Ábika, ten miles from Eufaula station in the Creek Nation, Gatschet obtained a valuable vocabulary of the old language in 1885. Under the laws of the Creek nation Lasley represented his tribe in the Creek "house of warriors," although practically without a constituency. He was still alive at an advanced age, together with several other relatives, all speaking their own language, when the writer visited Eufaula five years later.

Synonyms

NÁ'tsǐ—Nache, Nachee, Nachés, Nahchee, Naktche, Natchee, Natchez (old French plural), Nauchee, Notchees, Ani-Ná'tsǐ, Aníntsǐ, Pine Indians, Sunset Indians. The Indian word is of doubtful origin and etymology.

YÁ'ZU—Yasoux, Yassaues, Yassu, Yazoo.

KOROA—Coloa, Coroa, Corrois, Couroa, Kouroua, Kólwa, Kúlwa.

TIOU—Théloël (?), Thioux, Thysia, Thoucoue (?), Tihiou.

¹ Swan (1791) in Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, 1855, v, pp. 260-263.

² Gatschet, *Creek Migration Legend*, 1884, pp. 125, 138.