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Milly, an Indian woman

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MILLY, AN INDIAN WOMAN.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 826.]

FEBRUARY 28, 1843.

Mr. COOPER, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, made the following

REPORT:

The Committee on Indian Affairs, to whom was submitted a communication from the Secretary of War, recommending that a pension be granted to Milly, an Indian woman of the Creek nation, report:

That it appears, from the communication of the Secretary of War and the accompanying statement of Lieutenant Colonel Hitchcock, as well as from the published and accredited history of the period, that, in 1818, during the Indian war in the South, Milly, the proposed object of the bounty of the Government, saved the life of an American citizen, who had been taken prisoner by several warriors of her tribe, and who was about to be put to death by them, when he was rescued by her energetic and humane interposition. The act of this Indian girl revives the recollection of an event in our colonial annals—the rescue of Captain Smith by the daughter of Powhattan, the celebrated Pocahontas.

Milly is the daughter of the Prophet Francis, a distinguished Creek chief, who acquired a melancholy celebrity from his execution by order of General Jackson during the Indian war of 1817-'18. At the time she performed the action which is so ennobling to her character, she was under sixteen years of age, her nation was at war with the United States, and her father was one of the most decided and indefatigable enemies of the white people—circumstances all of which go to exhibit her conduct in a more excellent and exalted point of view. At the time the prisoner was brought in by his captors, Milly and an elder sister were playing on the bank of the Appalachicola river in the vicinity of the Indian camp, when they were startled, in the midst of their sports, by the peculiar war-cry which announced that a prisoner had been taken. They immediately went in the direction of the cry; and, on arriving at the place, found a young white man stripped naked, bound to a tree, and his captors preparing to put him to death. On observing this, Milly instantly went to her father, who, as before stated, was the Prophet Francis, and a principal chief of the nation, and besought him to save the prisoner's life. This he declined, saying at the same time that he had no power to do so. She then turned to his captors, and begged them to spare the life of the white man; but one of them who had lost two sisters in the war refused to listen to her supplications in behalf of the prisoner, declaring that his life should atone for the wrongs which he had received at the hands of the white people. The ac-

tive humanity of Milly would not be discouraged. She reasoned and entreated, telling the vindictive savage who was bent on the destruction of the prisoner that his death would not restore his sisters to life. After a long time spent in her generous effort, she succeeded in rescuing the prisoner from the dreadful death to which he had been doomed by his cruel captors. The condition on which his life was finally spared was, that he would shave his head after the Indian fashion and adopt their dress and manner of living. To this he joyfully assented.

Some time afterwards the white man sought his benefactress in marriage, but she declined, and subsequently married one of her own people. Her husband is now dead. Her father was put to death in the war of 1817-'18, and her mother and sister have since died. She is now friendless and poor, residing amongst her people in their new country, near the mouth of Verdigris river. She has three children, a boy and two girls, all too young to provide for themselves, and consequently dependent upon their mother for support.

Under these circumstances, the Secretary of War recommends that a pension of eight dollars per month be allowed her during the remainder of her life. The committee see a strong argument in favor of this dispensation of the bounty of the Government, not only in the relief which it will afford to the immediate recipient, whose conduct has so well deserved it, but also in the effect which it is calculated to produce by teaching the still uncivilized though gradually improving people to whom she belongs the virtue of humanity. This act of the Government, furnishing at once a proof of its gratitude and benevolence, will show them the estimation in which deeds of mercy are held by it, as well as the rewards which it bestows on those who perform them.

The power of the Government to confer such bounties has been frequently exercised. In 1824, Congress passed an act granting to General Lafayette and his heirs two hundred thousand dollars and a township of land. In 1834, an act was passed granting to two hundred and thirty-five Polish exiles, transported to the United States by order of the Emperor of Austria, thirty-six sections of land, within the limits of the State of Illinois or the Territory of Michigan. The act by which pensions are granted to the widows of officers and soldiers of the army of the United States is an exercise of the same power founded on the same general principle. But it is enough to say, that the Government which does not possess the power to pay its debts of gratitude, and to perform acts of beneficence and charity, would be unworthy of the respect and affections of its citizens.

Believing that the act of this Indian woman presents a proper case for the exercise of the gratitude and bounty of the Government, the committee report a bill allowing her a pension of ninety-six dollars per annum during her life.

WAR DEPARTMENT,

Washington, April 16, 1842.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit, herewith, a report of Lieutenant Colonel Hitchcock, in the case of Milly, an Indian woman of the Creek nation, who, in 1818, when quite young, saved the life of a white prisoner captured by her tribe and sentenced to be put to death.

She is now residing with her people at the West—a poor destitute widow, without the means of support, having lost all her property, and her children too young to provide for her or themselves. Similar to the romantic scene in our early history, her peculiar case demands our sympathy and admiration, and most strongly commends itself to the favorable consideration of your committee and of the House. I would recommend that a pension for life, of eight dollars per month, be allowed her by the Government. It may be an inducement to preserve the lives of those captured by hostile Indians, and be the means of mitigating to a great degree the barbarous cruelty of savage warfare.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your obedient servant,
J. C. SPENCER.

HON. JAMES COOPER,
Chairman Committee on Indian Affairs.

WASHINGTON CITY, April 13, 1842.

SIR: I have the honor to report that, in my recent visit to the Creek nation of Indians, I found a Creek woman, named Milly, a daughter of the celebrated Prophet Francis, the Creek chief who was executed by order of General Jackson in the Seminole war of 1817-'18; and, believing that the circumstances of her history presented a case of very peculiar interest, I made it a point to obtain from herself a statement of her conduct in 1818, when, as public history has already recorded, she saved the life of an American citizen who was a prisoner in the power of some of her tribe. The history states that the white man was about to be burned alive, but was saved by the interposition of the prophet's daughter. Being in the vicinity of the Indian girl, near the mouth of the Verdigris river, and being acquainted with a portion of her history, I rode several miles to hear her story from herself.

I had been informed that she has a claim to some negro property, now held by the Seminoles; and I first questioned her in relation to her claim, and then directed her mind back to 1818, and told her I had heard that she had saved the life of a white man in the war of that year. She answered that she had, and immediately gave me a minute and very graphic account of the circumstances.

I shall not be able to do justice to her story, and can only embrace the main features of it. She began by saying that an elder sister and herself were playing on the bank of the river Appalachicola, when they heard a war-cry, which they understood to signify that a prisoner had been taken. They immediately went in the direction of the cry, and found a white man, entirely naked, tied to a tree, and two young Indian warriors, with their rifles, dancing around him, preparatory to putting him to death, as was their right, according to custom, they having taken him a prisoner. She explained to me that in such cases the life of a prisoner is in the hands of the captors—that even the chiefs have no authority in the case. Milly was then but 15 or 16 years of age. "The prisoner was a young man," said Milly, "and seemed very much frightened, and looked wildly around to see if any body would help him." "I thought it was a pity," said she, "that a young man like him should be put to death; and I spoke to my father, and told him it was a pity to kill him—that he had no head to go

to war with," (meaning that the young man must have acted upon the advice of others, and not upon his own suggestion, in going to war.) "My father told me," continued Milly, "that he could not save him, and advised me to speak to the Indians, and I did so; but one of them was very much enraged, saying he had lost two sisters in the war, and would put the prisoner to death. I told him," said Milly, "that it would not bring his sisters back to kill the young man; and so, talking to him for some time, I finally persuaded him; and he said that if the young man would agree to have his head shaved, and dress like an Indian, and live among them, they would save his life." She then proposed the conditions to the white man, which were joyfully accepted; and the Indians changed the contemplated death scene into a frolic. They shaved the young man's head, excepting the scalp lock, which was ornamented with feathers; and, after painting him, and providing him an Indian dress, he was set at liberty, and adopted as one of the tribe.

Some time afterwards, the young man proposed marriage; but Milly says she did not save his life for that, and declined his proposals.

I asked Milly how she now lived. She told me that she was very poor, and had to work very hard; that her father was put to death in the war, and her mother and sister were dead. Her husband was also dead. Of eight children she had but three living, two of whom were young girls, and one a boy, too young yet to help her. But she said that if she could recover her property from the Seminoles, she could live very well.

She is now about 40 years of age; and after having seen her, and being entirely satisfied of the truth of her story, I am induced to recommend that her case be laid before Congress, with an application for a small pension for her support in her old age, in consideration of her extraordinary and successful interposition, by which, in 1818, the life of an American citizen was saved from a cruel death from the hands of savages. A small pension, (\$50 or \$75 a year,) with a clear exposition of the grounds of its allowance, may have a salutary influence upon savage customs in future times. A more suitable occasion than the present, it is presumed, can hardly be expected. Milly has now no husband or brother, or any near connexion, to provide for her, and is in need—with a fine promising son, indeed, but too young to be of service to his mother; and, owing to pledges made to the Seminoles, it is probable she will not be able to recover possession of some negro property, now held by the Seminoles, belonging to her.

The story of Milly Francis is recorded in a volume entitled "Indian Wars," in which there is a picture representing the preparations for putting the white man to death, while the Indian girl is represented as pleading for his life to her father.

The circumstances are familiarly spoken of in the Indian country; and there is no reason to doubt the truth of the story, except that Milly told me herself that the young man would have been shot, and not burned to death, as the story represents.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. A. HITCHCOCK,

Lieutenant Colonel 3d Infantry, &c.

Hon. J. C. SPENCER,
Secretary of War.