



## Chief Pushmataha of the Choctaws

(1765-1824)

Speech to John C. Calhoun (1824)

### INTRODUCTION

Pushmataha fought with the Americans against the British in the War of 1812 and was a warrior against the Osage Indians and in Mexico. The Choctaws lived in southern Alabama and Mississippi, but after the American Revolution they began to drift westward. In 1830 the last remnant ceded their lands east of the Mississippi River to the United States and departed. Earlier, in 1824, Chief Pushmataha traveled to Washington D.C. “to brighten the chain of peace.” He was treated with great attention by President Monroe and by John C. Calhoun, the secretary of war, to whom he made the following speech. Soon after this, he fell ill. On his deathbed he said to his Indian companions, “When you shall come to your home they will ask you, ‘Where is Pushmataha?’ and you will say to them, ‘He is no more!’ They will hear the tidings like the sound of the fall of a mighty oak in the stillness of the woods.” Then he died.

At his request he was buried with military honors. The procession that followed the body of Chief Pushmataha to the Congressional Cemetery was estimated to be more than a mile in length. The sidewalks, stoops and windows of houses along the way were thronged with crowds and guns were fired from the hill of the Capitol. In the U.S. Senate, a eulogy was given by John Randolph, who called the Chief “one of nature’s nobility: a man who would have adorned any society.” On his tombstone he is described as “a warrior of great distinction; he was wise in counsel, eloquent in an extraordinary degree, and, on all occasions and under all circumstances, the white man’s friend.” Andrew Jackson said he was “the greatest and the bravest Indian he had ever known.”

### SPEECH TO CALHOUN

Father, I have been here at the council-house for some time, but I have not talked. I have not been strong enough to talk. You shall hear me talk to-day. I belong to another district. You have, no doubt, heard of me. I am Pushmataha.

Father, when in my own country, I often looked toward this council-house, and wanted to come here. I am in trouble. I will tell my distresses. I feel like a small child, not half as high as its father, who comes up to look in his father’s face, hanging in the bend of his arm, to tell him his troubles. So, father, I hang in the bend of your arm, and look in your face; and now hear me speak.

Father, when I was in my own country, I heard there were men appointed to talk to us. I would not speak there; I chose to come here, and speak in this beloved house; for Pushmataha can boast and say, and tell the truth, that none of his fathers, or grandfathers, or any Choctaw, ever drew bow against the United States. They have always been friendly. We have held the hands of the United States so long that our nails are long like birds' claws; and there is no danger of their slipping out.

Father, I have come to speak. My nation has always listened to the applications of the white people. They have given of their country till it is very small. I came here, when a young man, to see my Father Jefferson. He told me, if ever we got in trouble, we must run and tell him. I am come. This is a friendly talk; it is like that of a man who meets another, and says: "How do you do?" Another of my tribe shall talk further. He shall say what Pushmataha would say, were he stronger.

