

REMOVAL OF THE INDIANS.

THE Indians, who have suffered so much from the injustice, and scarcely less from the neglect, of the whites, have become, of late, the objects of general attention. Politicians and Christians have alike turned their eyes to the Indians. The condition and the destiny, the rights and the wrongs, of these unhappy men, have been the theme of vehement discussion on the floor of Congress, in the cabinet, in the public journals, in the pulpit, in the Board of Missions. A crisis has come, in the history of the Indians. All men among us feel, that now it is to be decided whether the remnants of the tribes shall be preserved, or shall perish. The politician is anxious to determine the question, respecting the civil relations of the Indians to the national and state governments. The friends of missions earnestly desire that the Indians may be placed in the best position to receive the Gospel, and to enjoy its manifold blessings.

The Indians on this side of the Mississippi, may be divided into two classes. The first class embraces the remnants of a large number of tribes, the greater part of whom inhabit the countries around the great lakes. These Indians are uncivilized, and subsist chiefly by hunting. They have no regular forms of government, nor permanent homes. The missionary cannot obtain access to the adults, unless he follow them in their hunting expeditions, or visit their huts during the winter. He cannot collect the children into schools, except those whom the parents may be induced to relinquish to his care. These Indians are daily becoming more necessitous as the game decreases. The annuities which they receive from the government are, for the most part, expended for whiskey. White traders, in defiance of the laws, introduce this poison among them, and filch from them not only their annuities, but their furs.

For these reasons, the attempt to civilize them, and to teach them the gospel, is almost hopeless. Even the children, who are taught with much labor and expense, are constantly liable to be withdrawn by their parents, and after they have been instructed in letters and religion, they must return among the mass of their wretched countrymen, to be corrupted by their vices, and to partake of their degradation and misery.

These are the Indians among whom Mr. M'Coy has labored; and the experience of ten years has convinced him that they must perish, or be removed to some position where they can be placed together, on lands appropriated to their use, where they will be further removed, at least, from the invasion of white traders, and where the expanding white population shall not press on them as it does in their present situation.

The other class of Indians embraces the Cherokees, Creeks, and some other southern tribes, who have become partially civilized, have instituted governments, and are practising agriculture and the mechanic arts. These Indians, the Cherokees especially, are in a

different situation from those at the north. They can protect themselves, in some degree, from white traders. They have permanent homes. They can for the most part obtain a comfortable subsistence. They have laws, magistrates, a printing press, and a newspaper. There is, consequently, a less urgent necessity for these Indians to remove, although it is affirmed, on respectable authority, that large numbers of these tribes are wretched, indolent, intemperate, and suffering, in other ways, the evils which the Indians have always experienced when brought into contact with the whites.

But the States within whose nominal boundaries these Indians reside, claim the right to exercise jurisdiction over them. Georgia has accordingly extended over the Cherokees her laws, and abolished the Indian government. One or two other States have done the same, in relation to the tribes within their territorial limits.

The national government has announced to the Indians that it cannot protect them ; and that they must either submit to the States, or migrate to the country west of the Missouri, whither the President has been empowered by an act of Congress, to send all the Indians who may be willing to go, and to assign to them a suitable portion of land, to be secured to them forever.

These circumstances have unhappily entangled the affairs of the Indians with questions of State rights, and with the exasperated animosities of rival political parties. Men have taken sides, on the subject of the removal of the Indians, not so much from a clear perception of the real interests of the natives, and from a sincere desire for their welfare, as from their views respecting the rights and policy of the national and state governments. They have seemed desirous to confound all distinctions, and to rank every man who approves of the removal of the Indians, as an advocate for the policy of Georgia, and as a partisan of the administration ; and on the other hand, to attribute a disapprobation of the removal, to animosity against Georgia and the President.

As the Baptist General Convention have expressed an opinion, favorable to the removal of the Indians, and the Board of Missions have presented memorials to Congress in relation to the measure, it may be proper to say a few words on this subject. In the first place, the distinction between the two classes of Indians must be kept in mind. It is the former of these classes to whom Mr. M'Coy and the Board have had special regard. They have believed it to be necessary for the preservation of these hapless beings, that they be removed. They have specifically referred, in their memorials to the government, to these northern tribes, and to other Indians in a similar situation. They have expressed no opinion respecting the civilized Indians at the south. It is the decided belief, certainly, of many persons, Baptists and others, that it would be a judicious measure, on the part of the Cherokees, to remove. And this opinion is strengthened by the fact, that a large portion of the Cherokees themselves voluntarily migrated to the west several years ago. But as a body, the Baptists have uttered no opinion respecting the Cherokees. Neither the Convention nor the Board has intimated a wish that they should remove.

In the next place, neither Mr. M'Coy nor the Board has, in the slightest degree, countenanced the idea, that the Indians could rightfully be *forced* to remove, by either direct or indirect means. They believe, so far as I know their opinions, that the Indians have a perfect right to remain where they are; that they have an indisputable title to their lands; that the treaties with the Cherokees, and other tribes, are just as binding on the United States, as treaties with England or France; that the States within whose limits the Indians reside, have no right to extend their laws over them; and that, consequently, the President of the United States is bound, by his oath, to protect the Cherokees, and guarantee to them their rights. The first chapter, in the able pamphlet published by Mr. M'Coy, on Indian affairs, is devoted to a conclusive argument, in favor of the absolute title of the Indians to their lands. He says, in speaking of the Cherokees, "force is not to be used in this case. All righteous men agree, that their lands cannot be forced from them."

The question, therefore, whether it is expedient for the Indians to remove, is distinct from the question whether they possess a right to retain their lands and their distinct existence as independent tribes. A belief of the former does not involve a denial of the latter. A man may think it for the good of the Cherokees themselves that they should follow their countrymen beyond the Mississippi, and yet feel grief and indignation at a violation of solemn treaties, or an attempt to force the Indians from their homes, and the graves of their fathers. I believe that the Baptists generally in the United States, do cherish these feelings. I am sure that no one with whom I have ever conversed, feels otherwise. I can say for myself, that in my opinion, the Indians have a title to remain where they are, as good, at least, as our right to occupy our homes; and that they alone are to judge whether it might or might not be for their benefit to remove. If they choose to remain, the government is bound to protect them; and woe to the nation if it oppress these unhappy men, or abandon them to their enemies.

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