

CREEKS AND CHEROKEES.

Copy of a letter from Thomas L. McKinney, of the Indian Department, to Jeremiah Everts, Esq.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR,
OFF. IND. AFFAIRS, May 1st, 1829.

Dear Sir,—Whatever relates to our Indians, will, I know, be interesting to you. Indeed, the subject is one which takes hold, not only of your feelings, and the feelings of your board, but of other associations similarly organized, and also of the feelings of the good citizens of our republic, generally. All unite in the wish to see those people rescued, and elevated into a participation of the blessings of the civilized, and Christian state.—The question is, how can this be best accomplished? Now, we know, men often agree in regard to various matters as to the end, but often differ as to the means of its accomplishment. This is precisely the case with this Indian subject. All desire to save the remains of this once mighty race, but the means have not, I humbly conceive, been as yet, exactly hit upon,—at least they have not been carried on fully. If I am not mistaken, I shall be able in the course of this letter, to lay bare to you the cause, to a great extent, of the present degraded state of these people. To make manifest the evil, will make manifest also, the remedy. I do not mean to be general in my remarks, but apply them chiefly to one great point—and that relates to their landed possessions, within our States, and organized Territories; and the necessary, but fatal connexion of Indians arising out of that relation.

For myself, I have always viewed the subject of our Indian landed possessions, and the relation which these bear to our states and territories, as full of interest, and pregnant with difficulty. All that I have felt of hope for the preservation and improvement of our Indians, has been clouded with fear that the time would arrive, when, between them and the states, and the general government, the issue would have, at least to be tried. It cannot have escaped the observation of those who have paid attention to this subject, that the right of the Indians to the lands held by them, is but a *possessory* right; and that whatever guarantees may exist, as they do in our Treaties, these cover no more than a right of this sort. *It could not have been otherwise.* To interpret these guarantees by any other rule, would be to decide, that Sovereignty should be set up against Sovereignty: the Sovereignty of the Indians against the Sovereignty of the States. It never was so meant.—Whenever, then, with a view to the cultivation of their local resources, or for an extension of power, the states should feel their Indian population to be burdensome, it was most clear that this feeling would, in some way, manifest itself. At first it was natural to suppose it would be disclosed in acts of the Legislatures, extending over the Indians, as one attribute of Sovereignty, their respective laws. This, in two of the states, Georgia and Alabama, has been actually done. The laws of the latter are now in full operation: those of the former are prospectively enacted, to take effect in 1830. In this state of things, it was natural to suppose the Indians would look, under their mistaken conception of the nature of the guarantee spoken of in Treaties with them, for protection from the operation of those laws, to the Federal Government; nor was it less natural that they should be, whenever the question should be raised, undeceived in regard to this—since it could never have been contemplated that the general government would bare its arm, and go forth with an array of power to contend against the exercise of any one attribute of Sovereignty, of any one of the States. The states having made no grant, expressed or implied, to the Federal Union, of the kind, it was not to be expected that the general government would assume the power.

I have never, before, I believe, attempted to place this subject before you in this light, but looking more to the issue of the question, I have, from time to time, urged upon you, and the friends of Indian improvements, generally, the importance of so enlightening the Indians as to show them clearly, the very delicate, nay hazardous relation in which they stand to the states within whose bosom they are. I never doubted, nor do I doubt, that if they were made to see the peril of this relation, they would seek to establish a better one upon a different basis than that which secures their lands to them as *possessory tenants only*; and this would lead them west of our states and territories, where every sort of guarantee could, and I doubt not, would be given to them; and every protection and blessing, within the power of the general government to confer, extended to their race. Upon such a basis only, can they expect to be preserved, and improve themselves, or be improved by others. Need I stop to demonstrate how utterly impracticable it is to re-model the Indian character, and fashion it after the civilized form, situated as are those tribes within our states? Where is the example of a single transformation, in a tribe, of this sort? I know of not one. But I know of many in which even amidst efforts the most untiring, the Indians have (although individuals have profited) disappeared, until now; many of our states that once swarmed with an Indian population, contain not a vestige of one! Whence comes this decay, and final disappearing of the Red, before the White man? It comes not of the color, nor of physical or moral malformation; nor of destiny—but from causes the most natural, which a change in our relations to each other would work, even upon us. The elements may all be found to lie in the intellectual, moral, political and social relations which exist between them and us. It would require a volume to discant upon these. I will merely touch each, and pass on.

Who does not see the effect of intellectual superiority, even among our citizens? And where we see one absolutely superior and another absolutely inferior, does not the consciousness of that inferiority in the person feeling it, depress his energies, and paralyze his efforts? Do we not see this daily? Now, why should a different result of the cause be looked for in the Indian? But the relations between the white man and the Indian stop not here. The latter finds himself, *always*, the victim of that intellectual superiority, and feels that he must always remain so. Bereaved in the past by superior tact, he feels that he is no less so in the present; and what he sees of the future, is even more hopeless still. The existence of this relation, alone, did it stop here, would in time work his overthrow. But there are others. The moral energies that will sustain, to a degree, even conscious inferiority, are not felt by the Indian. To these he is almost a stranger. And whence does he derive any thing but depression and despair, when he sees the political distinction enjoyed by the white man by his side—the high honors to which he is elevated—the privileges which these confer, and the freedom they entail? Is there any thing in this view calculated to inspire him with the spirit of emulation? To rouse him to action, and to the performance of deeds of virtue or renown? Far from it. If he be human—and that he is none will deny—what must he feel when even his oath is not deemed worthy to be taken! Can a human heart beat free when oppressed by such degradation? Must it not sink into despair? And what then? We all know. But the Indian has to endure one more thought. It is the total impracticability of his ever participating in those refinements of the social state, which are a necessary result of the white man's superiority over him in intellectual, moral and political advantages. If there had been any light left to shine, although but dimly, on his prospects, this would obstruct it, and shroud his prospects in the deepest gloom. Well, then, this is the relation in which the red man stands to his more cultivated white brother.

This, however, is but one side of the question. There is another: the action of the white man upon him. The first is the worm within, eating out his vitals; the last, the storm that prostrates the shell which the worm may not have devoured. This comes of the same elements. The Indian is seen to be degraded, and unfortunately for man, it is too true, that there is the despotism in his nature, to exercise upon such, cruelty, injustice and re-