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Equal rights to all religious denominations among Indians

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EQUAL RIGHTS TO ALL RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
AMONG INDIANS.

MARCH 3, 1879.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. SCALES, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, submitted the following

R E P O R T :

[To accompany bill H. R. 4718.]

The Committee on Indian Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 4718) giving to all religious denominations equal rights and privileges in the Indian reservations, have had the same under consideration, and report :

That it is true, and not denied, that under the present management of Indian Affairs the agencies are divided up between the different religious denominations; that these denominations, at the request of the President, nominate the agents for their respective agencies, and the President is under obligation to appoint; and uniformly does so, the agents nominated. These are always selected from the denomination making the nomination, and these in their turn select those usually engaged about the agency who are also of the same religious faith. This in effect establishes the religion of the agent as the religion of the agency. In all this there is no positive law prohibiting other denominations from going in, but the management and the practice of the department are such as effectually to exclude all others from the reservation. The peace policy is confessedly founded upon this idea. The present Commissioner admits that if this be taken away, the present system must fail. It is justified upon the ground that all the different denominations assent to it, and that the arrangement is one of their own making. This is not true. Complaints from time to time have come to the committee from at least one sect that they are refused admittance to some agencies where the Indians themselves demand it; that in many instances a church is excluded from preaching and teaching Indians that they have had under their charge for years long before the present policy was adopted, and that the wish of the Indians is disregarded, even though many of them have for years been communicants of that church. It has long been the proudest boast of an American that all men here may worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, under his own vine and fig tree, and none dare molest or make him afraid, and yet here, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, your committee are compelled to report that on the reservations set apart for the Indians of this country there is no religious freedom, no religious choice. The Indians must take such religion as we send, whether he will or not.

Your committee believe this to be a gross violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Constitution, and it is the more reprehensible in that it is done in an indirect and unmanly way. The President, who has the power alone to appoint, seeks to delegate that power to some church, which in fact makes the appointment and makes it from those of their creed; this is a violation, in the opinion of the committee, of his duty; and in effect makes the religion of the agent the religion of the agency and the Indians. From that moment no other sect will dare to intrude. The department is against it, the Commissioner is against it, the agent and all the employés are against it; and if at any time any man of any other sect, however pure his intentions, however holy his ambition, and however much he may be desired by the Indians themselves, and however pressing he may feel the duty enjoined upon him by the word of truth to preach the gospel to all nations, enters that agency, he is at once cast out as an intruder and the Indians are not permitted to hear him. These things seem strange, and yet they are true.

Your committee believe that here, as well as elsewhere, the doors should be opened wide, and all allowed to come in upon equal terms to teach and preach as their conscience may dictate, and that the government should not, either directly or indirectly, interfere with them. They therefore report back the bill with a recommendation that it pass.