

REMOVAL of the INDIANS

In August, 1830, President Andrew Jackson rode south from his Hermitage home to meet with Chickasaw chieftains at present-day Franklin, Tennessee. Jackson (whose Indian name was, appropriately, Sharp Knife) urged the Indians to abandon all land they occupied within southern states. "Old men!" he admonished. "Lead your children to a land of peace and promise before the Great Spirit shall call you to die. Young chiefs! Forget the prejudices you feel for the soil of your birth. . . ." In any case, the President warned grimly, the Indians would have to go: "You must submit—there is no . . . alternative." Congress had passed, by a 5-vote majority, an Indian Removal Bill sponsored by Jackson's administration.

The extinction of Indian land titles, and the cruel suppression of Indian rights, was most poignant in the South, where five nations named on the map below were bullied by state and Federal governments into mass migrations in the 1830's. Some 50,000 men, women, and children were herded into boats and concentration camps, on their way to barren reservations in the distant Indian Territory. The rich and civilized Cherokees of Georgia, who had converted their language into printed characters, sent their children to college, and lived under a constitution and president, suffered 4,000 deaths from exposure, disease, and harsh treatment on their 1,000-mile-long "Trail of Tears." More than 300 Creeks drowned when an unfit steamboat, assigned to them by the government, blew up in the Mississippi. The expulsion of the southern tribes threw open millions of acres of rich new land for southern planters whose eastern holdings had been depleted by cotton culture.

