

Missionaries and Northern Reformers

SOME OF YOU ARE WHITE Christian missionaries who live amongst the Cherokee people or once did. You are not plantation owners, gold prospectors, bankers, or military people. You are simply individuals who want to preach the word of God and do what's right. You are of many different Christian denominations. At great sacrifice, you moved away from the comfort of civilization to go live in much more difficult conditions.

You believe that the Cherokee people have made great progress advancing toward civilization. According to a resolution your missionary group recently passed, some Cherokee families have “risen to a level with the white people of the United States ...” Most Cherokee now wear clothes like white people and have given up their original Indian dress. Women wear decent gowns, that cover their bodies from neck to feet. Before, the women had to do the hard work of tending the corn using hoes. Now, the men do the farming with plows. They are a much more industrious people, and own more property and better houses than in the past. Slowly some are becoming Christians and—thankfully—are forgetting their old Indian superstitions. As your resolution points out, “Ancient traditions are fading from memory, and can scarcely be collected ...” When the whites came upon the Cherokee, the Indians were in a “purely savage state.” But this is no longer the case. Many Indians and whites are beginning to intermix. This is

good, as it brings Indians in closer contact with civilization.

You don't know a single Cherokee who wants to leave home and go west across the Mississippi River. As your resolution states, there is “an overwhelming torrent of national feeling in opposition to removal.” And you ought to know: you live with these people. You are reluctant to take sides in political arguments, but you have to bear witness to what you see and hear.

Those of you who live in the north have read the writings of the missionaries who live amongst the Cherokee. They don't want to steal the Cherokee land, so they have no reason to lie. Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen from New Jersey has spoken eloquently about the Cherokee situation. He calls the Cherokee “the first lords of the soil.” The senator puts himself in the Indians' position and asks, “If I use my land for hunting, may another take it because he needs it for agriculture?”

It's true that the richest Cherokee—about 10 percent—own some black slaves. Some of you are abolitionists, who want all slavery to end, and don't approve of this. However, almost everyone who ever traveled in Cherokee territory agrees that the Cherokee do not treat their slaves as harshly as the whites treat theirs. Most slaves in Cherokee country have some rights, and individuals in families are almost never sold away from each other. But slavery is slavery, and some of you don't approve of *any* slavery. ■