

INTRODUCTION

THE following relating to Billy Bowlegs, the Seminole chief, is copied by permission from *Harper's Weekly* for June 12, 1858. The comments I have freely added with the hope that they might be of general interest. The word chief or chieftain is here used in the sense of the leader of a clan or tribe. In some instances the social organization of the Indians is rather complex. In the case of the Seminole each group had its leader with councilors, in some cases elected, in others hereditary. The terms *sachem*, *sagamore* and *cazique* are Indian terms for chief or leader which have crept into our language. At the time of the writing of the article in *Harper's* Billy Bowlegs was evidently main chief of the bands of Seminole Indians in Florida. This article throws some interesting side lights on the Seminole wars which were fought in Florida with much loss of life and money. The military resources of the whole nation were sorely taxed to down a comparatively small number of Indians with few resources except their wits and safe hiding places. They were finally bought off, which is in the end probably the cheapest and easiest way to settle disputes with peoples of that nature, especially when they are more or

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less in the right. They were defending themselves against aggression and probably thought they had perfect right to their lands and especially to the slaves who had sought asylum in their midst. The meaning of sovereignty is not very clear to primitive peoples (and to some civilized peoples also), especially to the Indian. He rarely dominated the things around him. He was a part of Nature and not its boss. In many instances he resented exploitation to such extent that he died in consequence.

But he has left his mark in many ways. Some of his words, especially the names of plants and animals, are a part of our language. There are many words in constant use that are of Indian origin; such as *mahogany*, *persimmon*, *squash*, *tobacco*, *tomato*, *chocolate*, *succotash*, *skunk*, *mink*, *opossum*, *moccasin*, *canoe*, *cougar*, *scupper-nong*, *manatee*, *hammock*, *maize*, etc., etc. We use their thought very often without realizing it when we speak of smoking the pipe of peace, burying the hatchet or going for another fellow's scalp, etc. The Indian word *tomahawk* is almost as common as the French word *hatchet*. They discovered the use of cotton, rubber, tobacco and many other useful things long before the white man landed.

Many of our place names are of Indian origin. On one short railroad in Florida it is amusing to

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hear the trainmen call: *Osceola, Kolokee, Chulota, Pocataw, Wewahotee, Salofka, Tohopkee, Holopaw, Illahaw, Nittaw, Apoxsee, Lokosee, Yeehaw, Hilolo, Efaw, Osowaw* and *Okeechobee*.

Several places are named for the generals who fought in these wars, and the names of the forts then in use still hold. And, besides, the blood of the Indian flows in the veins of many Americans to far greater extent than most of us realize.

Coconut Grove, February, 1925.

JOHN C. GIFFORD.



Wm Bowlegs 1858

BILLY BOWLEGS, CHIEF OF THE SEMINOLES.—From a Photograph by CLARK, of NEW ORLEANS.—Frontispiece.