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THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES AND THE SEMINOLE INDIANS.

The subject of the Florida Everglades has hung in the balance for several years, and justice, that proud dame of American independence, has smiled, then frowned, as her scales tried to adjust themselves equally to the credit of the State of Florida and to our American honor. But alas! corporations and politics were too heavy a combination and Uncle Sam's strong and steady arm was called upon to right the over-powering weights and through the congress of 1912 at Washington, the Aegean stables of the Florida Everglade Drainage scheme--the drainage question, taxation and false representations by unscrupulous real estate agents, were aired, with the result that the State of Florida appropriated \$40,000 and had competent engineers appointed to thoroughly survey, estimate and advise as to the feasibility of drainage and to report upon the work already done in these great swamps.

These engineers under the leadership of Isham G. Randolph, chairman, and Warren S. Hall, of the United States Geological Survey, have just returned from the Everglades after several months work in the watery wastes of the Okeechobee country. During the time, the engineers were engaged in this colossal survey, and a force of from 40 to 60 men was necessary in this work.

Drainage A Question of National Importance.

With the great amount of resy hued advertising by land corporations on the North, backed by the influential names of some of the highest officials in Florida, who were honest in their belief that the Everglades would become a veritable Eldorado of wealth, the number of actual buyers of lands in the Everglades reached enormous proportions and made the question one of National importance. With thirty-eight States of the United States represented by buyers of lands in the Everglades--purchased by faith and good American dollars, certainly the "handwriting on the wall" was not seen, when Florida, with certain high officials, encouraged by wealthy corporations, undertook the colossal work of draining these great swamps, as she supposed, to enrich her treasury, but unfortunately without success. For the many buyers from all over the United States, whose entire savings were in many cases put into these lands purchases, (much of which is still under water) the deepest sympathy should be felt.

History for 6,000 years has repeated itself and every violation of law and right has met with its reward even unto the third and fourth generation, so in this Legislative Drainage Act, Florida forgot her duty to her own wards, these silent peaceable Seminole Indians, who are the only Americans who have a genuine right to this location and who should live happily and successfully amid these morasses and game laden forests. This neglected justice to the Seminole has rebounded, leaving a blot on the escutcheon of the fairest State in the Union.

Now that Florida is again on the threshold of another reclamation undertaking, why can she not look at the poise of the Scales of Justice and see if the land sales of the Everglades will not balance better if the unhappy and homeless Seminoles are given lands and plenty of them to be theirs forever. There is today more than enough land in Florida for both races.

The report of the engineering corps has just been sent in and the interview given out by Mr. Hall is full of interest and brings again the problem of reclamation to the attention of an inquisitive public, as well as a deeper interest into the future of the homeless Seminoles.

The interview, in part, is encouraging as to the final success of this daring and colossal drainage scheme, inasmuch as it says that it will be "possible to reclaim most of the water-covered area. Just so soon as this now useless territory can be turned into fertile farm lands and enough money can be appropriated and judiciously used. We are bound by our contract not to give out detailed information regarding the work being done, until the report has been accepted by the Board. We have things coming up before us every week, that would make interesting reading but by the terms of the contract must remain silent."

"The first great task," continues Mr. Hall, "will be in the construction of a canal which will connect Miami and Fort Myers, and which will be made navigable for the largest ships ~~that~~ and will reduce the distance between these two points 165 miles."

The plan of this late surveying party is to perfect a drainage system in the wet season and an irrigating system in the dry season, so at best it will mean alternate drainage and irrigation, two very expensive farming operations.

Because this latest engineering report exactly coincides with a statement appearing a few weeks ago in the columns of the press giving the Seminole's belief as to drainage, and to this effect; putting the question of reclamation to Billee Bow Legs, the progressive young chieftain, as to whether the 'Glades could ~~be~~ ever be successfully reclaimed, with much deliberation he answered, "me no think so, rain come Okeechobee wet o jus (heap)". This is based upon the Indian's shrewd knowledge of nature's laws after a life observation of the seasons. Presuming that reclamation of the greater part of the Okeechobee area will be a successful operation at some future time, still it is a herculean task the State of Florida is undertaking. Sometime ago Florida made an appropriation for drainage work. Several million dollars were spent. The work according to the new surveyors, "was done without ~~the~~ due consideration. The men engaged jumped at conclusions and as a consequence, the work done is lost time and money uselessly spent, for the water does not run the right way." The people of Florida were heavily taxed for this blunder, and buyers from all over the United States spent their money running into millions, purchasing in most cases from Northern corporations and from the enticing paper plot.

It is understood that the present engineering corps will send in a recommendation for an appropriation, where millions of dollars again will be called for to meet these enormous drainage taxes, and before any real assurance of success can be estimated. Even the brief pen picture of these watery prairies will convince the reader of the gigantic and colossal task that confronts the powers in charge.

This vast region contains about 4,000 square miles of marsh lands and tropical forests, interlaced with thick clustering vines and is the greatest area of unexplored country in the United States. Even at this writing, Engineer Hall is quoted as saying that there are hundreds of square miles of the Everglades where no white man has ever set foot. The accounts of the interior of this mysterious swamp are to be found only in his traditions or Indian legends? Approaching the hidden Seminole camps, one must travel through an aquatic jungle in a light canoe, the motive power of which is plenty of muscle, a broad blade paddle and a push pole about 18 feet long, when a trackless waste of saw grass and water is entered, with scattering islands and lagoons and channels running in all directions. These channels often terminate in a pocket and then trouble begins, as these pockets are so shallow that a canoe or skiff has to be pulled by rope or pushed by hand through the mud and grass until deep water is found. "When the water is high the trouble is not so great, but when it is low," so writes an adventurous botanist, "the traveler can lay

(3)

aside his bible, quote a chapter from Dante's *Inferno*, and plough through the mud until his energy is exhausted and wonder if Dante ever heard tell of the Everglades."

Bordering the sedgy lagoons are dense cypress forests with here and there cabbage palms, Indian rubber, and mangrove, while tangled vegetation weaves itself in chaotic style over underbrush and trees. These are the primeval woods of the United States. To be lost in these great swamps means worse than death. They are the paradise of the serpent and the alligator. It is said in old slavery days that slaves who ran away into the swamps, were entered on the books as dead.

The Seminole Claim on the Everglades.

The thought now comes, is it worth while to make this region fit for habitation? While the onward march of progress is the watch cry of the Twentieth Century, still there are times when a people may well pause for reflection.

In this hard and so-called practical age, it should be well for us if we would only stop long enough to consider the picturesque life of an aboriginal people, and thus preserve a little of the world's romance in the tropics of Florida. First, Florida is the natural home of the Seminole; it is his by right of governmental treaty, if Uncle Sam's word is as good as a Seminole's. That the Florida Seminole will never submit to removal is an accepted fact, and rather than leave their beloved Florida, their home with the balmy sky, and move to the chilling blasts of a Western country, they would choose death rather than such an exile.

Again the Florida Everglades has been the home of countless thousands of migrating birds of the North American continent and with the channels running through the Glades alive with fish, they make excellent feeding grounds for the heron and other water birds. Until the white hunter went in and ruthlessly destroyed these beautiful birds, either for their plumes or for simple slaughter, these Everglades have been an ornithological Eden. With stricter laws and better game wardens, our feathered friends are returning to these waterways, and if reclamation could be stopped at this time, these weird and wonderful swamps and forests could be made of lasting value for bird protection, and whereby the American continent could reap from it many benefits. From an economic standpoint, the subject is worth considering by the United States government.

Another question arising, will the drainage of the Everglades have the effect to lower the water courses of the Northern areas as well as the adjacent territory?

Millions of Acres Untenanted.

There are today millions of acres all over Florida, drained, tillable, of excellent soil, within easy reach of the homeseeker and close to convenient transportation, with reasonable taxes and at moderate prices per acre--then why follow the rain-bow for the uncertainties of the tropical swamps of Okeechobee, when fertile fields adjacent to schools and churches and prosperity are within the easy reach?

Our recently returned engineers will recommend reclamation, not denying that millions will be required for drainage, nor do they claim that all the aquatic jungle can be reclaimed.

The appropriation cannot be made until the final report of the commission has been unambiguously accepted by the Interhal Improvement Board.

It is to be earnestly hoped that the same Hand that parted the waters of the Red Sea as He led the Children of Israel out of the Wilderness will stay our fair State of Florida in a future appropriation and lead gently out of their oppression these red children of the Everglades, who have wandered thrice forty years in the wilder-

(4)

ness of despair. To spare these Everglades to the original owners, this fast vanishing remnant of the proud old Seminoles would certainly bring honor and credit, even at this day, to our country. A picture of a Seminole home ought to inspire courage and sympathy for those silent, peace-loving dwellers of the Everglades. We may see the happy wigwam homes, gleaming in the red flames of the camp fire and hear the soft lullabies of the crooning mothers as they watch with careful eyes the toddling papooses as they play in the grassy sward. We see the happy turban-crowned braves move about and the dusky squaw glide in and out amid the shadows of the great live oaks. In the ~~solitary~~ solitude, which only nature reveals, these brown skinned people live, doing no man harm, seeing God in the skies and hearing him in the winds. The laughter of the game-laden hunter is heard and the love songs of the Seminole Minnehaha make the night beautiful.

Shall we wrest from these people, this, their last foothold in Florida? Of what crime are we guilty if these homes are confiscated without reparation? It becomes the duty of the United States government, through its Indian department and the State of Florida to see to it that land sufficient for their use be left in the Okeechobee country with Uncle Sam's sign boards reading, "penalty to trespassers."

Governor's Veto.

"God moves in a mysterious way his wenders to perform," and possibly no act in the last quarter century has done more to stimulate sympathy and patriotic action toward the solution of the Seminole problem than Governor Park Trammel's veto on the last day of the legislative session of the Seminole land bill that had passed both bodies of the Legislature with but one dissenting vote. The bill granted 235,000 acres of swamp and almost uninhabitable land to the Seminoles. This is the first step Florida has ever taken to provide a home or improve the condition of the Seminoles, and while Florida's Governor may have felt that it was his duty to "veto", and thus deny these homeless and peace-loving Americans a few thousand acres as a last refuge in their extremity, after all a Hand more powerful may have made the veto an instrument of good for the Seminole's future. Let us hope so.

Nations, as well as individuals, must face a crisis often, in order to bring about a sudden upheaval and in order to feel national a duty and a conscience that has perhaps lain dormant for years.

The Governor, honest, in his belief, no doubt, that these tropical swamps are very valuable, claims that "this land which is sought to be given away belongs to all the people of the State, yet seeks to take the title and ownership from all the people of Florida, approximating \$800,000 and place it on only 400 people of the State."

Acting as a great American jury, let us pause in our mad scramble for dollars, and consider our red brother. The question of right and justice should be our only consideration.

The Southern part of Florida peninsula belongs by treaty and prior rights to the Seminoles. No Christian, no philanthropist, no good citizen can deny this. If encroachments go on and no homes are provided, the anguish of these persecuted people will touch the hearts of the most sordid money grafter. With lingering locks, these red patriots will see the loved scenes of their homes fade away, their happy-hunting grounds, their beloved Florida. They will go silent or weeping to the horizon of their destiny, driven like dumb beasts before the power of the civilized white man.

Alas, for the remorse of a nation or a State, when a Higher Court than earth's says: "too late, too late!"

Minim Moore Willson.