

THE FLORIDA SEMINOLES.
THEIR RIGHTS IN THE EVERGLADES.

By Minnie Moore-Willson, of Kissimmee, Fla.

NO BATTLE FOR JUSTICE WAS EVER LOST.

The characteristic of Americans since that July day in 1776 has been to "wake somebody up" and when we stop to think of the dormant strength that has been stored up in this red race of the Everglades for more than a century -- of 600 people that have been denied liberty and a square deal, then we must know that the citizenry of Florida, when fully aroused as to the true condition of the vanquished and unfortunate Seminole will rise up and demand justice.

Seen ^{now} the Legislative halls at Tallahassee ^{are} ~~are~~ vibrant with the affairs of the state. More than one hundred men ^{will} ~~will~~ answer to the roll call and bills for moral uplift, bills for material progress and bills for financial aid ^{as being} ~~will be~~ presented.

"What will the Legislature of 1915 do for the Seminole?" is ringing in clarion tones throughout Florida.

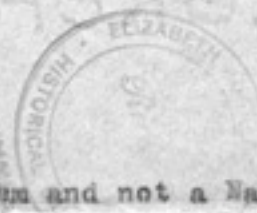
The subject is all-absorbing and is appealing to every red-blooded, white American in Florida and the homeless condition of these native people, the original owners of all this country, is touching the instinct of chivalry of all Floridians.

A STATE PROBLEM.

Florida's Indian population is a State problem and not a National problem; these aborigines occupy a unique position, different from that of any other tribe in the United States. First they were Spanish subjects, but, with the hoisting of the American flag in 1821, they came as a part of the new territorial possessions, - citizens of the United States.

Under Spanish rule, Florida was home to them and in peace they possessed lands, cattle, indigo plantations and orange groves. With the influx of white settlers from the Southern States, who came with their slaves and blood hounds, the Seminoles commenced to retire towards the Everglades.

In 1855 when the U. S. Government decided to Florida all her "swamp and over-flowed lands" the Indians came as a part of the possessions, as



they occupied the Everglade territory. Thus they became a STATE PROBLEM, AS MUCH A PART OF FLORIDA AS THE LAND ITSELF!!

Florida accepted this gift of the Everglade country from the National Government. Can she repudiate her responsibility to her Indian subjects that came as a part of this gift? Of the 58,000 square miles we call the Land of Flowers little remains for the original owners.

THE SEMINOLE LAND BILL.

At the last Legislature, as is well known, a Seminole Land Bill was carefully drawn by an intelligent body of men granting a tract of 235,000 acres to the Everglade Indians. The bill passed both House and Senate, but was killed on the last day by the Governor's veto. If there was any technicality involved (and no reasonable one has ever been given) then a similar bill should be so framed as to be free from any objectionable features and passed at the approaching Legislature.

For the benefit of those not informed, 200,000 acres of this tract are water-covered and utterly worthless for agricultural or reclamation purposes, being of "lime stone rock formation full of 'pot holes' and according to the report of the committee on Indian affairs would only serve as a hunting ground, and further that no white man could ever make use of it!"

So today we find our Florida Seminoles stranded in these great morasses, a XXIX Nation haunted by famine and extinction. Will the democracy of Florida allow a helpless people to be crushed out of existence by a handful of speculators whose highest thought is the jingle of dollars? This forlorn remnant of a once powerful race are being pushed on and on, by a brute force totally unworthy of Floridians and the white speculator says, "There is no land left for the Seminole, let him make bricks without straw."

NO ALMS ASKED.

In making a plea for these bewildered people we only ask that they be given an American chance. No alms are asked, neither charity, nothing but the lands that are theirs by the sacred rights of Governmental treaty.

Further the making of good citizens is the highest duty of an individual or a State and every Seminole Indian is capable of being molded into a worthy American citizen, fully up to the highest Caucasian standard.

The first work for Floridians is to see that these bewildered people have an abiding place, a refuge where they can work out their own destiny without fear of molestation. At the present time, the Seminole selects a home, builds his wigwam and with rude tools clears and fences his little fields. The white man comes along and tells the Seminole to "move on, move on", that he has purchased the property. In his anguish, the Indian is silent and uncomplaining and with his little belongings moves on into other trackless wilds.

It should be the duty of Floridians to resent with all their strength the enemy of the Seminole,--the man, the bandit, who would rob him of his home.

The knowledge of Florida's boundless millions of untenanted acres makes this appeal an easy one, and the opposition may as well realize that the agitation will not cease nor the subject be settled until it is settled right, and justice is done the helpless, home-loving Seminole, and thus white America may atone in part for a cruel "century of Dishonor."

Florida's honor is far greater than her land possessions and to know that the State of Florida has the legal right to SELL her Everglade lands is to know that the State of Florida has the legal right to make a GRANT of such lands and thus right a wrong a century old. This Florida of ours, the fairest State in the Southland, is great enough to come to the rescue of the kindly and home-loving Seminoles and give to them a shelter and a refuge in this, the direst hour of their existence.

LET FLORIDA DO HER DUTY NOW.

Let Florida do her duty now and not wait as Oklahoma has done until America asks, "Why have these red people of the 'Glades been cheated out of their rightful inheritance," for the answer might be an entangling one to unravel.

Surely the Everglade country has had enough ugly and destructive publicity, for all Florida suffers today for the high pressure sales of water covered Everglade lands.

The hour has arrived when the voice of Floridians should be heard and the call to right and justice should be sounded from every hamlet, town and city of this fair State. No longer should these wards of Florida be denied homes in the country they love so well, and no longer should a stigma on the fair name of Florida be heralded in flaming headlines to the world.

THE DRAINAGE PROBLEM.

No longer should the great drainage scheme be in the way. It is not a question of whether the 'Glades can be successfully drained. It is not a question of subterranean lakes that would require the locks and gates of Pluto's region to cut the water off. It is not a question of \$23,000,000 to complete the drainage. It is not a question of whether bonds can be sold or not, nor of the enormous "DRAINAGE TAX" that may continue for half a century, nor of U. S. Court indictments and all the propeganda that combine to make the Everglade problem a staggering one; none of these unhappy subjects should be debated.

It is the crime against an innocent people that is robbing the Everglade country of a success and a triumph and filling the great drainage scheme with defeat and humiliation.

Shall we make of Florida a little Belgium by driving the Seminole from his possessions?

The tragedy of brave little Belgium must not be repeated in Florida for this American Nation of ours is looking to and thinking of oppressed humanity as she has never done in the 432 years of her Anglo Saxon existence, and if homes are again denied this red race in the land of their nativity, denied them because they are an innocent and helpless people,-- If only Florida, of all the forty-eight States in the Union, continues to carry a blot on her escutcheon, then will the smouldering embers of journalistic comment and investigation burst forth into a lurid flame of EXPOSE as if lighted by a thousand signal fires. Then will an inquiring and indignant public wait for the answer to the riddle of the Okeechobee sphinx which alone holds the key to this Egypt of America --- the land of the Seminoles' ..

If injustice be done the /Seminoles, will the Everglades lands ever be sold?