

THE SEMINOLES OF FLORIDA  
AND  
THEIR RIGHTS IN THE EVERGLADES.  
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For the past two months the hearts of the American people have been saddened by the recitals, verbal and pictorial, of the atrocities practiced upon the innocent and helpless in the terrible war-conflict of the nations of Europe. Moving picture films show among other distressing sights, old women and little children driven from their homes and fleeing before the enemy. Carrying their little bundles, the pitiful salvage from the wreck of their homes, they flee, terror-stricken and starving, to find refuge where they can.

In Florida we have a people who have fought no less bravely and honorably for all that is dear to the heart of man, and their history is no less tragic. Hidden in the dreary Everglades, pushed to their last extremity, are to be found a band of Indians, - a shattered remnant of the American Aborigines - the Seminoles. Today universal sympathy is going out to this remnant of a people who have fought so bravely for the land of their birth, for their homes, and for the burial place of their kindred.

Rivalling the story of "A Man Without a Country", the history of the helpless, homeless and hungry Seminoles must appeal to the highest impulses of the best citizenship of the

State of Florida.

MUTE STORY OF AN OPPRESSED PEOPLE.

The history of the home-loving Seminoles is a very Iliad of tragedy, - a poignantly-touching story of a despoiled people in dire necessity. Farther and farther into the trackless wilds of the swamp morasses they have been driven, their once well-stocked hunting-grounds depleted and their fields and gardens taken from them by the ever-incroaching white man. There has been no wanton bloodshed, perhaps; no barbarous cruelty has been practiced, no dum-dum bullets have been used nor sharp edged sabres thrust into the hearts of the non-resisting Seminoles; but the white speculators' continuous cry "move on, move on" has rung in their ears for three-quarters of a century.

Surely, we owe as much to these native Americans - the original owners of all the vast domain of the Okkechobee country - as we do to the black man or to the crude emigrants who are swarming to our country. Surely, we injure a man when we take away his country and his livelihood without his consent and without recompense. Indeed, can there be deeper injury?

The Everglade Seminoles who gave their pledge in 1842 to General Worth, "never to take up arms and to desist from all aggression upon their white neighbors, and to confine themselves to certain areas in the Southern Peninsular of Florida" have kept faith with their white conquerors. With their few belongings they have moved on and on, until they can go no

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There are six Ravens, Crows, Squirrels  
and Baboons, who have increased  
in number from the little band of  
182<sup>0</sup> kept in Fla. at the end of the  
7 yrs war in 1842



further. These red people of the great silent 'Glades have  
now reached <sup>the crucial point</sup> the great crisis of their existence in the land  
they love with such absorbing devotion, and it is for us to  
see that, facing as they do so bravely and uncomplainingly  
the changed conditions of their life, they shall at least  
not lack sufficient land in their fastnesses on which to  
support that life.

As we consider this, let us think what we owe them, what  
have been our dealings with them in the past. Broken treat-  
ies and violated pledges must be fresh in their memory; for  
the white man's dealing with Chief Tallahassee's people is a  
record of broken agreements and scorned oaths. Under the  
American flag in 1843, a peace council was held where Seminole  
chieftans and American Army officers, all in the regalia of  
their respective official ranks, agreed upon a treaty and the  
Seminoles were assigned to certain areas. THE SEMINOLES HAVE  
NEVER BROKEN THAT TREATY!!

As their traditions tell them of the oppression their  
people suffered during the thrice forty years they wandered  
in the wilderness, who can tell the secrets of their hearts?  
To do this it would be necessary to become for the time the  
Indian - what white man can ever do more than vaguely feel the  
bitterness and sorrows those hearts must experience? Only to  
the winds that ~~waft~~ across Okeechobee are whispered the heart-  
throbs of these red people of the forest homes.

Today, these six hundred homeless, native Americans lurk

in their swamps, hedged wigwams, built on little islands in the gruesome Everglades wilderness, eking out an existence, fearing the white man, yet independent - too proud to receive alms of State or Nation, and only asking to be "let alone".

#### THE INDIAN CODE OF HONOR.

No public money has ever been appropriated to maintain insane asylums, penitentiaries or courts of justice for this part of Florida's population. Their simple form of tribal government erected on three pillars "not to steal, nor lie, nor cheat", is strictly obeyed, and their moral code has molded them into beings ever quiet and peaceful even in the face of most unjust dealings and provocations, and has caused them to stand out among all the peoples of the world as marvels of chastity, for the stern death penalty by the council follows any breach of their unwritten law of virtue. In this, and in all other respects, they are today observing the same laws as did their forefathers nearly two centuries ago. Their legends and laws have been handed down from generation to generation and like the secrets of Masonry, have been preserved unbroken and inviolate.

#### A WORK FOR FLORIDA WOMEN.

The 20th Century slogan for woman is "help for the needy and uplift for all". All over the United States women are crying that slogan and seeking to give that help wherever it is needed. Their work and successes have been epoch-making

and this America of ours stands out today among all the nations of the globe as the apotheosis of the spirit of democracy and humanity. In the words of our honored President, Woodrow Wilson, "the way to succeed in America is to show that you are not afraid of anybody but God and His Judgement".

The women of Florida have at their door a problem more pitiable, involving a people more worthy of help, far more deserving in its extremity, than confronts the people of any other State in the Union. It is their privilege to succor the helpless Seminole Indians, who, since the hoisting of the American flag in 1821, have been reduced from a powerful nation to a decimated band of starving humanity. Under Spanish rule the tribe owned homes, cattle by the thousands, indigo plantations, and fertile hammocks studded with bearing orange trees. Today, under American rule, although they are worthy descendants of their beloved war chieftan Osceola, and in their blood is the same inherent love of home, country and honor, they dwell wretched but uncomplaining in their wierd morasses and their very helplessness makes a most touching appeal to our 20th Century civilization and Christianity.

#### THE SEMINOLE LAND BILL.

It is a far call from the marshy Everglades to the Legislative halls at Tallahassee, and yet with the affairs of the State in the hands of men willing to serve the highest as well as the lowest of their fellow-citizens, it is earnestly hoped that the heart cries of the silent dwellers of the 'Glades



will be heard and justice and fair play be given to these red children of Florida.

While probably all the club members of Florida are familiar with the action of the Florida Legislature at its last session, still a brief recital will refresh the memory.

The Seminole Land Bill, granting a large tract of land, passed both the House and Senate with but one dissenting vote. This bill was passed by a body of men who had carefully weighed the matter of a reservation, <sup>most of it</sup> - a swampy and almost uninhabitable area, - yet considered the best available refuge for this frail remnant of the original owners of all this Everglade country.

This act of Florida's representative citizens should go down in history to the everlasting praise of that splendid body of right thinking men. All over the country was the good news heralded by the press association, to the Indian department as well as to the deeply interested friends of these wards of the State.

Alas! The pathos of the story, the unhappy sequel came when this bill was vetoed by the Governor on the last day of the legislative session, when it was too late to pass the bill over the veto; thus leaving the Indians, these distinctive Floridian natives, more helpless and more dependant than before.

#### WORK FOR THE FUTURE.

The work before the friends of this helpless people is to secure from the State of Florida a suitable tract of land in

the Everglades, with a strong law prohibiting others from hunting or living on the tract, - a refuge where in peace, this aboriginal race can readjust their mode of living and become citizens, Christianized and civilized. So today we must know that the future of the Everglades Seminole lies in the present just and humane citizens of Florida. This gentle and kindly race must have an abiding place, - lands to be theirs forever.

While the life of the Florida Seminoles has been a turbulent one, and they have ever been aliens to the joys and delights of civilization, there is at the present an optimistic side for their future, providing always that the State of Florida will do her part and make a grant of land for their use. Their kindred in Oklahoma have never forgotten this remnant and some have, during the past few years visited them in their 'Glade homes. The Oklahoma Seminoles are educated Christians and stand ready to send teachers to their brethren in Florida, and to help in their uplift, both in industrial training and along the line of missionary work.

In review, and briefly, it is well to state here that the Seminoles have three powerful allies in the field of action for the betterment of their condition. First, the Florida Legislature, whose friendly action in 1913 is known to all and is now a matter of history. Second, the Federation of Women's Clubs, which has championed the Indian's cause and is making the help of the Seminoles a part of their uplifting work.



Third, the Florida Press Association, the great molders of public opinion and the motor power of the state, which at its annual convention in the City of Fort Myers held in April, 1914, most graciously and amid frequent applause, obligated itself by resolution to further the policy of homes for the Seminoles and to stimulate interest in behalf of these homeless people in a free land."

#### MILLIONS OF ACRES UNTENANTED.

There are today scattered all over Florida, drained, tillable and of excellent soil, millions of acres of land; within easy reach of the homeseeker and close to transportation, with reasonable taxes and at a moderate price per acre, - then why follow the rainbow for the uncertainties of the tropical swamps of Okeechobee, when fertile fields adjacent to schools and churches are within easy reach.

The drainage scheme of the Everglades of Florida continues to be problematical and uncertain. ~~The~~ vast saw-grass wilderness of four thousand square miles is surcharged by the overflow of Lake Okeechobee. This lake received its floods from a watershed of <sup>5,000</sup> 5366 miles, and spilling over its southern edge makes the country <sup>a vast</sup> aquatic jungle.

With this stupendous amount of money that must necessarily be paid out for canals, with pumping stations to be provided for, with a system of irrigation to be met, with locks to hold the water in the canals at certain seasons, with the intensity of the rainfall, with the dredges to be employed to keep the canals free from crumbling rock and soil as long as

the country is inhabited, with cross country ditches and lateral canals, together with the diking of thousands of acres, - with a " DRAINAGE TAX " that may continue for half a century, the Drainage of the Everglades is a problem so vast as to stagger the average mind. And of the taxes, no adequate estimate can be made. Then why the enormous expense of draining the Everglades when so much good land is yet unoccupied. Broadly speaking, the Seminole Indians are the only race which could ever successfully make its home in these marshy fastnesses and they would take them as they are.

These lands and possessions we have taken from them, and now have we no duty to perform toward them? Surely, out of our abundance we may let fall a few crumbs to help sustain them in their unequal struggle for existence. Of what crime are we guilty if we fail in this, our best opportunity to pay a very little part of the great debt of justice we owe them? There is something more than money involved. If these people are wantonly destroyed, or crowded out of existence for the sake of putting a few more dollars into the land speculators' pockets, it will be the foulest blot that has ever soiled the escutcheon of Florida.

#### THE SEMINOLES' FOOTPRINTS.

From the Northern boundaries of the State to the farthest corner of the Peninsular the history and wanderings of the old Turbaned tribe of Florida can be traced in the soft rymthical names they have given to numerous lakes, rivers and towns. Around the very name of Florida clings a wealth

of legends and abiding words of beauty, memorials left by these pathfinders, firmly imbedded in the history of the State. Their traditions are not less interesting and fascinating, and retaining as the Seminoles have done through centuries, all the picturesqueness and customs of their ancestors, their folk-lore is peculiarly rich, and in years to come, students and ethnologists will wake up to a research of their priceless but unwritten records, and their mythology will be one of our most cherished possessions. They have given us an enduring heritage of beauty. Shall we give them less than a belated justice?

Believing that the people of Florida are eager and anxious to see fair play shown the Everglade Indians: Believing that honor and justice should come before material interests; and relying on the hope that the behavior of our citizens at the coming Legislature will dignify human kindness in a triumph for the weak, we place this subject before the reading and thinking public, -- confident of the verdict that will be rendered.

#### THE LAST GREAT COUNCIL.

When the Last Great Council meets and the red brother sits on equal footing with the white brother before the throne of the Great Spirit, when each is measured by the light that was given him, may the record of the Florida of 1915 be not "weighed in the balance and found wanting".