



# The Red Man



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# The Seminoles of Florida:

*By Minnie Moore Willson.*

**T**HE history and characteristics of the Seminoles of Florida is an engrossing story of primitive protestation against the advancement of the white man on the one side and a desperate struggle against extinction on the other. Mrs. Willson, the author of this article, has written an intensely interesting book on this subject, entitled "The Seminoles of Florida," which has been read by thousands, and has stirred up interest and sympathy in behalf of these people. Their problem is unique and presents many difficulties. At the same time, the recent activity of the Federal Government shows that there is hope for the remnants of the Seminoles, who chose to remain in Florida while their fellow tribesmen moved to the western prairies of what is now Oklahoma.—The Editor.



**F**AR away in the dreary Everglades of Florida are to be found to-day hiding, as it were, a frail remnant of Seminoles. These Indians are the descendants of that invincible tribe who were never conquered by the force of arms. Refusing in 1842 to accompany their people to the mysterious West, they ceased to exist save for themselves. Finding refuge in the almost inaccessible Everglades, they were for a time almost lost to the historian. They have had no legal existence, hence no rights that a white man is bound by law to respect.

Almost universal sympathy goes out to this remnant of a people who fought so bravely and so persistently for the land of their birth, for their homes, for the burial place of their kindred. As their traditions tell them of the oppression their people suffered as they wandered in the wilderness thrice forty years, who can tell the secrets of their hearts? To do this it would be necessary to become for the time an Indian, and what white man has ever done this. To the winds that waft across Okuchobee are whispered the heart throbs of these red fawns of the forest.

### *Unique Position.*

**M**ORE than seventy years ago the Government recognized the Seminoles in a treaty, granting all the vast domain of the Okuchobee country to them. To-day dynamite blasts shake the very pans and kettles hanging around the wigwams and the big dredges groan an accompaniment, as it were, to the death song, the recession of the Seminole. Forced from off the prairies and from out the mighty hummocks where they roamed at will and did no man injury, these romantic savages have reached the end of the peninsula.



This band of Indians consider themselves more valiant in defense, more determined in purpose than that part of the tribe that succumbed to emigration to the Indian Territory. So to-day, the Florida Seminoles are unconquered and unsubdued. They occupy a unique position with reference to the United States Government, having no legal existence, nor allegiance to our Nation. In short, so far as the United States is concerned officially, justice has been a tardy laggard in recognizing the rights of these original Americans.

### *Will the Everglades Be Successfully Drained?*

THE Seminoles now number about 500 persons, independent, receiving no alms, but suspicious, only asking to be "let alone." We cannot but admire the proud and independent spirit of the Florida Indian as he refuses all aid from a Government which he believes has wronged him, and while he may proudly be called the only American who has been found unwilling to share the spoils of the Nation, still we know that the only way to protect these silent dwellers of the Everglades is to have a reservation set aside for them and hold it in trust for them forever.

The Everglades, a trackless waste of saw-grass and water, with its scattering islands and lagoons, has been a great political question among Florida people during the past few years, and while the drainage is a much-mooted question, certainly the cutting of the canals is driving these original owners farther and farther into the wilds of the swamps. As to the final result of this daring drainage scheme with its millions and millions of expenditure, the best engineers differ; but to the Seminole, however fast the door of the swamp may be locked, with moccasined foot he enters when and where he will; he is the true key bearer and knows every foot of this interminable morass, and when the question was put to Billie Bowlegs, the progressive young chieftain, as to whether the Glades could ever be reclaimed, with much deliberation he answered: "Me no think so. Rain come. Okuchobee land wet ojus (heap)." *Sufficient hint to the wise soil tiller.* With thirty-eight of the States of the Union represented by buyers of land in the Everglades, purchased by faith and good American dollars, much of the land still under water, certainly the "handwriting on the wall" was not seen when Florida undertook to drain the Everglades, as she supposed to



enrich her treasury, but without assurance of success. In this legislative act, Florida forgot to regard her silent, peaceable dwellers, who are the only Americans who could live happily and successfully amid these morasses and game-laden forests.

*The Seminole Belongs to Florida.*

WITH the encroaching civilization and the Caucasians' eternal "move on, move on," ringing in their ears, with the extinction of their food supply, their support will be a matter of serious consideration in a short time. That they will never submit to removal is an accepted fact; rather than leave their beloved Florida, the land of the balmy sky and life-giving sunshine, and move to the chilling blasts of a western country, they would choose death.

At this writing a few well-meaning but ill-advised friends of the Florida Indians, who know little or nothing of the Seminoles' feelings, are suggesting their removal to the western country, but forbid the thought! Let us earnestly plead with all friends and persons in power that those liberty-loving patriots be protected in their homes and their removal strenuously opposed. The Seminole will never take up arms against the white man because his pledge to Col. Worth "to abstain from all aggressions upon his white neighbor" is held inviolate and like Mekanopy, when he is pushed beyond the borders of Okuchobee, "the place of the big water," rather than submit to emigration he will say, "Kill me then; kill me quickly!"

We are dispossessing the Seminoles of their natural rights. Dwellers of every land from Scandinavia to the Congo have a Christian welcome to our shores. The slums of Europe pour in upon us to fill our almshouses and to be supported by our taxes. Centuries of wrong from hands too powerful to be resisted have taught these Americans the patience of despair; he is an outcast from sympathy and an alien to hope, yet he has never ceased to be manly. At the expense of thousands of dollars we are protecting different species of wild animals, setting aside great tracts of land for their maintenance, while our brother in bronze is left a prey to the lawless and a helpless victim of every loafer.

The Florida Seminole regards the Everglades as his by right of treaty, and cannot understand the white man's encroachment. What the ultimate fate of this proud race will be should be a serious question to America and to Florida. Having taken the lands of their an-



cestors from them, we have a debt to perform; and out of our abundance they should be given a few crumbs in the last hours of their existence. The history of these picturesque Americans cannot be separated from the history of Florida; in the melodious names of rivers, lakes, and towns their wanderings can be traced all over the State; these abiding words of beauty are their memorials firmly imbedded in the history of their conquerors.

### *The Governor's Veto.*

ALL over the country chords of human sympathy are vibrating in harmony for these despoiled people in this their direst extremity, and when the Florida Legislature of 1913 heralded to the press and to the deeply interested friends of the wards of the State the good news of the passage of a bill giving 235,000 acres of land, land poor and swampy and almost uninhabitable, yet the best refuge available for these homeless people, the recognition was received with the utmost joy.

But alas! the pathos of the story, the sequel—"Governor vetoes Seminole reservation act on last day of session." Like a bolt from a clear sky flashed the news over the wire, unexpected and unlooked for.

The occasional visits of these Indians to the doors of civilization always revives interest in the race, for through these living authors one may study the story of their people, a story that is full of pathos, dating back in its traditions almost 200 years. They tell of their homes being encroached upon, the fields taken, their hunting grounds molested, and game scarce and with much pressure reluctantly admit that the Indians "sometimes go hungry." Hungry in a land like Florida!

A picture of a Seminole home ought to inspire courage and sympathy for these 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 on the grassy sward. We see the happy turban-crowned braves move about and the dusky squaws glide in and out amid the shadows of the great live oaks. In a solitude which only nature reveals this brown-skinned people live, doing no man harm, seeing God in the skies and hearing Him in the winds. The laugh-



ter 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. There is at this time plenty of land for both interests. It becomes the duty of the United States Government and the friends of the homeless Seminoles to see to it that land sufficient for their use be left in the Okuchobee country with Uncle Sam's sign boards reading, "Penalty to Trespassers." As the "Stars and Stripes" proudly herald liberty and independence to the comers of all nations, how can we be unmindful of that "charity which begins at home?" As the panorama of Indian history passes before us, we see nothing more tragic than the pictures of the wrongs endured by the poor, struggling, long-hunted Seminoles, as they approach silently, but with sad heart and a slow step.

In that last great council meeting, when the red brother meets on equal footing with his white brother before the throne of the Great Spirit, when each is measured by the light that was given him, how will the scales of Justice swing?

