



Why Have the Seminoles of Florida Been Continually Denied Lands in the Everglades?

By Minnie Moore Willson.



WHO are the Seminoles? They are not aliens; they are not foreigners; they *are* Americans! And yet today in this great moral State of Florida, we find the Indian population broken, wounded in spirit and pauperized. The Florida Seminole is the very incarnation of the "Man Without a Country;" he is a stranger in his own land, with no refuge in sight. A great state like Florida, that seeks to better her condition and increase her sparsely peopled territory by extending to the restless world an invitation of welcome, should sound the keynote of honor and justice and look into her own hidden record, the treatment of her Everglade Indian.

Truth Should Be Unveiled.

WHY then may the truth not be known? The American people are entitled to know why Florida with her boundless, untenanted millions of acres continues to withhold from the Seminole land upon which he may place his wigwam and where with the help and cooperation of his white friends he may cease to be panic stricken and where he may be helped to a better and a happier existence.

The voting citizenry of Florida has a right to know; moreover have the Seminole not a right to know why their treaty rights have been confiscated, while they in their anguish have been ordered "Move on, move on" into other trackless wilds of the great swamp morasses?

Do we believe that the sun does not shine because we have walled up our windows? Then let us be assured that Truth has waited long enough for a place in Florida's capital, and that despite every obstacle, through cracks and crannies, like sun notes, she will enter, and history, which weighs guilt as well as innocence on her scale, will decide.

The Seminole's Treaty.

BURIED in the archives of the Seminole memory, handed down from generation to generation, is the history of the treaty of 1843. Let us draw the curtain and study this picture three-quarters of a century old. We see the American flag as it furls and unfurls over the speaker's

stand. Seminole chieftians and American officers are each in the regalia of their respective ranks. In the background may be seen the United States soldiery in friendly relation with the flower of the Seminole Nation, —a remnant of a remnant, now reduced from thousands to about one hundred patriots; this remnant of the proud old Seminoles are still unconquered and determined to remain in their beloved Florida. Under a peace compact this band agreed "to abstain from all aggression upon their white neighbors and to confine themselves to certain areas in the southern peninsula of Florida,"—*The Land of the Seminoles. The Seminoles have never broken that treaty!*

Are we as Floridans willing to wait for interference from philanthropists from other states, because we are not answering the ringing, pointed questions, "Why are the Seminoles of Florida continually denied homes in their native land—why this crime against an innocent and a helpless people?"

Governor Park Trammell's Veto.

AS IS well known, two recent legislative sessions have passed, refusing a land grant to the Seminoles.

The 1913 Legislature manipulated the chess board of the "Seminole Land Bill," with a veto by Governor Park Trammell on the very last day of the session.

The chess board of 1915 could not stand out against the petitions, the enthusiasm, yes and indignation, felt by the white citizens of Florida, and the "hand writing on the wall" in translation read as follows: "Tallahassee, May 31, 1915.—Action on Indian bill stopped today. The lands will be there still and we will try again."

There is an optimistic side to this tragic ending of the work of years, but significant and like a star shining through a clouded sky is the beaming phrase, "The lands will be there still." With the American people upholding this work of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, the ultimate success is certain.

With the signal fires so lighted as to touch the dynamic force of the American press, with the offer of brain and pen of America's greatest writers to sound the call to all good white citizens to help this hungry remnant of the old Seminole patriots to homes, we must know that these red children of the Glades, who have wandered thrice forty years in the wilderness of despair, will ultimately come into their rightful heritage.

Personally, allow me to say that I will never desert the cause of this gentle and kindly aboriginal race. If these 600 homeless people did not know that I have never deceived them, nor worked for any other reason than a conscientious devotion for their uplift, I would not possess the confidence with which they have honored me and which is worth more than all their coveted lands.



MRS. MINNIE-MOORE WILLSON, OF KISSIMMEE, FLA.
With her pet cranes, Bettie and Dixie, and Elaw, the collie.

Again, a great state like Florida need not villify the history and lives of her native people. There is much more than money involved in the handling of this Everglade country. Florida's honor is far greater than her land possessions. The Seminole Indian is a state problem and naturally should be cared for by Florida, but since legislature after legislature denies these original owners lands, the subject will be agitated by America and when the slogan, "Why have the Seminoles been continually denied lands in the Everglades?" becomes nation-wide in its agitation and when Americans awaken to the needs of the helpless and peace-loving Seminole and to a sense of duty of patriotism, there will be something doing in the Everglade country.

Tribute to Indian Character.

IF THE American Indian were not worthy of a place in the world's history, would his memory be perpetuated by his white conquerors? As an idealistic type this 20th century is rushing to pay him a tribute.

Is there a white American who would dare to place before a Congressional body a bill for the erection of a colossal statue of the African to stand beside the Goddess of Liberty in New York Harbor?

The American Indian in bronze statue is to have this honor, and to Ex-President Taft was assigned the honor of lifting the first spadeful of soil at the dedication services.

In the Nation's Hall of Fame in the Capitol at Washington, the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, an Indian, is honored with a place.

An Indian head is on the five-dollar bill as well as the five-cent piece. To the practical mind let us not forget that an American Indian must sign our currency before it is passed by the Treasury Department.

In military tactics the name of no greater genius adorns its pages than that of Florida's patriot, Osceola, the Seminole.

The instinctive eloquence of Coa-coo-chee, the Seminole chieftain, in his speech to our American General Worth, made him the peer of a Clay or a Calhoun, while the great Seneca Chieftain Logan delivered the most eloquent oration ever compiled in American history.

In the athletic world it took Jim Thorpe, the red skin, to bring the world's championship to America, and as this youthful red American stood before the King of Sweden, and with the Swedish ruler's hand clasping his, heard the words, "You are the most wonderful athlete in the world," all America shouted for Jim Thorpe, the world's champion.

In poetry, in romance, in legends and in folk-lore literature of America we must look to the red man.

It was by the blue waters of Ontario that Hiawatha nearly four centuries ago formulated plans for the first peace compact. Today, "Peace, Peace," is the wounded cry of the world.

The youth of America, the Boy Scouts, and the Camp Fire Girls, after looking through pages of history for a model, have taken the Indian for their hero.

Can anyone doubt the superiority of the Indian character?

We must not forget to pay a tribute to the historic women the red Americans have given to literature.

To our own Florida belongs the first romance of American history. In the life story of U-lee-lah, the Princess of Hirrihigua, is a setting for as dramatic a recital as has ever adorned the pages of literature. Florida's Indian princess is the peer of Virginia's Pocahontas, antedating the history of Lady Rebecca by almost a century. U-lee-lah, for her courage, heroism and womanly tenderness in saving the life of the only Caucasian on the southern shores of Florida, deserves a place in American annals.

To Pocahontas the glorification of saving Virginia from utter destruction is well known, and in the newest romance of American history, the first lady of the land proudly traces direct descent from the Indian Princess Pocahontas.

Can we imagine the young Indian mother Sac-a-ja-we-wa, whose guidance of the Lewis and Clarke expedition gave to the Caucasian the great Pacific slope?

The linguistic perfection of the Seminole language is sustained in the name of our rivers, lakes, and towns and gives to Florida a halo of romance greater than that possessed by any other state in the Union—a silent heritage of the aboriginal pathfinders.

From Tallahassee to the mysterious swamps of the Everglades, every few miles marks the spot where the ancestral blood of their race was spilled as they defended the land the Great Spirit had given them.

And again Florida's history is so interwoven with that of the red man that no official document is signed without her great state seal, which makes the impress of a Florida Indian with outstretched arms welcoming the white strangers from other lands and the inscription reads, "In God We Trust!"

Shall the travesty of Florida's seal be allowed while we continue to defraud the Seminole of his heritage?

The Everglade Drainage Scheme a Staggering Problem.

IN THE horoscope of Florida's firmament it takes but a cursory glance to see that in the near future the women of the state who are working for the uplift, for a moral reform in the weak places, will also be taking a firmer hold in the state's progress and will be expected to wield a strong influence in the political field as well as in the municipal and internal affairs.

For this reason, it is well to begin a study of the greatest project that has ever been attempted by any state of like population, viz: the reclamation of the great Everglades of Florida.

This subject, colossal in its magnitude, needs to be looked at from a commercial standpoint and from a moral issue.

The paramount question is, Who of this 20th century are to be the beneficiaries? Certainly not the great rank and file of the citizenship of Florida. With a state whose population consists of only 800,000 people to undertake the stupendous work of reclaiming 5,332 square miles, assuredly looks like a staggering proposition, and while the onward march of progress is the watch cry of the 20th century, there are times when a people may well pause for reflection.

Until Florida populates her millions of tillable and untenated acres, certainly she need not reach out for the uncertain and problematical Everglades.

If this great scheme, which has been a "political football" for nearly a score of years is deserving a place in Florida's column of prosperity and will stand a test of the X-ray of honest investigation, then it should be the counsel of those friends of the Flower State to urge that a full and fair account of the works to be done be made to the citizens.

How many attractive-looking booklets containing the engineering report have been spread broadcast over the country? How many newspapers have been furnished with condensed reports of this daring drainage scheme? Are the people not entitled to know as much of their phase of the problem as they are to know the estimated values of the enormous vegetable crops that this El Dorado of America is likely to produce, say twenty years hence, or perchance will produce on some experimental farm?

The subject of the reclamation of this, "The Least Known Wilderness of America," has extended far beyond the boundaries of Florida and is now a theme of nation-wide discussion, and our hundred thousand purchasers of submerged and unsurveyed lands are waiting with much patience for the answer to the riddle of the ever-silent sphinx of the Okeechobee country, which alone holds fast the key to this Egypt of America.

High Ways and Water Ways.

IN every state of the Union men and women are united in one effort and this is to beautify and protect natural scenery and to preserve the romance and history of their respective states. The Lincoln Highway, the Dixie Highway, National and State Parks all come in for this attention of the people. Florida's natural and romantic beauty in landscape and waterway is one of her chief attractions and has acted as a beacon light to draw thousands of visitors from all over the world, and yet today for

the grind of dollars our great Okeechobee Lake, "the place of the big waters," in Seminole dialect, has been changed from a deep, restless inland sea, like the ocean itself, to a region of shallow shoals and white, glistening sand dunes.

Must Florida continue to disturb nature's balance wheel and relinquish her world-famed Caloosahatchee River with its great navigation value, for the purpose of securing a few thousand acres?

United States Government Keeping a Watchful Eye.

IN THE great drainage scheme of the Everglades, Florida faces a peculiar delimita, which is today challenging America at large.

So interwoven is the history of the native inhabitants with that of the great 'Glade country, that to speak of the one invites the attention to the other, and it is for this reason that Florida should scrutinize closely this great drainage problem.

Broadly speaking, the Seminole Indians are the only race which could ever successfully make its home in these marshy fastnesses and these saturnine children of the swamps would take them as they are.

Moreover, Florida's Indian population is a state problem and must be handled from such a premises.

When Florida accepted the gift of the Everglade country from the National Government in 1855, she accepted the Indians as a part of the possessions. Until she is ready to repudiate her title to this grant of "swamps and overflowed land" she cannot repudiate her obligation to her Seminole population. This red race is therefore a state problem and as inhabitants of the 'Glade territory are as much a part of Florida as the land itself.

As an investigation of Everglade troubles has already been agitated, those in control who have been holding the check reins are reported to be uneasy, lest the workings of the drainage scheme go through another exposé, conducted as it was two years ago by the Federal Government.

To drain this vast aquatic jungle a stupendous amount of money must necessarily be paid out for canals; pumping stations must be provided for; a system of irrigation must be met; locks must be made to hold the water in the canals at certain seasons; the intensity of the rainfall must be considered, while dredges must be employed to keep the canals free from crumbling rock and soil as long as this southern region is inhabited. To this add cross-country ditching and lateral canals and the diking of thousands of acres, and with a drainage tax that may continue for half a century, the drainage of the Everglades becomes a problem so vast as to stagger the average mind. Of the taxes no adequate estimate can be made. Of the subterranean lakes in the heart of the Everglade section no report has ever been made. Of these impregnable barriers

to successful drainage, the silent Seminole might enlighten those most interested.

With a probable cost of \$25,000,000 or more for the purpose of draining 1,000,000 acres, all the territory that the State of Florida now owns, (the remaining acreage of this vast area of more than 5,000 square miles being in the hands of the speculators) it is little wonder that there is an ominous silence when Florida's high officials who control the Everglades are questioned as to the final outcome of the work.

Refreshing is the knowledge that comes from Secretary of War Garrison regarding the waters of Okeechobee and which settles a question much discussed last season with reference to the lowering of the lake. The United States Government cannot be bought with dollars, according to Secretary Garrison's letter, as follows, which says: "This department can be depended upon to fulfill the duty of protecting navigation which the law imposes upon it, and the level of Okeechobee shall not be lowered below a certain point."

No Alms Asked.

WHILE America is benevolently feeding the starving millions of Europe, she has not been asked to contribute a dollar towards aiding her red Americans of Florida. In making a plea for these bewildered people we only ask that they be given an American chance. No alms are asked, nothing but the lands that are theirs by the sacred rights of governmental treaty. Will the democracy of Florida allow these original owners of all the vast region of the Okeechobee country to be crushed out of existence by a handful of speculators, who say there is no land left for the Seminole—let him "make bricks without straw."

The paramount work of the hour resolves itself into the one thought, to see to it that this helpless race are provided with an abiding place, a refuge where they can work out their own destiny.

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 caused them to stand out among all the people of the world as marvels of chastity, for the stern death penalty decreed by the council follows any breach of their unwritten law of virtue. These 600 Seminoles hiding in their swamp-hedged wigwams, adhere to the teachings of their ancestors as practiced three centuries ago.

A Seminole's Honor.

THE Seminole is proverbially truthful. Pertinent was the reply to the white hunter when he asked if it were safe to leave his gun in the wigwam. "Yes," replied the chief, "there are no white men within fifty miles of the camp."

Anxiously and carefully have we studied their form of government, knowing that they leave their money, their trinkets, and their garments in the open wigwam.

With carefully framed questions we asked of Billy Bowlegs, "Billy, your money you leave it in your wigwam. You go back to Okeechobee; money hi-e-pus (all gone); Indian steal it, then what you do?" He answered, "Me don't know." "Yes, but Billy, white man come to my house, my money steal 'em, by and by, in jail big sheriff put him. Indian all the same, bad Indian steal. What does Indian do?"

Making the points clearer, illustrating by the theft of his gun, showing him that a bad Indian from one of the other settlements might come in his absence and steal his Winchester, yet with a perfect understanding of our meaning the reply came as before, "Me don't know. Indian no take 'em,—Indian no steal."

In such a community of "Golden Rule" principles where there is no crime there can be no punishment. The endeavor to show the Seminole what Christianity stands for has been one of the most complex problems encountered; his code is to neither lie, nor steal, nor cheat, and to "think with God;" he believes in God's Son who came to make the Indians better and to prepare them for the Happy Hunting Grounds when the Great Spirit calls them hence.

From his oral lexicon, the Seminole has condensed his verdict of the pale face into one forcible, single expression, "Es-ta-had-kee, ho-lo-wagus,—lox-ee-e-jus" (white man no good—lie too much).

During Billy Bowleg's last visit when with the most reverent attitude he listened to the returning of thanks at the table, the question was put: "Billy, do Seminoles talk to God and ask Him to help them and give them food and homes?" "Munks-chay," (no) replied Billy, "no ask Him." Then as if a light dawned as to the nature of our study, he told of a hunting experience of a few weeks before, when he had acted as guide for a New York tourist. For three days the red huntsman had sought all the bayous for a deer, but deer "hi-e-pus" (all gone). "Man feel sorry 'ojus' (plenty). Night come, me wake two o'clock, moon shine bright. Me hear water laugh, me saw big echo (deer) swim across the river. My gun me take. Kill big deer. Me tell Great Spirit, me thank you. White man glad 'ojus;' he go back to New York, take big buck antlers, he say he kill big deer in Everglades."

The Seminole, like his ancient ancestors, thanks the Great Spirit for blessings received, but does not beseech favors.

Visitors from the Everglades.

THE occasional visits of the Seminoles to the doors of civilization always revives interest in the race, for through living authors one may study the life story of these people—a story dating back in its

traditions for more than three hundred years. These Indians tell of their present life, of their homes being molested, their fields taken by the white man; they tell of the dynamite blasts that shake the very pans and kettles that hang around the wigwam. The mysterious smoke of the Everglades which their legends taught them was the "breath of the Great Spirit" now fades away like the dying embers of their camp fires, as it meets the lowering smoke from the great dredges that have been brought by the pale face to take their last homes from them.

The Seminole reluctantly admits, when pressed for an answer, that "now Indians sometimes go hungry, by and by picaninnies hungry plenty me think." *Hungry in a Land Like Florida!*

National Sympathy for the Seminole.

ALL over this continent there is a growing interest in Chief Osceola's long neglected people. A few incidents of their last visit to KISSIMMEE may interest.

The visit was planned for Christmas week and had been the theme in the Seminole camps for many, many moons.

Of the members of the party, Billy Bowlegs as escort and friendly interpreter was most prominent, yet his endeavor to see that his friends had a good time seemed uppermost in his mind. The party of six Indians were all in neat, yet brilliant, attire to visit the white man's town, all save little eight-year old Mop-o-hat-chee, whose traveled-stained dress worried the mistress of the home, for they were all expected to attend the church Christmas tree that evening. Asking Billy if the little one had another dress, he replied, "she no got 'em; she wash her dress." I replied, "no, she is too little," but being assured that this little red-skinned tot was equal to the emergency, she was permitted to proceed with the order from Billy.

A cunning picture she made, as her long black hair fell around her shoulders and she, with nature's wash board (her tiny hands), rubbed the quaintly made dress until it was clean and ready to be dried. Taking the dress to be ironed, a glance at Mop-o-hat-chee revealed a forest child convulsed with sobs. Not understanding a word of English, she thought her only dress was being taken from her.

None of these Seminoles, except Billy Bowlegs, had ever been in the white man's home, and yet they accepted the change from the wigwam of the weird Everglades with the simplest dignity.

Only once was there any apparent curiosity evinced and this was within an hour after their arrival, when upon being called to the telephone, I looked back to see the two children peering into the room through the French window; no doubt wondering what foolish thing the mistress of the house could be doing. At another time Martha Tiger, the aged

grandmother, came close to the phone with a quizzical look, when I vaguely explained that I was "talking to the store man down town."

In Seminole history old Martha and her contemporaries antedate the American telephone, for with smoke signals and their warriors' quickness in getting news of the enemy they puzzled many an American officer in the Indian wars.

These Seminoles rode in the automobiles with the same calmness that they would do in their cypress dug-out canoes along the water courses of their saw grass homes.

Pictures from the *Geographic Magazine* and letters from the old blue back spelling book interested all of these Everglade people except old Martha Tiger, who said she "old too much."

Who shall say there is no hope for these forest people?

The hour spent at the Christmas tree will live long in the Seminole's memory and will be told over and over again to the members of the tribe, as they sit around the glowing embers of the campfire. Many small gifts were placed on the Christmas tree for these children of the 'Glades. One exclamation of delight came from the little girl when she opened her Christmas box and found a doll. The boy blew one blast on his tin horn to the delight of everyone, the white-haired grandmother enjoying it most of all.

After these demonstrations all gifts were laid away to carry back to their swamp homes, with the exceptions of beads which were brought in numbers by town friends and children. These were instantly added to the already heavy necklace of both Mop-o-hat-chee and Martha Tiger. For is not the Seminole teaching, "plenty beads, plenty good Indian women."

It is a distinct teaching of the Seminole to care for and revere old age. A word of tribute is therefore due to the filial devotion of Willson Tiger toward his feeble and aged mother. With great care he helped her up and down the steps and was always most solicitous for what the doctor thought of her condition. "What you think? Doctor tell you he make her well?" was the question after the doctor's visit.

As this visit drew near to a close and that feeling of homelikeness was apparent, when some humor might be indulged in, we suggested that Show-lod-ka, the good-looking ten-year old boy, should remain and learn to drive the automobile and "make letters" and that Mop-o-hat-chee could stay with him. These two motherless children are direct descendants of the old chieftian Tallahassee, whose grim and determined patriotism wrenched his tribe from the white man's bullets and Uncle Sam's blood hounds. These children were devoted to each other. A few minutes later the boy had vanished and little Mop-o-hat-chee sat on a chair, her feet swinging and rubbing her eyes to stay the tears. The

cause was soon learned. She had been told in her own language what had been said. "She 'fraid you keep her," the older Indian explained and the boy with the same fear had slipped off to his sleeping apartment. Love for their Everglade home has been instilled into every Seminole. They love the country bequeathed by their ancestors, this gift of the Great Spirit to his Florida children, with a love that is frenzied in its demonstration. Shall the great state of Florida deny these home-loving Seminoles their inheritance?

A Picture of a Seminole Camp.

A PICTURE of a Seminole camp 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 fires 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 Nature only reveals, this brown-skinned people live, doing no harm, seeing God in the skies and hearing him in the winds.

The laughter of the huntsman is heard and the love songs of the Seminole Minnehaha make the night beautiful.

Shall we wrest from this people all that the Great Spirit has given them?

Shall we as good Americans allow this helpless people to be crushed out of existence by a handful of speculators whose highest thought is the jingle of dollars?

If this America of ours can protect the property rights of her citizens by the unfurling of the glorious Star Spangled Banner, if she can say to the war-mad nations of Europe, "*Touch not my people,*" surely she will look into her own galaxy of statehood and see the banner of her own flowery Florida besmirched with a blot that is bringing shame to her citizens and causing the country at large to look with reproach upon the political workings of the state.

With the attitude of the American people so ready to enfold with arms of charity and benevolence the weak and the oppressed of all nations, it looks very much as if this stranded red race of 600 souls in the Everglades will find enough patriotism in this land of liberty to secure to them homes upon which to earn a livelihood in the land they love so well, and speculators of the Everglades, whose fetish is the dollar mark, may yet find a checkmate in the "King's Row."

