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Publications of the Women's National Indian Association.

...The...
Case of the Florida Seminoles.

At a recent meeting of the St. Augustine Scientific and Literary Institute and Historical Society, addressed by Col. James E. Ingraham, President of the State Board of Trustees for the Seminole Indians, resolutions were unanimously adopted asking the President of the United States and the Secretary of the Interior to secure to those Indians their present homes, in many instances occupied for a century; calling for school opportunities for the Indian children, and heartily commending the work of Dr. and Mrs. J. E. Brecht among these Seminoles since June, 1891.

Recently, also, the Trustees of the Seminoles in their Report to Governor Bloxham, state to his Excellency that when first appointed they regarded it as useless to try to force those Indians upon any reservation, and that they therefore decided to ask for protecting titles for the lands which they now occupy, and, we add, to which they are deathlessly attached.

From THE INDIAN'S FRIEND for June, 1897, we quote further: This first conclusion of the Trustees was a just, humane and wise one, and one which should ever govern legislation concerning those Indians. Any attempt to force them upon any "reservation" and keep them there would simply lead to or become a war of extermination,

and would justify the Indian distrust of many years. Such a "removal" might, indeed, free Florida soil from Indians, but it would, and should, lastingly burden the consciences of Florida Christians with bloodguiltiness. Assuredly it is too late in our country's history to repeat so great a crime against the Seminoles.

It was our own Association which began the late movement and work on behalf of Seminole homes. We bought four hundred acres of land in March, 1891, established there a mission, secured government co-operation, and, December, 1893, transferred our land, buildings, and religious work in that particular section, to the Episcopal Church of Southern Florida. Our representative and helper in this work, Dr. J. E. Brecht, it was who purchased for the Government, at its expense, in response to our constant petitions, the 6,000 acres of land which are now ready, at different points, to be given in severalty to the Seminoles when they have the courage, and confidence in our people, to become United States citizens. Mrs. Brecht is still in our other work there, and thus this enterprise which has secured so happy results still goes on.

The State of Florida, in June, 1891, voted 5,000 acres for the Seminoles, but there was no appropriation for surveys, or for any work in connection with this vote, and it is now proposed to reserve for the Indians an island in the Everglades, Long Key, which is wholly in Dade county, in the extreme southern part of the State, a place never occupied by the Indians as a home because of its worthlessness. If this plan proposes to set up this island as an old-time "reservation," and now

or at any future time to "remove" the Seminoles there from the lands which they have cultivated, in some cases for generations, where their hearts and homes are, and where for every just reason they have a right to be, every right-minded man in Florida and in Congress should be actively and indignantly opposed to the scheme.

Charles H. Coe, Esq., who has lately written a valuable and fascinating history of the Seminoles, and who has had best opportunities for studying their characteristics and the records concerning them says, in part, in the *New York Sun* of June 6, 1897:—"The last band of Seminole Indians to leave Florida departed in 1858. About 160, including men, women and children, had been induced to come in from their remote fastnesses and join the old chief, Billy Bowlegs, for transportation to Indian Territory. They left behind them not only their old homes and the graves of their dead, but also a heroic little band of invincibles numbering about 100 souls. This remnant, who in some respects might be called the flower of the tribe, could not be persuaded to join the others—indeed, few of them ventured from their secure retreats—and they were finally allowed to remain behind. For thirty years thereafter they were in peaceful possession of the lands they occupied, and were prosperous in their way. They shunned the white man and his settlements as much as possible, only visiting the latter at two or three points when necessity compelled the purchase of ammunition or other articles of common use. From about 100 in the year 1858, those descendants of Osceola's patriot warriors have gradually increased, until at the

present day they number in the neighborhood of 500 persons. The Florida Seminoles are superior to Indians in general. As a rule, they are perfect specimens of manhood; they are truthful, honest, and self-supporting. They never beg, and they do not ask or expect anything from the Government, except to be allowed to remain in peaceful possession of their old homes.

Between the years 1870 and 1888 several attempts were made by the United States Government to help these Indians. Congress appropriated the sum of \$6,000 in 1884 "to enable the Seminoles of Florida to obtain homesteads upon the public lands of Florida, and to establish them thereon." Agents were sent year after year for the purpose of carrying out the objects of the appropriation, but in no case did any of them accomplish anything for the Seminoles. All reported that there were no public lands on which the Indians could be settled, and that the lands they were occupying were owned by the State or by improvement companies. Congress continued to renew the appropriation each year, but the money, unused, reverted to the Treasury, until finally the Women's National Indian Association appealed for its expenditure for the Indians.

In March, 1891, Mrs. A. S. Quinton, President of the Association, visited the Seminoles in the wilds of Lee county, on the western border of the Everglades. She was accompanied by two other women and a native Floridian. The object of her visit was to purchase suitable lands for the establishment of a mission among these Indians, and headquarters for active work. A tract of 400 acres in

Lee county, forty miles southeast of the town of Myers, was purchased, and Dr. J. E. Brecht and his wife were sent to this place for missionary work. After two and a half years, the mission being established, it was transferred with its land and the work to the Protestant Episcopal Church in S. Florida.

In the meantime the Government had been interested and had begun active work by purchasing eighty acres of the Association's land and appointing Dr. Brecht industrial teacher. A sawmill was erected and it furnished lumber for other buildings. Mrs. Brecht was continued in mission work by the Association, and at its expense. It has been the policy of the Association and the Government to assist the Seminoles to help themselves—not to demoralize them by giving them rations and clothing. The Seminoles are quick to learn the white man's ways. The young men especially have a desire for improvement. To-day the confidence of these Indians in the good intentions of the Government and its representatives is established, and that is a great point gained, for they were the most distrustful of all Indians.

A leading object of the Association was the purchase of suitable lands to be held in trust until the Seminoles are willing to remove to them and assume citizenship. Through the efforts of Dr. Brecht about 6,000 acres have now been located and purchased by the United States Government. So far as possible the lands now occupied by the Seminoles, have been embraced in the purchase. Several of their former homes have thus been secured to them, among others the home of old Doctor Tommy, the oldest member of the tribe. It is

fortunate that this is so, for the lands occupied by the Indians are coveted by the whites. Indeed many places on which the Indians had lived and where they had grown crops, orange, cocoanut and other fruit trees, have been taken from them by white men, under the homestead laws.

While Mrs. Quinton was in Florida she interested several prominent women in the cause, wrote to the Governor, and petitioned the State Legislature for a donation of land for the Seminoles. The result was that in the following June 5,000 acres of "swamp and overflowed lands" were set apart, by joint resolution, for this purpose. The Governor then appointed a board of three trustees to select and hold in trust the lands. On April 27 last the trustees held a meeting at St. Augustine, and thereafter sent the above report and recommendation to Gov. Bloxham.

The object of their report, in the success of which the hopes of certain real estate men and cattle owners rest is disclosed by the statement that, as no funds were available for surveys, the trustees "do now recommend the reservation of the whole of Long Key, an island in the Everglades" which they say contains some 5,000 acres of land; also all the marsh for a distance of two miles on all sides of said Key. * * * "If Long Key is made an Indian reservation, it is the purpose of the trustees to advise and influence the removal of the Indians to it, the cultivation of the Island, and its permanent improvement. It is not thought necessary, by the trustees, that the Indians immediately remove to this Key, but that they would thus always be sure of a home when the advancing tide of civilization

had pushed them from the lands which they now occupy, and where they would be free from all encroachment for the remainder of their lives." The reason why they would be 'free' is explained in the next paragraph by the statement that the island 'is not sufficiently accessible to invite the white settler.' One can easily read between the lines of this recommendation!

A more desolate, remote, and fever-infested place probably does not exist in the United States.

Not a word is said in this report about inducing the Indians to occupy the 6,000 acres already secured to them, nor of the just and humane policy of appropriating money to survey and purchase their present homes. Either plan would be in perfect harmony with the broad policy of the United States Government to induce the Seminoles to assume citizenship and accord them every privilege enjoyed by any other citizen of the country.

A more unjust and selfish scheme to disposses a worthy and deeply wronged people has not been hatched in Florida since the treacherous seizure of the patriot Osceola under a flag of truce by Gen. Jessup. The rank injustice of it is strongly emphasized in the following absolutely truthful statement contained in the trustees' report to Gov. Bloxham: "In making this recommendation the trustees desire to call your attention to the Seminoles Indians. They are brave, independent, and an intelligent body of men; they have refused to become the wards of the nation. They support themselves by hunting, fishing and planting; their habits are clean, and they are honest and reliable."

"Let us, then, follow the example of the so-

called savage Seminole, and be honest and just in our dealings with him in this last connection with the atrocious seven years' Seminole war. Let us act like civilized people, and not again be guilty of commencing another war of removal or extermination. Let more money be appropriated to survey and purchase for them the homes they love so intensely, and thus in a measure atone for the wrongs of other days."

Francis E. Leupp, Esq., of Washington, D. C., in an article in the *New York Evening Post*, June 5th, 1897, speaking of Indians in the East, says, among other things*—“The most interesting of these are the Florida Seminoles, of whom there are between 400 and 600 scattered through the Everglades. Until within a little while no one thought of disturbing them there, for they were living on land belonging to the United States, and in a district which no one else cared to occupy. Various speculative schemes for redeeming the Everglades have been pushed to the front of late, however, and, to crown all, the United States government has decided to make a gift of this tract to the state of Florida. With the prospect that the land occupied by the Indians might become valuable, there arose a local demand for their removal to some spot where they would be out of the way of white development of the country and a board of trustees appointed by the state government to select a site for a permanent reservation has just reported to the Governor. This gives a definite air to the enterprise which it has not

*We regret that want of space forbids giving both these articles entire.

before worn, and it would not be surprising if an attempt were made to remove the Indians to their new home at no very distant date. It behooves every champion of the rights of the red man to be ready to resist so gross a wrong.

No better argument against this reservation project is needed than is furnished by the trustees themselves in their report.

Why there should be any need of removing, or corraling, a self-supporting people, honest and of clean habits, is not obvious. For the last ten years all the energies of our government have been directed to breaking up the reservation system, scattering the Indians upon individual landholdings, and absorbing them as rapidly as practicable into the general population—"making white men of them," as the engineers of this wise policy tersely put it.

And where do the Florida trustees propose to put these people whom they commend so highly, and who so desire to be let alone? One would naturally infer that a people who deserve so much by virtue of what they have done for themselves would be well taken care of. Let us see. The trustees "recommend the reservation of the whole of Long Key, which contains a variety of soils, is sufficiently high for health, and can be reached by canoe routes through the Everglades at all seasons of the year." But if it is so choice a spot, why have not the whites seized upon it already for their own use? We see the old story retold—the Indian pushed off into a corner where no whites care to go, and where, being left to his own companionship exclusively, he is expected to continue his course of

civilization by pulling himself up by his own bootstraps.

There is no reason in the world why the "advancing tide of civilization" should "push" the Indians anywhere, if they are protected in their rights as white men are. To protect them is the plain duty of the government of Florida, and it is a pity that the trustees should have put into the public record any insinuation that the State would not do its duty. So far, nearly everything which has been done for these Indians has been done by private effort. The Women's National Indian Association began studying the Seminole situation as long ago as 1888, and three years later purchased a site for a missionary and school station, where it put Dr. and Mrs. J. E. Brecht of Philadelphia in charge. Later it sold to the Government enough of this land to have a school established, and Dr. Brecht was transferred to the government payroll as industrial teacher. He set up a store, in which he sold the goods most needed by the Indians, charging only cost price. This was done to encourage the Indians to trade there rather than go to the towns where whiskey is pressed upon them. But of course this incensed the traders in the town, and increased their desire to get him and his whole establishment out of the way.

Dr. Brecht has been trying for some time to locate definitely, and have methodically surveyed the individual little farms of the Indians. Many of these lie on the hammocks, or high places, in the Everglades, where the waters rarely overflow them. They are difficult of access, and the fund on which he can draw for the cost of the survey is

very small; but wherever a survey is made so that a farm can be accurately platted and described, the United States Government makes an exception of it from the operation of the patents issued to the State of Florida.

The great thing now for the friends of the Indian to do is to see that the scheme for removing the Indians to Long Key is not carried out. The Florida trustees realize that the state would be playing a dangerous game in attempting this; for they say in the same report from which citations have already been made: "These men are now friendly but their animosity and hatred are easily aroused, particularly by encroachment upon lands which they have cultivated in order to earn a living. If they are to be driven from place to place, without a spot which they can call their own, trouble will surely be the result in the near future."



Sumner's right to law

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