

## CHAPTER XII.

### INDIAN TRADITIONS AND FOLK-LORE.



**B**EFORE taking final leave of the Indian River country, we lingered awhile for additional information regarding the Seminoles, particularly of those who had bought stores of us and had promised to pay at a certain time.

At exactly the time appointed the party of Seminoles came in, headed by Indian Parker, the honest sub-chief; and as they stayed several days, camping out on the beach, we improved the opportunity to obtain additional words for our vocabulary.

According to Indian Parker, there are now two distinct bands of Seminoles in Florida, sometimes further divided into three or four. The wildest of them all live over in the Big Cypress, on the west side of Lake Okechobee, in a region practically inaccessible. These are direct descendants of the original Creeks, who came into Florida, from the north, about a century ago.

The Okechobee Indians are the wealthiest and have the best land, and contain among them such famous personages as Indian Parker, Micco, Tony, Charley Osceola, Tustenuggee, Billy Smith, and Tommy Tiger.

Away south of Okechobee and Indian River, on the borders of the Everglades, near Key Biscayne, is another collection of Indian families commanded by young Tiger Tail, and having with them, a few years ago, Little Tiger, Big Tiger, Old Tiger, Ellick, and Chipco, the last of whom was among the bravest fighters in the last Indian war.

The patient Parker sat on the sand hour after hour, imparting to us such information as we desired; and as we have never seen many Seminole words in print, we submit a portion of our vocabulary to our readers, merely remarking that if they do not wish to read the list, they can "skip it" and turn to something more to their mind.



INDIAN SCALP-DANCE.

The Seminole word for "a mile" is *akiska*; "How many miles?" is *akiska nachoma?*

"An axe" is *potsasna*; "an arm," *chesukpa*; "a boat," *pishloo*; "a book," *nacotsee*; "beads," *kokose*'; "a bear," *nokose*', and "a boy," *onunawah*.

"A camp" is *istahapo*'; "an Indian camp," *istachattahapo*'. "A crow" is *oshahawah*; "a cabbage-palmetto," *tallahako*'. When an article is cheap they say, *niskiheta*'.

"A deer" is *ichoo*'; "don't know" is *stuntosh*; "a deer-skin" is *ichoo-hablepe*'; "a dipper," *ahloo*'.

"To eat" is *humbuxjay*; "Me eat," *hompala'na*.

"Fire" is *totkah*'.

"Good" is *hitletutsjay*; "no good," *holawaukus*.

"Go" is *hiepusjay*; "Me go," *ahnetiepusjay*.

"A girl" is *nocktoche*'.

"Hungry" is *lowkow*; "Me hungry," *salowetutsjay*.

"How many?" *nachoma?* "How much?" *innachomah?*

"House," *choko*'; "Indian house," *istachatta choko*.

"A huckleberry" is *chafakana*.

"A knife" in Seminole is *slafkah*; "a pocket-knife," *slafkah pecotskah*.

"The moon" is *hullisshé*'; "a moccasin," *stillepikah*.

"Me" (I), *ahné*'; "Me buy um," *nesalanesjay*; "money" (dollar), *shatokonowah*; "man," *hoonuntakah*.

"Pipe" is *chippakawah*; "potato," *ahkah*.

"A rabbit" is *chofe*'; "raccoon," *wootkoa*; "rifle," *itsah*; "breech-loading rifle," *itsasolotkah*; "road," *nene*'; "rain," *ooski*; "rock," *chato*'; "river," *weahlaka*.

"See-um," *hitsutlesjay*; "Me sleep," *notsepalanaste*'; "shoe," *stillepika onehay*; "smoke," *hoputka*; "smoke-skin," *chosseah*; "sand-hill crane," *watula*'; "squaw," *kooktakah*.

"Thunder" is *tenitskah*'.

"A wood-ibis" is *kakatawah*; probably so called from its cackling cries.

"A wolf" is *yaha*'; "to write," *hotsa'chen*. "What you call um?" *nagatoche'fatake?*

"A woman" is *koktakah*'.

"Yes," *hungkah*; "you," *chime*'; "You go," *chimetiepusj*; "You got um?" *chemocha?*

The Seminole system of numeration is very complete, up to even a million.

"One" is *humkin*; 2, *hokolin*; 3, *totschanen*; 4, *orstan*; 5, *shako'bin*; 6, *epah'ken*; 7, *ko'lopahken*; 8, *ke'napahken*; 9, *orstapahken*; 10, *pahlen*; 11, *pahlen-humkin*; 12, *pahlen-hokolin*; etc.

It is supposed that the Seminoles, like many other wild Indians, used the fingers as aids in counting; hence we find their system one of fives and its multiples.

One of our number had with him an old book written more than a hundred years ago by a bluff old sailor named Romans, and it was interesting to compare that author's accounts with our own observations. In relation to the settlement of this continent he says: "I am firmly of the opinion that God created an original man and woman in this part of the globe, of different species from any in the other parts;" and then he goes on to show the difference between the white people and these savages native to America. "Our women," he says, "carry their children with their faces towards their own; a she savage puts the back of hers towards her own back. When we make a fire we pile the fuel parallel to each other; the savage puts his wood in a circular form, lights the central ends, and by the help of one of the sticks, which he shoves always to the centre, he keeps it alive. We make war in an open way; a savage, by hiding himself, surprises the enemy. Our prisoners are sure of life; those of the savage are sure to die by cruel tortures. When we take a sweat we keep ourselves warm, with the utmost care; a savage, with the pores of his skin open, plunges into an icy river or through a hole in the ice," — and so forth.

After these generalizations, the old author speaks of the Creeks and Seminoles, ancestors of the present red men of Florida, whose customs are similar in every way. "I must relate," he says, "a particular custom of these people: when a deer or bear is killed by them they divide the liver into as many pieces as there are fires in camp, and send a boy to each with a piece, that the men belonging to each fire may burn it; but the fires of the women are excluded from this ceremony, and if each party kills one or more animals, the livers of each are treated in the same manner.

"Like all other savages, they are very fond of dogs, insomuch as never to kill one out of a litter. It is not an uncommon thing, in the nation, to see a dog so very lean that it has to seek a wall or post for its support before venturing to bark.

"They bury their dead in a square pit under the cabin, lining the grave with cypress-bark and placing the corpse in it in a sitting posture, as though alive, depositing with him his gun, tomahawk, pipe, and such other matters as he had the greatest regard for in his lifetime.

"In the Choctaw nation the dead are placed on an elevated stage till dried up, when a set of elderly gentlemen with very long finger-nails scrape the bones, deposit them in a chest, and paint the skull vermilion. At the end of a year the friends and relatives gather around, take the chest down from its shelf, weep over the bones, brighten up the color of the head, and then leave the



INDIAN BURIAL-PLACE.

remains to lasting oblivion. An enemy or a suicide was considered unworthy such attentions, and was at once buried and forgotten."

In regard to the great mounds of earth and shell which are found throughout Florida, this writer says: "This region was possessed by the Cherokees on the arrival of the Europeans, but they were afterwards dispossessed by the Creeks; though neither nation had any traditions for what purpose the mounds were built. Nor even had the nation they had previously dispossessed. All the country for many ages preceding the Cherokee invasion must have been inhabited by one tribe or nation, possessing one system of government, customs, and language.

"The language of these people is very agreeable to the ear; the women, in particular, speak in so musical a manner as to remind one of the singing of birds, and when heard and not seen one might imagine it to be the prattling of young children. The men's speech is, indeed, more strong and sonorous, but not harsh, and in no instance guttural.

"Seminole courtship in the olden time, as to day it is, was very simple. When a young man is determined to marry, and has fixed his affections, he takes a cane or reed, and repairs to the habitation of his beloved, attended by his friends and associates. In the presence of these wedding-guests, he sticks his reed upright in the ground; soon after, his sweetheart comes forth with another reed, which she sticks down by the side of his. This constitutes the ceremony of marriage; then they exchange reeds, which are laid by as certificates of the event, which is celebrated with feasting, music, and dancing, each one of their relatives contributing something to the new couple in their home."

It would seem to be an easy thing to get a divorce in this case, for one would only have to hide his stick or burn it, and then the other would have no proof visible of the ceremony.

More than an ordinary interest attaches to the forlorn remnant of this once powerful tribe, which, within the memory of the older portion of our people, held undisputed possession of the greater part of Florida. It is thought that Florida was once held by the fierce Caribs; later, the equally savage and untamable Yemassee overran the territory, when they, in turn, were dispossessed and finally exterminated by the Seminoles, or Lower Creeks. Whence came this powerful nation, or when they first occupied the territory held by them when first discovered by Europeans, is unknown. Traditions are insufficient to preserve historical facts. It is a notable circumstance that no tradition survives of De Soto's great march of two years among the Choctaws, Chicasaws, Cherokees, or Creeks, though he met and conquered thousands of red men, and left a trail of blood wherever he went.

"From the memory of the old men  
Pass away the great traditions,  
The achievements of the warriors,  
The adventures of the hunters."

Their traditions state that, a long time ago, some wandering clans of Indians from the Northwest found their way to the present States of Alabama and Georgia. There, meeting with plenty of game, they settled in the vicinity of the then powerful tribes of the Florida and Appalachian Indians, who once overspread the country from the capes of Florida to the Mississippi. Gradually acquiring strength with their growth, the Seminoles successfully attacked and incorporated into their confederacy all the tribes within their reach, and became famous and prosperous. Extending themselves northward and eastward, as the supplies of game began to diminish, they settled along the principal rivers of Georgia and South Carolina. They subdued the Alabama nation, and won their good-will by restoring their river and territory. It was ever their policy to annex and make allies of powerful tribes, rather than weaken themselves in efforts of extermination. If the red men had pursued this policy in the early years of our Union, far different would have been their history.

The original Seminole nation soon divided, and became known by distinctive appellations. The northern Indians — by far the most numerous and wealthy — were known as the Creeks or Muscogees; they possessed a fertile and well-watered country, and consequently were able in war and successful in the field. The tribes or clans choosing the southern hunting-grounds retained the old title of Seminoles. Their country was poor and barren; and though numerous, they were obliged to separate into small bands in order to obtain subsistence. Well are they named. Peculiarly significant is their distinctive appellation of Seminole: *Ishti Semolli*, — "wild men, lost men." Wanderers upon the face of the earth have they been from the earliest record of their lives. In the latter part of the last century they inhabited the most fertile portions of northern and western Florida. Their principal town was Micasuka. They were styled the "Lower Creeks," in contradistinction to the Upper Creeks of Georgia and Carolina.

From the many different tribes that had been incorporated into the Creek confederacy, the original Seminole tongue was constantly undergoing changes and modulations. Only among the Lower Creeks or Seminoles was it spoken in its purity, and then only by a few of the oldest and most respectable of the women and chiefs, who made it a religious duty to instruct the young in the language of their ancestors, which, however, was soon forgotten and lost in the frequent use of the speech of the majority.



AN INCIDENT IN INDIAN WARFARE.



The Seminoles were constantly receiving additions to their number from the Upper Creeks who were driven south by the whites, from vagrants and outlaws of other tribes, and from escaped negroes and white men. Their country being a place of refuge for all, equally welcome were they made, in the simplicity of the Seminole heart. This accounts for the many broils and disturbances; for the Seminole was, essentially and peculiarly, a peace-loving and agricultural nation, from the first. They resided in log houses, cultivated crops of beans, potatoes, and corn, and lived a life of peace, so far as they were permitted.

Though several minor difficulties had occurred during the impetuous campaign of General Jackson, the disposition of the Seminole was pacific, and he committed no wanton or unprovoked attack. From the period of the cession of Florida to the United States, in 1821, there commenced a system of petty hostilities by the resident whites who desired the land, and by the settlers of Georgia who wanted the negroes of the Seminoles. Many negroes had fled for protection to the Seminole nation, and had been received as equals. The Indians also held slaves of their own; for the example of their white brother, in this respect, they were not slow to emulate. Though the white settlers, with truth, could claim many of the Seminole negroes, they also claimed and sought to obtain possession of many owned by the Indians, whom the latter had bought and paid for.

By various means and in many ways did the white man seek remuneration for the property his red brother held; but chiefly was this sought and obtained by means of treaties, by which the white man thought to induce the aborigines to emigrate to the far West. The treaty of Fort Moultrie in 1823 assigned the Indians a portion of territory, fixing the northern limits; and they were induced to give up their fields and villages for considerations which, they claimed, were never paid.

In 1832 such was the pressure brought to bear upon Congress and the executive of the State, that the Indians were assembled, represented by their principal chiefs, and induced to sign articles which were preliminary to a final agreement by them to leave the State and settle at the West. After an examination of the country by their chiefs, the majority of whom reported adversely, they were given two years to assemble for emigration. As the time drew near for their departure, the feeling of bitterness and hate that the preceding years had seen engendered by unscrupulous white men grew deeper, and they resolved that, sooner than leave their native land, they would fight the hated white man to the last. The war that ensued is a matter of history. It was begun by the massacre of Colonel Dade and his band of one hundred men, in December,

1835, and it was waged with unparalleled vindictiveness for seven years. It called into action such generals as Scott, Taylor, Gaines, Clinch, and Worth, and taxed the energies of many thousand men to subdue it. It developed new traits in the Indian character, showing that the peaceful agriculturist could be as relentless as the warrior who had trod the war-trail all his days. It showed what a feeble but desperate and determined people could do when aroused.

The Indian chiefs that assumed the control and direction of the Seminoles won the respect, if not the admiration, of their foes. The wily Osceola, the quick and generous Coacoochie, the treacherous Tustenuggee, and the desperate Philip have proved themselves worthy and respected foes.

At the conclusion of the war, in 1843, but a small remnant of the nation was left. Of the fifteen hundred warriors at the commencement of hostilities, but a paltry hundred or so remained in the State at its close. The remainder had either been killed, carried into captivity, or compelled to emigrate.

Since that outbreak the Indians have resided upon lands reserved for them in the southern part of the peninsula, hunting, and tilling their lands. One or two feeble outbreaks have given evidence that the old fire yet slumbers; but since 1858 there has been no serious difficulty with them.

There are at present between two hundred and three hundred Seminoles in Florida; but any accurate estimate of their number is prevented by their vigilance in keeping themselves concealed in the swamps and fastnesses of the interior and the regions of the Everglades. The number of families, as related by the most intelligent chiefs, is about fifty. Upon the borders of Lake Okechobee is the largest settlement, of thirty families. In the gloomy swamps of the Big Cypress, southwest of Lake Okechobee, are from five to eight more, of the most sullen and unconquerable, who shun all intercourse with white men. In the Everglades, some ten miles from the shore of Biscayne Bay, upon the Atlantic coast, are from ten to fifteen families. Upon Pease Creek, a stream flowing into the Gulf of Mexico, are some seven or eight families.

To resolve the different settlements into their radical lineage and go back to the period when tribes of different blood roamed over the State, it would be correct to say that the Okechobee Indians are Seminoles, pure and simple; the Everglade Indians, the Micasukees, are a peculiar offshoot of the Creeks; and the gloomy inhabitants of the Big Cypress are Creeks who were forced (or, rather, whose ancestors were) to join in the war, having been driven from Georgia in the fierce and bloody wars that ensued prior to the Seminole War in Florida.

These Indians hold little intercourse with the whites; occasional trading-visits to the coast being the limit of their communication with them, when they exchange dressed deer-skins, silver ornaments, and sweet-potatoes for the



DEATH OF KING PHILIP.

necessaries of life that the trader keeps in stock,— calico, ammunition, beads, and the much loved whiskey. For the last, though not so immoderate as their Western relatives, they will go any lengths, and do anything to obtain it. The Seminole makes a business of intoxication, and devotes himself exclusively to getting drunk, when the mood and state of his finances will allow. He carries to the trading-post his stock of deer and bear skins, wild honey, beeswax; his wife takes her agricultural products — sweet-potatoes, generally; and after purchasing and begging all the articles deemed necessary to their support and adornment, they invest the rest in whiskey. So methodical are they in this matter that they have sometimes left the trading-post without buying the whiskey, not willing to deprive themselves or their families of the more necessary articles. But, the whiskey being purchased, they proceed to enjoy it. They first — generally this is done — place their knives and rifles in a place of safety in charge of the women, when they give themselves up to the free and unrestrained enjoyment of their dearly bought pleasure. They get very "high," boisterous, tipsy, "tight." In their drunken fits they perform all sorts of extravagances. Sober-looking, dignified chiefs, their heads whitened by the burdens of seventy years, will dance and shout with the agility and hilarity of youth. Their drunken sprees generally end without bloodshed, even without a quarrel, and they expend their energies in shouting and whooping themselves hoarse. The women wait patiently until their lords have recovered their senses, and then they are allowed to inebriate a little on their own account.

Bartram, a writer and botanist who visited the Seminoles over a century since, gives an amusing description of one of their drunken frolics, and tells how the women then procured their share of the liquor. He says: "The men go about in a joyful state, and whenever they meet a woman, insist upon her drinking. This she pretends to do; but, after taking a good mouthful of the whiskey, she discharges it into a bottle concealed in her mantle. This is repeated until sometimes the bottle is filled; and she afterward, when the drunken wretches have wasted their liquor, sells it to the braves at her own price."

In many things the Seminole is superior to his white brother. His uniform gentleness and courtesy to his family are noteworthy. In his trading-expeditions his wife and children always receive their share of purchases, and some little trinket or article of apparel is always bought for the latter. They are ignorant, yet enlightened; neglectful of many interests which the white man considers essential to happiness and prosperity, yet attentive to many considerations of which the white man would do well to be mindful.

They adopt the dress and habits of the whites, so far as they do not interfere with their wild instincts of the chase. Their cabins are of logs, but

open at both ends. They wear the homespun shirt of the white man, but the leggings and moccasins of their forefathers. They cannot read or write, yet they have a complete numerical system which answers every purpose.

If we accept the statement of Washington Irving, there is a deep-seated reason for the Seminole ignorance of reading and writing. This is the graceful writer's Seminole tradition: —

"We have a tradition handed down from our forefathers, and we believe it, that the Great Spirit, when he undertook to make men, made the black man. It was his first attempt, and pretty well for a beginning; but he soon saw that he had bungled, so he determined to try his hand again. He did so, and made the red man. He liked him much better than the black man, but still he was not exactly what he wanted. So he tried once more, and made the white man, and then he was satisfied. You see, therefore, that you were made last, and that is the reason I call you my youngest brother.

"When the Great Spirit had made the three men, he called them together and showed them three boxes. The first was filled with books and maps and papers; the second with bows and arrows, knives and tomahawks; the third with spades, axes, hoes, and hammers. 'These, my sons,' said he, 'are the means by which you are to live; choose among them according to your fancy.'

"The white man, being the favorite, had the first choice. He passed by the box of working tools without notice; but when he came to the weapons for war and hunting, he stopped and looked hard at them. The red man trembled, for he had set his heart upon that box. The white man, however, after looking upon it for a moment, passed on, and chose the box of books and papers. The red man's turn came next, and you may be sure he seized with joy upon the bows and arrows and tomahawks. As to the black man, he had no choice left but to put up with the box of tools.

"From this, it is clear that the Great Spirit intended the white man should learn to read and write, to understand all about the moon and stars, and to make everything, even rum and whiskey; that the red man should be a first-rate hunter, and a mighty warrior, but he was not to learn anything from books, as the Great Spirit had not given him any; nor was he to make rum and whiskey, lest he should kill himself with drinking. As to the black man, as he had nothing but working tools, it was clear he was to work for the white and red man, which he has continued to do. We must go according to the wishes of the Great Spirit, or we shall get into trouble. To know how to read and write is very good for white men, but very bad for red men. It makes white men better, but red men worse."



BURIAL OF DE SOTO.