

CHAPTER V

MISSIONARIES AND FRIEND

SECTION 1. THE REVEREND MR. FROST

For at least 60 years the waves of organized Christianity have been lapping on Seminole shores. At the end as in the beginning, the Seminole stands like the Rock of Gibraltar unshaken in pagan pride. A Reverend Mr. Frost endeavored to establish a school among the Seminoles as far back as 1870; the project was soon abandoned as futile.

SECTION 2. THE IMMOKALEE MISSION

Beginning in 1888, the missionary committee of the Women's National Indian Association, and particularly the association's president, Mrs. Amelia S. Quinton, began investigating the Florida Seminoles. In March of 1891 she, with two other ladies, accompanied by Capt. Francis A. Hendry, visited camps on the western edge of the Everglades. Before returning to civilization, Mrs. Quinton bought 400 acres for the association, just west of the present village of Immokalee (sec. 4, T. 47 S., R. 29 E.); and in June of the same year Dr. and Mrs. J. E. Brecht, of St. Louis, came on to establish the Immokalee Mission.

Inasmuch as Doctor Brecht was shortly appointed Seminole agent for the Indian Service, his work will be discussed under Federal administration.

After two and a half years, the mission was turned over as a gift to the Missionary Board of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the work of which in South Florida was directed by Bishop William Crane Gray. In the summer of 1895 a Rev. Mr. Gibbs with his wife took up residence at Immokalee. He and others working under Bishop Gray carried on at the Immokalee Mission for some 20 years, right up to the time of the appointment of Mr. Spencer as Seminole agent in 1913.

SECTION 3. THE MISSION AT GLADE CROSS

The Episcopal Church also bought the 640 acres in section 8, township 48 south, range 34 east, and established a mission out on the edge of the Everglades which they called Glade Cross. It being rumored that the store at the boat landing in section 15 was a source of liquor for the Indians, the bishop also bought the storekeeper out. The Glade Cross Mission was built in 1898 or 1899, and was at first manned for a part of each year by the missionaries from Immokalee. They built a dwelling, a store, a small hospital, with outhouses and sheds; dug drainage ditches and fenced some fields; grew corn, cane, potatoes, bananas, and citrus fruits on some of the islands and

hammocks. For many long and lonely years, Glade Cross or the boat landing was the home of an English missionary, "Dr." W. J. Godden, a pharmacist. He died out there quite alone on October 1, 1914. This plant was abandoned at the death of Doctor Godden, and, like the Immokalee Mission, has quite gone to decay.

SECTION 4. INDIAN MISSIONARIES

In the fall of 1910 a delegation of 11 headed by the Rev. Mr. A. J. Brown was sent on by seven native Baptist churches of the Seminole Nation in Oklahoma to look over the Florida evangelical field. Although they had no reason to be encouraged by their canvass, these western Seminoles sent on a full blood and his wife to open missionary work at Bower's store, the site of the present Indian town. As they saw only five or six Indians in three months, this venture was likewise abandoned. But again and again these western Indians returned to the Florida field. They were here in 1929.

This is but a partial list of missionary activities. "The Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians have had the field in turn, and all have abandoned it except the latter," Creel wrote in 1911. The Presbyterians are still in the field, although more as friends than as missionaries.

SECTION 5. RESULT OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

The Reverend Mr. Spencer, Seminole agent from 1913 until his death in 1930, was dean of the Episcopal Cathedral in Orlando before he entered the Indian Service, so he hardly can be accused of prejudice against the church. His opinion of missionary activities was not high:

During the entire 24 years of my association with the Florida Seminoles I have never known of the case of a missionary working among them whose influence was not decidedly harmful. The Indian is naturally a very religious person and the detrimental effect of the missionary comes from the fact that they do not try to build up and enlarge the Indian's belief but proceed to destroy what religion he has and then leave the field without giving him anything in return. It is an indisputable fact that in every instance the Indian shows a lower standard of honesty and morality after coming in contact with the missionary.

SECTION 6. FRIENDS OF THE SEMINOLE

If genuine, the quality of friendship makes itself felt even through barriers of race and language. It is difficult to overestimate what the friendship of people like the Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale, the Hendrys and Hansons of Fort Myers, and the Willsons of Kissimmee meant to the Seminoles during the years when they distrusted the Government and hated the missionary. They had one of the dominant race to whom they could turn for disinterested advice. Where could a Seminole stay in a town like Fort Myers were it not for the hospitable Hendry or Hanson back yard? Many of his neighbors wondered why Frank Stranahan kept a horse long after the automobile had relegated most stables to the past. Few knew of his trips in the dead of night with that old horse to bury some Indian baby or friend who had died in the camps on the edge of the town. The Seminole can still count to-day as a heavy asset the interest of many stanch friends.