

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1896.

## AMONG THE SEMINOLES.

THE HOME OF THE MIAMI IN THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES.

Wives are Scarce and Eagerly Sought for by the Young Braves—Congo Huts—Mosquitoes that Torture a White Man but Have no Terrors for the Seminoles.

The Seminole camp of the Miami family on an island of the Everglades, thirty miles up the Hillsborough River, Fla., is nearer to civilization than any other camp of the Florida Indians. The camps of the other families, such as the Big Bends, Cow Creeks, Tallahassee, Allapattas, (alligator), and Oketokus, (magnolia), are all much further in the swamp, at points lying to the north and south of this. To reach some of them a canoe journey of more than a hundred miles from the coast is necessary, through channels so tortuous and uncertain that there is no safety in the trip without an Indian guide. The last census gives the total Indian population of Florida as 215, but after a man makes the thirty-mile canoe voyage to the nearest camp he has not much faith in the census takers' ability to reach and enumerate all the tribes. The Seminoles themselves estimate their numbers in the swamp at about 500, and these are only the remnants of the tribe that once gave the Government so much trouble—descendants of the few who escaped into the Everglades when the rest of the tribe were deported beyond the Mississippi River at the close of the Seminole war. There are now about 2,500 Seminoles in the Indian Territory, where they constitute one of the five civilized tribes. The Indian belief is that those left in Florida have increased in numbers since the war. The young Seminole in the Everglades imagine that the Government is still on the watch for them, and would catch them at the first opportunity and send them West.

In each of the Seminole camps are two or three men, generally young fellows, though sometimes patriarchs, who go out among the whites in winter to sell bead and feather work and baskets, returning to camp in the spring. These men naturally pick up a good speaking knowledge of English, and through them and others who have been peddlers, but have given up the business, the whole tribal family acquires some knowledge of the country. A white man going to the Miami camp has no difficulty in talking with any of its people, except the very young children and two or three old women. They use the Indian language, but understand English and can make themselves understood in it, speaking it nearly always with a curious dropping of some of the syllables. Their Indian words, when interpreted, give a visitor an insight into the names of many Florida towns. There is Yallaha, for instance. Allaha means an orange, and Yallaha is a sweet orange. Hatches means a little river. Homosassa is Seminole for Pepper Range, a phrase now without meaning. Istachatta means red man. Mico, a town on Indian River, means chief. Altaka means oak, and Palatka, much oak, or many oaks, a name still appropriate to the place.

The Indian who greeted two white men recently on their arrival at the Miami camp after a thirty-mile canoe trip up the Hillsborough river was one of the winter taders, and so was not alarmed at the sudden appearance of two palefaces, but he was not such a gorgeous warrior as winter visitors usually see. Instead of the turban and leather coat and bangles, he wore only a shirt and trousers and a much battered straw hat. The shirt was worn open, not only at the throat, but as many rips and rents in the body and sleeves, and the trousers were rolled up far above the knees. But the most noticeable thing about him was that in this exposed state he stood on the bank without paying the least attention to the clouds of mosquitoes, while the white men in the boat were groaning under the torment and waving their hands before their faces to avoid inhaling the insects. Either the Seminole was tanned too hard to be bitten, or the mosquitoes had such a surfeit of Indian blood that they would not touch it. Another noticeable thing was that the young Indian looked very much like a negro. Take away the Seminole's turban and feathers and it is very hard to tell him from a mixed African until he speaks, though all agree that the Seminoles never mate with the blacks, and are very particular in their marriage customs. They despise the negroes and the negroes despise the Indians.

"We want to spend the night here with you," one of the white men said. "Have you got room for us?"

"Yes, plenty room," the Seminole answered, "very much space," and he waved his arms around the horizon to show that there was ample room for two more. "You come up here to landing," and he pointed to a spot on the low bank where the earth was trodden into mud, as it by many feet.

That the world is not so large as it might be became evident the next morning,

when the young Indian, with his hands on the bow of the canoe to draw it ashore, began to smile furiously and exclaimed:

"You come all way to see Chucco, eh? I know you. I tell you crane feathers at Lake Worth last winter. Now I tell you more."

This barelegged backwoodsman looked very little like the imposing Seminole who had strutted about the hotels of Lake Worth a few months before selling impossible slippers and useless baskets, but his account of himself was true enough, and even if it had not been, the circumstances were not such as to warrant the strangers in refusing to recognize an alleged acquaintance. "Chucco" is Seminole for square, but whether the man referred to the trader's methods of doing business or to his physical characteristics was not explained.

The strangers were hardly on shore and their canoe drawn up before they were surrounded by a little mob of Seminoles that included all the inhabitants of the camp except two or three old women who sat in front of the cabins and disdained to show their curiosity. The people had seen the white men, but they made no move toward them until they saw Chucco talk familiarly with them and help them to land. There were men and women, boys and girls, all dressed precisely like so many white people of the "cracker" variety saying that they were whatever odds and ends of civilized clothes the fates provided. All the tattered clothes, however, were arranged with due regard to decency, and every woman, even to the youngest child, was covered from head to foot.

Chucco said something to the man in Seminole, and then turning to the visitors explained that he had told them the white men were customers and friends of his. As it to make his words good, four of the men stepped up and offered their hands, with a "How do?" that was indulgent if not effusive. The women and younger people satisfied themselves with staring at the white men and their few chattels, without saying a word; women and children are taught to keep in the background among the Seminoles.

The camp to which the white men were introduced thus unexpectedly is inhabited by forty-two persons, all so nearly allied by blood that they do not intermarry. They are, in fact, a family rather than a tribe, and the boys, when they become old enough, go off to other camps in search of wives, the girls waiting at home for suitors to come from abroad and carry them away. If Chucco's accounts are to be believed, they do not have long to wait, for women are scarce and in great demand, and the young bucks either marry a girl before she is fully grown, to make sure of her, or bring home some wrinkled squaw whose former husband has recently been removed by an alligator or a rattlesnake. Appearances in the camp supported his words, for there were plenty of boys, but no unmarried girls older than children, and even the old women, old enough to remember their wrongs in the Seminole war, had their mates.

Without a friend at court matters might have gone slowly and uncomfortably for the strangers, for the chief men showed no inclination to be hospitable, at least not at first. But Chucco bestirred himself, and as soon as an opportunity offered to slip a few coins into his hand, and to do a like service for a bright faced boy who had been impressed to carry the guns and other traps, the situation changed. Even the chief men became anxious to do something for their visitors for a Seminole warrior can scent a quarter from afar, and prefers it to all other game. One of the pole huts was offered for a lodging, and preparations were begun to clear it of its contents, but the visitors were not yet aware that the Seminoles' habitations are kept extremely clean, as Indian housekeeping goes, and rather than accept the offer they made a primitive camp under the shelter of a giant water oak.

All these things, however, were seen dimly through hovering clouds of mosquitoes. Both the white men had been on the Florida keys in summer, and had thought themselves able to stand anything in the way of insects after braving the perils of Upper and Lower Matecumbe and Largo, where mosquitoes blacken the walls and make life a misery. But they soon learned that the Everglades are a hundred per cent. worse. The clouds of mosquitoes on the water were replaced by still thicker clouds on land. To hold out a hand for thirty seconds was to see it blackened with them. They stung through the thin clothes, and made war upon every exposed inch of flesh. Both men were gory on hands, face, and neck, stained with their own blood distilled through the insects. It was not only maddening, but dangerous. The worry of it has thrown more than one white man into a fever. The best natured man becomes under this infliction as cross as a bear. A mosquito netting does little good, for the air is so full of them that it is im-

possible to keep them out, and many of the most savage specimens are small enough to crawl through the meshes. And it did not modify the misery to see the Seminoles stand as unconcerned as if the Everglades had never known a mosquito.

The only chance left to a white man in such a case is between mosquitoes and smoke. The mosquitoes madden him, and the smoke suffocates him, and whichever he is suffering under, he thinks that the other would be a relief. The exchange of a few words with Chucco and his people was as much as the white men could stand, and they immediately began to negotiate for a good lively smudge. This is the last stage of human suffering. When a man is so harassed by insects that he waits eagerly for the building of a smudge, he can go no lower. The smudge is bad enough in Northern woods, where it is merely a smoky fire, but in southern Florida it must be a fire smothered with some material that gives a thick, black, rank smoke, or the mosquitoes pay no attention to it. In a few minutes Chucco and the boy had a smudge in operation that was a delight at first, but that soon began to torture the eyes and throat. Having been duly smoked and smothered and baked by fire in a temperature that was in the nineties under the sun, the white men ventured into pure air again to follow their Indian friend and see the curiosities of the camp. While a man is in motion the mosquitoes can be borne much better than when he is standing still, as they are not so likely to settle upon him. A hasty inspection of the buildings showed that the Seminoles are not skilful mechanics. The two log cabins were modelled after the cabins of some of the white settlers on the mainland, but crudely made, with any interstices between the logs that once was evidently plastered up with mud. There were two chimneys, all the cooking being done outside under a tree. But the roofs were far superior to any other home-made roofs to be found in Florida, being of thatch, and a thatch that is not to be mistaken by any one who has ever seen the artistic thatching of the Congo negroes. Nearly all Southern negroes can thatch a roof, but it is only the Congoes and their descendants who can make the handsome and durable thatch that is almost equal to tiling.

"Why, that is Congo work!" one of the men exclaimed, when he saw the first roof. "No! Seminole work," Chucco declared, and he pointed out the old man who did it, and the old man told the same story.

To a Northerner all thatching must appear much the same, but there is a vast difference between the ordinary thatch and the Congo thatch. The Congo negro is the greatest thatcher in the world, and makes his roof of leaves as solid as a roof of boards. He has introduced his work into the West Indies, where it can instantly be distinguished from all other thatches by its symmetry and solidity. But the only Congo thatching in Florida is in a few isolated spots on the keys, and the interesting question whether the Seminoles learned the art from the negroes or it originated with them, is one that cannot be answered on the spot. At all events, they have the true Congo thatch, a framework of heavy sticks lashed together for rafters, with lighter cross-pieces, called "wattles," lashed on, and the whole covered with the long leaves of the scrub palmetto so dexterously knotted and laid that they form a covering as durable as shingles, and much handsomer.

While the visitors are examining this roof from the outside, a young man went past with a wooden pail filled with the heads and scales and other rejected portions of fish and a variety of refuse from the kitchen.

"Going to feed the pigs?" one of the white men asked.

"No, Chucco replied, 'no pig here. Seminole he keep no pigs, no chickens, no dogs, no animals' 'tall.'"

"Then what will he do with that stuff?"

"Throw away!" Chucco replied, making up a face and shrugging his shoulders. "Bad stuff. Umph! Throw away."

The little space between the cabins and wigwams looked so clean that there was evidently some system about the disposal of refuse, and Chucco's answer to several questions revealed the Indian method of dealing with this question. Some of the tribes, or families, it appeared, are somewhat nomadic, though they never move far from their original quarters. They build flimsy huts and pay no attention to outer cleanliness, but move a little further on when the camp becomes too foul for habitation. Other families, like the Miami and Tallahassee, put up permanent buildings, and never move. To throw the refuse into the water would be the easiest way of disposing of it, but experience has shown that there is not sufficient current to make this safe. There is neither knowledge nor material for a system of drainage, but the Seminole does the next best thing, and buries the refuse at some distance from the camp. For this purpose an imaginary semicircle is drawn about a



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hundred yards away, with the camp in the centre. When a pail is filled with refuse it is carried to this spot and emptied into a little ditch a foot or more deep, and covered with soil. The soil taken up to fill one ditch leaves a hole into which the next pail can be emptied, and so, although this Indian sewer is constantly working ahead, the emptying point is never further away from the camp than it was at the beginning on account of its semi-circular form. An old shovel, is left in the ditch always ready for use, and long before the far end of the sewer is reached the offal in the near end has been absorbed, and that place is ready for use again. On an island where all the drinking water comes from the black river, and is constantly moving, this system answers every purpose, and keeps the camp clean and healthy.

"Where do you get the pails?" the guide was asked.

"Make them," he answered. Seminole ingenuity is equal to the making of a water pail, and to describe how the pails are made will be to answer a question that has puzzled the small shop keepers of lower Florida time out of mind. When a Seminole has done his trading he almost invariably concludes the business by begging a barrel, and it makes no difference to him whether it is a flour barrel, a sugar barrel, or one of more substantial construction. He carries it to the water and tows it home behind his canoe, and in due time knocks it to pieces and converts the staves and hoops into water pails, to which he puts handles of rope made by plaiting split palmetto leaves.

The pole huts, of which there are six in the Miami camp, are fairly entitled to be called wigwams, as their construction is exactly similar to that of the western wigwams except in the covering. Six, eight, or ten long poles are sharpened on the thick end and pushed into the ground, far enough apart to make a hut about eight feet in diameter at the base. The tops are drawn together and lashed, and withes are twined around and across them for crosspieces to latch upon. Over this framework a substantial thatch roof is made, and the structure is perfectly watertight. The Western Indian, with his constant moving, uses a blanket for his tent covering, but the Seminole has no use for blankets, and no money to squander on such luxuries. To cover one of these huts with Congo thatch takes about three days of constant labor, but the covering lasts for ten years or more.

It can hardly be said that there is any furniture in the cabins or huts. The beds are bags of moss, and there are some home-made chairs and tables, very rough and rickety. Empty soap boxes hold what little finery the women have, and the bead work and baskets that they make for sale. If there is a mirror in the camp, it was not visible. Chucco laughingly admitted that there is not a book in the place, as there is not likely to be where nobody can read. But there are some old illustrated newspapers. The Seminole is fond of looking at pictures, and whenever the seller of beads and baskets finds an old illustrated paper he puts it in his pocket and carries it home for the delight of his parents and children. Most of the illustrations are beyond their comprehension, but anything in the way of outdoor sports or military life gives them great pleasure. In showing a picture of a dog team in the Arctic region, one of the old men hugged himself as if it gave him a chill, and shook his head; no, no, none of that for him.

The Miami cultivate both corn and sweet potatoes, if the Indian way of letting them grow can be called cultivation. In the spring, which means late in February or early in March, they plant their corn by going over the big fields with sharpened sticks, making holes two or three feet apart, into which they drop a few grains and scrape a little soil over the seed with their feet. There is no ploughing, no fertilizing, no tilling beyond pulling up the worst of the weeds that appear when the rainy season begins. In July the corn ripens, and they store the scanty crop in boxes, to be pounded between stones and baked in the hot ashes. They are not fond of fruit, and take no pains to grow it, but do not refuse what fate throws in their way. The men spend most of their time at hunting or fishing, and birds and fish are their great staples, particularly fish. They have some antiquated firearms, but bows and arrows are more to their liking, as powder and shot are ex-

pensive. In fishing they use the white man's hooks and lines, and they use matches, too, when necessary though there is generally some fire to be found in the ashes.

Some of the men who had been cool enough at the beginning supplied the strangers with more fish for supper than they could eat, but they were jukes, a sort of fresh-water-mackerel, and not very palatable when cooked over the fire of the smudge. By an hour after dark the camp was asleep, except that part of it lying under the branches of the water oak. The white visitors took turns in keeping up the smudge through the long, hot, night, alternately slapping and suffocating, and soon after daylight they began their homeward voyage down the Hillsborough River, without any burning desire to adopt the bold free life of the American Indian.

### THE HONEST FARMER.

He is Simple and Unsuspecting, but Scoops the Piano Drummer.

"Talk all you want to about the bunco steers and other sharpeners of the metropolis," remarked a drummer the other evening at a down-town hotel to a Star reporter, "but some of the sharpest of the sharps are to be found in the country. Out among the fields and lambs and sheep and other innocent things, don't you know?"

"That's because you don't expect to find such sharpness among the rurals," explained the reporter, who was born and raised in the country, and didn't like to see his fellow-countrymen libeled.

"Expecting it or not," insisted the drummer, "the sharpness is there just the same, and it is just as sharp. For instance," and the drummer fixed himself for a longer heat, "some years ago, when I was a drummer in pianos, I'll tell you what an experience I had. Our house was one of the big ones, with an advertisement in every newspaper in the country, and the way we sold pianos was a caution to snakes."

"Also a tip to alleged business men who don't advertise," interrupted the reporter.

"Your 'also' is sustained," said the drummer and proceeded. "As I was saying, we sold pianos right and left, and, as might be expected, we picked up a bad customer at frequent intervals. One of these had got a \$300 piano on a small spot cash payment, balance monthly, on the strength of a farm we thought was his, also on his general reputation, which up to this time had been as good as anybody's in the community."

"Like Eve's in the garden?" ventured the reporter.

"Exactly," smiled the drummer, "if the devil had not tempted that hitherto exemplary female she would have come through in good shape, and just so with our customer. A \$300 piano was more than he could stand, and he went down before it. After his first payment he failed to respond, and we waited as long as was our practice, and then sent word to him to return the piano, as per contract. In due time the piano box, in as good trim as when we sent it, came back, and we put it in stock. A month later it was shipped to another customer, and we heard from it soon to the effect that there wasn't any piano there, but that the box was filled with pieces of wood and iron of about the piano's weight, and wedged solidly into the box. Ordinarily we would not have been so careless, but we were rushing things, and had to neglect details. Now we had to make up for that neglect and went after our bunco friend in the country. He lived two hundred miles away, and at a short distance from the small town to which we had shipped the piano, which was on the railroad. Well, I got there one morning about 11 o'clock, and, tackling the first driver I saw, I asked him if he could take me to Jim Peters' place. He was a nice, honest-looking sort of a chap, and he told me Jim had moved to another place, about twenty miles away, and that I could only get there by driving over five miles to another road and go ahead on that to Jim's station. I paid him a dollar to drive me over, and he told me, as I have never seen Mr. Peters, to ask anybody, and he would be pointed out, as everybody knew him. The station where

he caught the train was only a crossing, and my driver flagged the accommodation, the conductor nodding familiarly to him as I got aboard. As the train moved off my driver drove briskly away, and when the conductor came around ten minutes later, I asked him if he knew Jim Peters, and he almost toppled over on me in his surprise. "Why—why," he stammered, "that was Jim Peters driving you." Then it occurred to me that the piano card on my satchel had given me away and Mr. Peters had done the rest. We tried to get the piano again," continued the drummer, "but we lost all trace of it, and finally gave it up, and Mr. Peters I presume, went with it."—Washington Star.

### The Color Line in Venezuela.

While the color line is not entirely obliterated in Venezuela society, it is not so strictly drawn as in the United States, and the fact that a man has negro blood in his veins does not debar him from either social, professional or political honors. General Joaquin Crespo, president of the republic, and his wife are of mixed Spanish and Indian blood, and she is a very intelligent and estimable woman, by the way. And the amalgamation of races is not unusual among the lower classes. It is a common thing to see a white woman with an octoroon, or even a mulatto, for a husband, and even more common to see a white husband with a tinted Venus for a wife. At public balls, at the hotels and other places of resort, in political, commercial and social gatherings, the three races—Spanish, Indian and negro—and the mixed bloods mingle without distinction. It is an ordinary sight to find black and white faces side by side at the dining tables in the hotels and restaurants, and in the schools and colleges the color of a child makes no difference in his standing or treatment. Some of the most accomplished scholars in the country, some of the most eminent lawyers and jurists, are of negro blood, and in the clergy no race distinction is recognized. I have seen a colored theological student—and one can always be detected by the long, black frock and shovel hat he wears—walking arm in arm with a white comrade, and in the assignment of priests among the parishes the bishop never thinks of race prejudice. This present bishop is reputed to have both Indian and negro blood in his veins.—W. E. Curtis.

### OUT OF THE TOLLS.

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