

Send to Miss Tarbell

New Port Richey, Fla., April 17, 1926

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Dear Editor:

As a Floridian I would like to have the privilege of telling you that I think the article by Ida M. Tarbell, - "Florida, and then What!" one of the best I have ever read. However, it is my opinion that she has given two erroneous impressions,-- first, that all of Florida is flat as to topography,--second, that DeSota found on the shores of Tampa Bay the Seminole Indians. At that time there were no Seminoles -- their fathers were Creeks in the territory that afterward became Georgia. The Indians of Tampa Bay and the coast both north and south were Calusas, and according to legend they came originally from Central America.

Legends relating to the customs and lives, aspirations and failures, loves and hates of a vanished race, are often as full of romantic interest and emotional thrills as the written history of a more advanced civilization. We have the Biblical narrative of the enslavement of the Children of Israel in Egypt,--of their escape and wanderings in the wilderness before they came to the Promised Land. Of the Calusas until the time of the Spanish expeditions we have no written history. They are said to have been a part of the Maya civilization of Central America and Mexico. We can but visualize their hardships and distress when they were conquered by the Aztecs,--their escape and wanderings until they too came to THEIR "promised land"--Florida.

At the beginning of our American history we find them scattered along our south Gulf Coast,-- a race of people distinct and different from all other Indians in the eastern, northern or central part of the continent--differing in features, form, dress, social and tribal life. According to the old Spanish writings they were a proud and warlike race, submitting to torture and death rather than acknowledge the supremacy of the invaders. To escape the hands of the Spaniards, their beautiful women and daughters, chanting hymns of praise to Toya, fell upon their own daggers.

The last great warrior chief of the Calusas, according to legend, was Muscochee, and here on this beautiful Pithlachascotee -- a river in western Pasco County, forever perpetuating the names of Chasco and her lover Pithla, the Calusas took their last stand.

It is said they had with them at this time a captive Spanish Priest known by his Indian name, "La-ka-no-kee". Whether Lakanokee was mythical or real we are indebted to that character for the vivid and picturesque description of primeval Florida. He weaves into his story a dramatic recital of the ruthless manner in which the Spaniards dealt with the natives and the barbaric retaliations by the Calusas. His poetic pen also recites the love romance of Pithla and Chasco and when he pictures the coronation of Chasco as ruler over the people, taking the place of the dying Muscochee, you can fairly hear the rustle of the palms in the Gulf breezes and the distant beating of the drums (tom-toms). When he describes the religious ceremonies of these red men and their human sacrifices to Toya you almost forget that you are not an actual spectator or participant. Lakanokee records the last words of Muscochee which seem like a prophecy taken from our Bible ----the complete annihilation of his people, according to this writer, taking place just about forty years after Muscochee's death.

It is the latter part of this "prophecy" that is so striking and seems to relate to the Florida of TODAY, for quoting in part,---

"When even the memory of this people (Calusas) is forgotten the Great Spirit will give this enchanted land to another ---a strange but noble people made up of every tongue, yet speaking the same language,--from the east and the west, from the north and the south they come; and they shall possess all of the land by the great Sea, and on this river of beauty and enchantment they shall dwell. They shall come in numbers greater than the number of the palm leaves that rustle in the evening breeze the river's winding length, even from the Trident Palm to the broken altar of Toya by the sea; from sea to sea they shall cover the land and from the isles to the high mountains and they shall remain here always in peace and happiness for they shall learn to obey the Great Spirit when I and my people have offended."

This narrative or legendary story, call it what you may, was considered important enough that a few years ago it was printed in booklet form. There are only a few copies in existence.

Coming back to authentic history, there were no Seminole Indians in Florida when DeSoto landed in 1539 in Tampa Bay (Espiritu Santo). The Calusas held the Gulf Coast section,-- the Caribs were in the southeastern portion,-- the Timuquas occupied the lake section, -- the Apalachees were in the northern portion of Florida,-- north of the Calusas and the Timuquas, and the Creek nations, from which the Seminoles separated at a later date, were north of the Apalachees.

Respectfully,

Garben M. De Vries