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THE TRUTH REGARDING "TIGER-TAIL"

Dictionaries do not agree in all things, but upon one point there is no difference of opinion: history *is avowedly a recital of* actual occurrences. Yet how often have we known blatant inaccuracies in historical records ; and how many times have we accepted as true some fictitious statement which was meted out to us, through the ignorance, conjecture or lack of information of some chronicler!

One of these supposed truths in our own Florida history has come down to us through four generations and no less than seventy-seven years, - the incorrect record of an event important enough to be repeated in several of our standard state histories and yet as utterly a mistake as any ever made. However, the originator of this error is, peculiarly enough, entirely to be exonerated of any blame connected with its perpetration. Which statement it is my purpose to attempt to elucidate in the following account of actualities, vouched for by those who have not merely heard, but have really seen.

One who has been interested enough to read anything about the Seminole War, has necessarily become familiar with the name of Chief "Tiger-Tail", a picturesque and important figure in that dark period of our history. I shall not attempt to review the years of that bloody conflict - suffice it to say that we will all agree that Tiger-Tail was in Florida at least so late as November, 1842.

At that time Colonel Vose, who had been in temporary command at Fort Brooke, had accomplished the great object of the policy he had been recommended to pursue in regard to the pacification of the Indians. He had determined their numbers and lo-

cation accurately, as well as their attitude towards emigration. Colonel Worth resumed command on the first day of November, 1842, and there awaited the arrival of Octiarche and a small band, who brought the news of dissatisfaction and threats of insurrection and dissention between the Creeks and the Seminoles. The latter declared their superior right over the former since the land to the south had been given to them ; which authority was resented by the Creeks in such a manner as to suggest bloodshed, should matters bearing upon the subject not be settled shortly. Developments in the situation became so alarming that Captain Seawell was instructed to seize Octiarche and his followers at the earliest opportunity and to send them to Horse Key. In this way only was it possible to overcome infidelity and treachery.

John T. Sprague, in his *Origin, Progress and Conclusion of the Florida War*¹ continues the recital of history at this juncture in the following words:

Octiarche was watched by his followers, to see if he wavered in his determination to carry out what he had pledged in council - *to die upon the soil*. Confiding in him, they ventured within the chain of sentinels, looking cautiously about, lest some ingenious scheme might be devised to entrap them, while they improved with industry every opportunity for purchasing powder and lead. The head-quarters of the army were transferred to Cedar Key, for a short time, where it was reported Thlocklo-Tustenugee, or Tiger-Tail, was sending messengers from his camp, nine miles distant, for whiskey and provisions. Disregarding his promises to remove south, with others, he had idled away his time, indulging in the most brutal intoxication. This was in conso-

¹ New York, 1848, pp. 499-502.

nance with his general conduct. By promises, treachery, and cunning, he had been the principal instrument in protracting the war three years, and by his counsel and advice had added to its sanguinary character. His plea now was, indisposition of the women and children who were to accompany him. Excuses of the kind were too common with him, and too often resulted in a renewal of hostilities. Surgeon Wright and Lieutenant Sprague, U. S. A., visited his camp, under the practicability of taking him by force. He was found in the midst of a scrub, stretched on a bear skin before a small fire, surrounded by six men and eight women, and several children. He was evidently in a bad condition, not from sickness, but bruises received in drunken revels, by which he had been maimed to such an extent as to be unable to travel. He could not see from the effects of blows, and his face had been severely scratched and bitten. From the position of his camp, he could be surprised, which was the only method of ever securing him. Captain J. M. Hill, assistant-quartermaster, then in command at Cedar Key, by a judicious system of negotiations and intercourse, executed the duty intrusted to him with complete success. Lieutenant T. Jordan, 3d infantry, was dispatched with a detachment of twenty men, instructed to bring Tiger-Tail to the post. This officer, by an alert and decided movement, surprised the camp, and in spite of arguments and threats, effected his purpose. This chieftain, the reckless violator of every promise and obligation ; the active instigator of cruel acts from the commencement of the war, and the artful diplomatist, was brought to Cedar Key on a rude litter, borne by the men of the detachment, accompanied by six men, and thirteen women and

children. He was transferred to Horse Key. The territory was thus relieved of an insidious, daring, and intelligent foe On the 29th of December, Major Seawell, at Fort Brooke, by well-concerted means, secured Octiarche and his entire band This band, together with Tiger-Tail and his few adherents, embarked for New Orleans Barracks, Louisiana, in charge of Lieutenant F. Britton, 7th infantry. The suddenness of their capture, the transition from a roving life to the limits of Horse Key, and their immediate departure, left no time to mourn over their fate, or to express regrets in parting from the land upon which they had, in council, declared their determination to die The number assembled at the Barracks at New Orleans, preparatory to starting for Arkansas upon the rising of the waters, comprised two hundred and fifty souls ; some of each tribe that had ever been in Florida Tiger-Tail, the most prominent chieftain among the number, died at the Barracks soon after his arrival. From the time he left Florida, his health failed rapidly. He was gloomy and reserved, and had no communication with any one but a sister, who strenuously exerted herself to cheer his spirits, and add to his comfort. Two days prior to his death his mind was gone. He occasionally muttered a "talk" repeating the names of Indians and familiar spots in Florida, terminating with an Indian song, to which he kept time with his hands and feet. On the day of his decease he asked to see the sun as it set. In a reclining posture, he gazed at it intently, continually opening and shutting his eyes, and shaking hands with those around: "I see," said he, "the sun for the last time!" As it sank, he

folded his arms, closed his eyes, and, while its rays lingered upon the horizon, his spirit fled. Thlocklo-Tustenuggee, known as Tiger-Tail, was dead.

So goes the most generally accepted historical authority's version of the affair. All of which proves that even the most humanly correct of positive statements is not invariably infallible.

Tiger-Tail was not dead and, moreover, he had never been sent to New Orleans!

Such a statement, in direct opposition to what has been accepted as an indisputable historical fact for many years, calls for explanation and proof, which of necessity must be more than hearsay.

In 1870, Marcellus A. Williams, one of the government surveyors of Florida, was encamped on the east side of the Everglades, a short distance from the Indian village which was situated about twelve miles north of the present site of Miami, and at the head of Snake Creek. With Mr. Williams was his thirteen-year-old son, who accompanied him on those trips into the Seminole country for five years, from 1870 to 1875. Because of the stern and strenuous character of the work to be done in that wild and uninhabited area, the little lad was often left with the trusted and faithful camp hands.

The presence of the white men was an inducement to the Indians to visit their camp, oft times in curiosity, many times for trading, but always they were friendly and as trustworthy as was consistent with their primitive mode of life. Little Arthur formed many interesting friendships during those years and many a long day was whiled away among his Indian companions.

One morning he had gone into the village, which consisted of thirty or forty huts, to spend the day with

young "Tiger-Tail" who entertained him by dressing him up in the regalia of a Seminole chief and then had a delightful time laughing at his uniqueness, in a good-humored, jolly manner. This youthful Indian was a silver-smith of his tribe, and it had been one of his duties to make the ornaments destined to adorn the breast of the chief. He had accomplished this by hammering silver dollars into crescent shapes and boring them with holes so that they might be strung or sewed to the front of the shirt. The white boy strutted about for the amusement of his friend and otherwise enjoyed himself until he became tired. Feeling completely at home, he lay down on young Tiger-Tail's bed of pine-needles and deer skins and fell asleep.

It was late afternoon when he awoke and through the open door he could see, standing in front of the hut opposite, a tall, dignified and majestic looking old Indian. He lay still for a while, watching the chief (for so he was dressed) as he fashioned an oar with a drawing knife. Finally, his childish imagination and curiosity overcame him, and he left the hut and approached the venerable Seminole.

There was a dead wild-cat on the ground beside the red man, which of course attracted the young hunter's attention.

"Did you kill that?"

"Incar,"² said the Seminole solemnly. "You eat him?" with the suggestion of a twinkle in his eye.

"No. Do you?"

"No!" was the emphatic and scornful answer. "Him holowagus!"³ And then in explanation: "Indian skin him."

There was silence for a time, while the Indian continued his work on the paddle. Then, suddenly - "What your name?"

² *Incar* - Yes

³ *Holowagus* - **No good.**

"Arthur Williams."⁴

"Your papa over there?" And he indicated the direction of the surveyor's camp.

"Yes, that is my papa. What is your name?"

The Seminole drew himself up to his full and impressive height and in a voice born of pride and importance, rolled out the syllables, in a deep, rich tone, ---"*Tiger-Tail!*"

That he was *the* Tiger-Tail there can be no doubt, because although that was the first time that he had been seen by Mr. Williams or his son, it was by no means the last. In fact, he became a frequent visitor to their camps, conversing with them freely and proving to them in more ways than one that his reported emigration to New Orleans and his subsequent death was entirely a myth. Almost the first question he asked Mr. Williams related to his friends the Gambles of Tallahassee at whose hospitable home he had visited and with whom he had spent more pleasant days in the past. His references to this as well as to other occurrences which were particularly the experience of Chief Tiger-Tail can be accepted as evidence. that he was none other than that Indian himself.

With this knowledge it is easy to see how the mistake occurred in the first place. Lieutenant Sprague distinctly states in his account, that when Lieutenant Jordan surprised Tiger-Tail's camp, he found that individual in a decidedly deplorable physical condition as the result of a drunken brawl. He particularly mentions the scratches and bites on the chief's face. Now, it will take little imagination for us to reconstruct the vision of that maimed countenance - swelling beyond recognition, blackened and closed eyes, thickened and purple lips and possibly a broken nose. In fact, perhaps in that unfortunate condition, Tiger-

⁴ Arthur T. Williams, President, Florida Historical Society.

Tail's best friend would have had a difficult task to positively identify him.

The reasonable conjecture and undoubtedly the truth of the whole matter is that Tiger-Tail had been informed of the intended capture and had made use of the information by escaping. He rendered his leave-taking doubly secure by substituting another Indian of his stature and physique and with the aforementioned facial advantages (because whisky was well known to be the particular Nemesis of Tiger-Tail). How eminently successful was his strategy has ample proof in Lieutenant Sprague's chronicle.

"Artful diplomatist" that he was, it is not at all hard to accredit him with powers of observation and mental keenness above that of his white conquerors, and no little might be said for the loyalty and cleverness of the Indians who aided him to carry out his daring scheme even after they had reluctantly left the land of their birth, knowing he remained behind to enjoy what they must relinquish forever.

ISABELLA M. WILLIAMS.