

F  
317  
700-1  
.M2C31

---

*The Land of*  
**MANATEE**

---



Number 1. Historical and Descriptive





Class F 317

Book .M2C31





# *The Land of Manatee*

A DELIGHTFUL REGION  
*on the*  
WEST COAST  
*of*  
FLORIDA



IDEAL CONDITIONS OF LIFE IN A  
NEW-OLD COUNTRY

BY

**Morton M. Casseday**



Number 1

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE

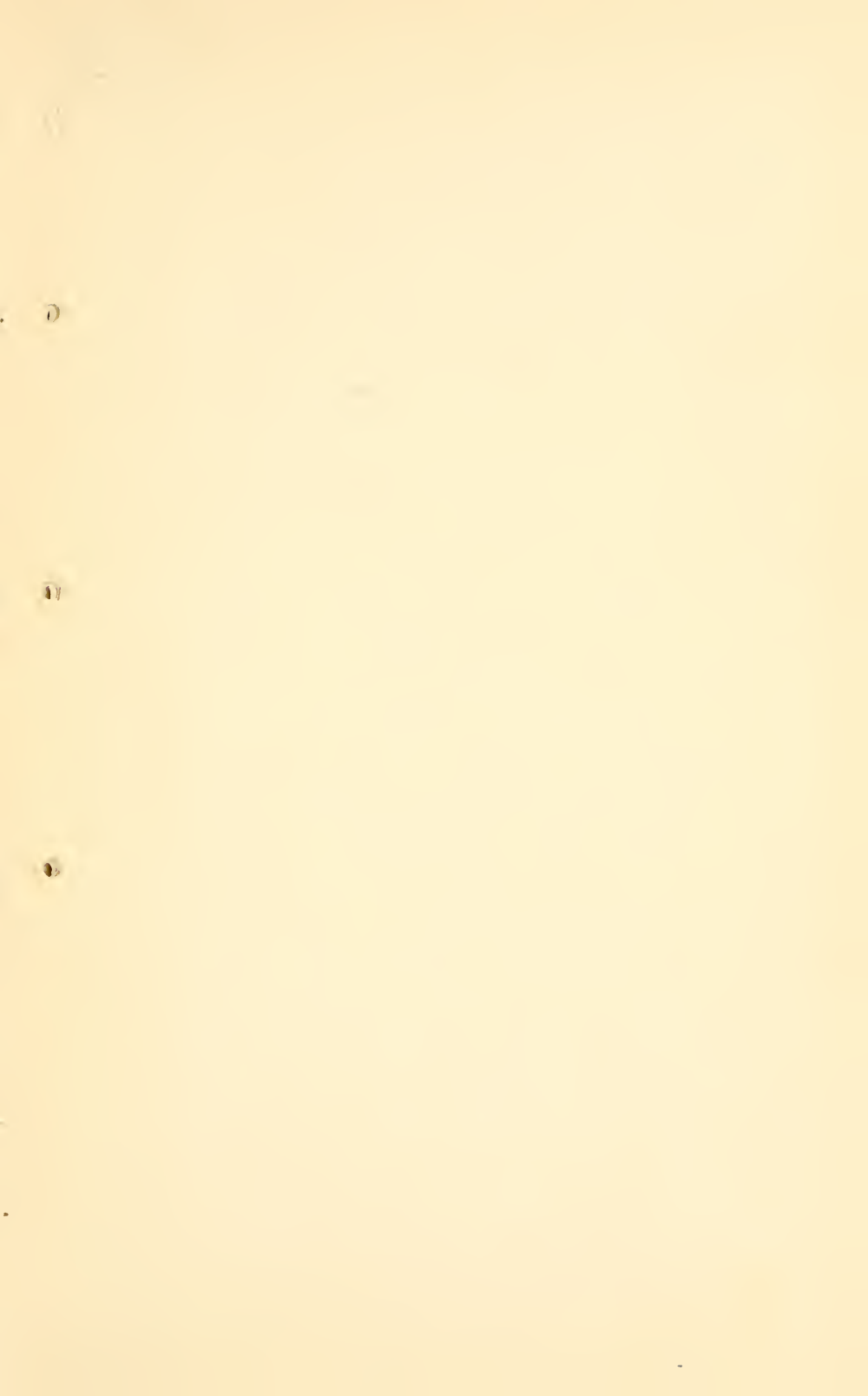
317  
18231

## *Introductory Note*

**T**HE conditions described in this and the other two booklets of this series are just as they have been found after painstaking, personal investigation. In publishing the information here contained, it has been the purpose to state only facts, such as the tourist, the settler or the investor may rely upon.

*Reissued November, 1905.*

JAN 1906  
18231





"ON THE MANATEE RIVER"





*The  
Garden  
of the  
Hesperides*

**THERE IS A LARGE AND BEAUTIFUL** and prosperous section of Florida, of much present import to its own people and those of the country at large, and of future importance assuredly far greater, which, nevertheless, in comparison with the St. Johns river region and the East Coast, is so little known to tourists and prospective settlers that one who has been over it has the feeling of a discoverer. If he has made a journey of discovery, so may other people. That is the difference between Twentieth century explorers, who travel by railroad trains, and Sixteenth century adventurers, who went in a caravel. The point of similarity between the modern discoverer and him of nearly four hundred years ago is that if what each of them found here in Florida is not the garden of the Hesperides it is a very fair practical substitute for it—at least in this practical age, when men realize that their golden apples have to be cultivated and cannot be plucked in a wild state. De Soto, in search of El Dorado, landed here in 1539, and the reason he didn't see that he had found what he was looking for was because he didn't know the signs. Besides, the Indians, who naturally disliked to give up a good thing, told him that El Dorado was "a little farther up the creek," just as fishing holes and the milk sickness are nowadays.

However this may be, certain it is that had De Soto traveled the world over he could have found no nearer approach to what he sought than he had then before him in what is now Manatee county. It, especially that part of it immediately adjacent to the Manatee River and south from the mouth of the river along the shores of the bays and for a mile or two inland, embraces every attribute of beauty and charm associated with Florida in its most poetic and romantic aspect, as well as all of those qualities of a more practical and utilitarian sort which appeal to persons who may be seeking a livelihood from the soil, while enjoying the delights and beneficence of a winterless land. Here is a country, almost tropical in character,

frequently entirely so in appearance, that is exquisitely beautiful, full of romance in tradition and aspect, and of a marvelous fertility. Manatee county contains all of the desirable features of Florida, and lacks entirely those objectionable ones that in some localities have caused disappointment to the tourist and loss and failure to the resident. It is the healthiest county in the State, and is largely populated by persons who years ago went there in the desperate hope that here, if anywhere, their lives might be prolonged.

*A  
Promise  
for the  
Future*

**THAT THE REGION** is not more widely known is due to the fact that until recently it has not had adequate transportation facilities. Its inhabitants are those who have searched for such conditions as it presents, and until the present time there has never been the occasion or the opportunity to make the country known to the world. That it will immediately become a favorite place of resort for tourists, as well as a country eagerly sought by settlers, is assured by its natural advantages. The soil is rich, the climate mild, in both winter and summer, and the scenery is beautiful, interesting and of great variety. and Fishing hunting are ideally good. The gulf of Mexico with the Gulf Stream and the winds that blow from it, have always prevented anything like a killing frost, and yet in the summer the days are never excessively hot, while the nights are invariably cool. The thermometer rarely reaches 95°, and then only for a few hours.

The atmosphere is never humid and oppressive, and at night there is always a breeze, usually from the east—from the Atlantic—which, blowing through the pines that fill the interior of the peninsular, is not only refreshing but tonic. Men and women work out of doors all day without discomfort in the midst of summer, and a sunstroke is unknown. It is the common experience of persons going to this region in summer to find the heat much less oppressive than it is at their own homes, even when the thermometer registers as high as or higher than they a



"A BIT OF ROAD AT ONECO"





"ENTRANCE TO FAIR OAKS"  
NEAR MANATEE



accustomed to, the explanation doubtless lying in the presence of great bodies of salt water all about.

Even under conditions as they have been Manatee county has been one of the most productive counties in Florida, both in citrus fruits—chiefly oranges, of course—and in garden produce. Its waters also have supplied millions of pounds of the finest fish annually to the Northern markets. Now that there is rapid rail communication from the heart of the section and from its southernmost extremity, the importance of the county in all of these directions will be increased many times, and especially will the trucking industry be rapidly developed; for there is no better land in the world for gardening than is the high hammock\* land of this county. It was the freeze of 1894-95 that sent orange growers into Manatee, and the truck gardeners followed. With only steamboats to Tampa as a means of reaching the markets, the fertility of the soil is such that the county already ranks as one of the most productive of the State in its exports of early vegetables as well as of fruits.

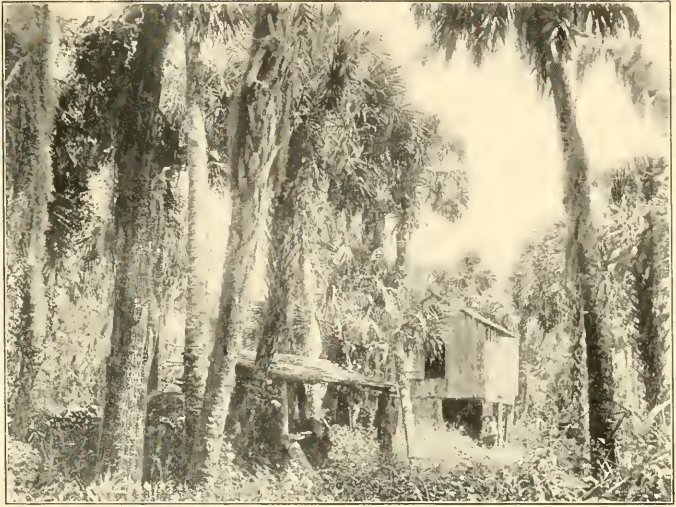
**IT WILL BE INTERESTING** to note where Manatee county is and to give some account of the early history of the locality; for, to be a country as new and undeveloped as this is, it has a long history in which tradition and fact are mingled in a way truly romantic. The county is bounded on the north by Hillsborough county, in which Tampa is situated, and of which it originally was a part, and by Tampa Bay; on the west by Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and the Gulf of Mexico, which also reaches around the string of outlying keys and touches the county on the south. A ride of fifty-nine miles by rail brings one from Tampa to Braidentown, the county seat. This is the center of the population and the life of the county. Across the river is Palmetto, a thriving, active place and the actual temporary terminus of the railroad; a mile farther up is the town of Manatee, the only incorporated town in the county, while other hamlets and villages dot

*Early  
History  
of  
Manatee  
County*

the river bank for some miles, all in sight from the dock at Palmetto or Braidentown. The scene is a beautiful and animated one, as there is plenty of life on the water as well as on shore, and one might imagine himself in a populous district, to judge by these evidences. But as the county is forty-eight miles long, has an average width of thirty miles, and contains 1,400 square miles, while its population is only between 5,000 and 6,000, this appearance is deceptive, as one soon learns if he goes back into the mainland a short distance or goes a few miles from this center, either up or down the stream.

*A  
Beautiful  
River*

**THE MANATEE RIVER** gives character as well as its name to this entire section of country and has heretofore been its main highway, while its banks, especially the south bank, naturally have been selected by those who have made their homes in this smiling land. It is one of the most beautiful streams in the world. Towards its mouth, where it empties into Tampa Bay, it more properly may be called a bay than a river; for here it is a broad sheet of water, from one and a half to two miles wide, flowing with the tides. Its banks are lined with tall cabbage palmetto trees, under which grows a wild grass that runs down to the white sand of its gracefully curving beach. As you come up the river, for a mile or two, the only house that you see is a low structure, almost hidden by palms, that was built of shell and sand by the Spaniards long before Americans had an existence. Under its palm-thatched roof Gen. Harney had his headquarters in one of the Seminole wars. Just back of you and in plain sight—you passed it but a few minutes ago—is the fortress of Egmont Key, which, with its companion, Mullett Key, guards the pass from the Gulf into Tampa Bay. Here the Government keeps 300 soldiers, as well as modern coast-defense guns that are among the most important safeguards of its shores. The lighthouse on Egmont Key is a prominent object in the landscape, and you probably have recognized it from the pictures you have seen of this spot.



"AN OLD-STYLE HOME"  
NEAR MANATEE





“ A PALMETTO HOUSE AND INMATES ’  
MANATEE CO.





From a broad, majestic stream, on whose astonished bosom De Soto sailed his ships, the river gradually narrows until, miles up, the branches of the trees on either bank meet and form an arch of dark, waxen green over the dusky, lazily flowing water. At its mouth in Tampa Bay one can imagine himself looking at a scene the ideal creation of a poet—some dream of the Tropics, where the glad gods live and golden loves sport with long-limbed woodland nymphs, and mermaids sing on yonder dream-island, and the tall palms lean murmuring to the blue, painted sea that laps the low, green shore; and the soft, sweet air kisses the warm and languorous earth—and presently you will rub your eyes and be awake. But it is a real scene, and its seductive beauty is a picture that you will always recall.

It is as you near Braidentown that the river takes on another aspect. Here, some five miles from the mouth of the stream, pretty houses dot the banks, well kept gardens run to the water's edge, and bananas, orange trees, and other fruit trees are interspersed with the palmettos, the pines, and the grand, moss-clad live oaks. You may imagine yourself in some favored spot of a well settled and highly cultivated tropical country. The bluffs and Indian mounds that characterized the lower river have given way to gently sloping banks, and sail boats and naphtha launches ply from point to point. A steamboat or two may be at the Palmetto or the Braidentown dock; for the river is still navigable for the boats that ply the waters of the bays. Indeed, it is navigable for eighteen or nineteen miles above Braidentown, to Rye, where it narrows to a little stream. A number of creeks lead off into the interior, and it is in these that are caught many of the game fresh water fish that help to make the whole region a very paradise for fishermen.

On the road from Tampa you have come through miles of pine lands, where the turpentine gatherer is stripping the land of its trees, only to make it ready for the orange grower and the farmer; for these pine lands are rich in

their possible productivity, as is amply testified at frequent intervals where the land has been cleared, and now fine groves of orange trees or wide fields of vegetables prove the fertility of the soil. You pass, too, through miles of the uncleared hammock lands, richest of all when the dense growth is once removed. Witness the gardens just north of Palmetto! You will have seen hundreds of strange and beautiful fowl as you came through a watered region, and even from the window of your train you probably saw alligators making their leisurely way through the shallow ponds, their long snouts lifted enquiringly above the water to gaze open-mouthed at a greater monster than themselves. Notwithstanding the railroad, hundreds of these rapidly disappearing beasts still infest the streams in a part of the country through which the line runs.

*Bathing  
in the  
Gulf of  
Mexico*

**BY ALL MEANS YOU SHOULD STOP** at Braidentown, and from there drive and sail to the points of interest. As yet Palmetto has no hotel, but that is a condition only temporary, and, doubtless the present year will see the building of one there. It will be worth your while to join one of the weekly bathing parties to Anna Maria Key, just off the mouth of the river. A launch will convey you quickly down the stream and across the bay, and a walk of less than a quarter of a mile brings you to the Gulf side of the key, where the fine beach, the gently rolling surf, and the warm, heavy water—it is said to be the saltiest water on earth—form ideal conditions for a sea bath. The river, the bay, and the palm-bedecked key completely realize your expectations of the picturesque beauty of the far South.

It is no wonder that a place so inviting should early have attracted the interest of those who approached it. The numerous Indian mounds on the banks of the river and the shores of Sarasota bay, just to the south, tell their own story. The Natchez and the Seminoles inhabited the country, and there were frequent wars between them and the whites, extending over the first half of the nineteenth



A CRACKER TALLY-HO





RUINS OF SUGAR MILL TWO MILES  
FROM PALMETTO



century. It was only after the conclusion of the war of 1835 that the Indians retired and the white men were able to occupy the land. There were occasional outbreaks until 1855, when the last war with the Seminoles was fought.

A number of pretty legends have been built around a most mysterious natural phenomenon that to this day is unexplained. Some of these are Indian and some Spanish stories. The phenomenon in question is known as the Mysterious Music of the Manatee. It is a musical humming that is heard at many points on the river, especially, at this time, in the neighborhood of Rocky Bluff, five or six miles above Palmetto and Braidentown, though it may be heard anywhere from the mouth to this place. It is the sound of wind whistling through telegraph wires, or, more poetically, something like the music of an Æolian harp. A pole thrust through the water to the river bottom will generally produce the sound.

**THE FIRST MEN** who came into the county after the Indians were driven out were Josiah Gates and Miles Price, who in 1841 settled, Price on the north and Gates on the south side of the river. A son of Mr. Gates who accompanied his father, being then six years old, is the Rev. E. F. Gates, now a venerable minister living at Manatee. These pioneers came from Tallahassee, as did Messrs. Reed, Gillyard, Wyatt, the Braiden brothers, Pinckney Craig, Ledworth, Ware, McNeil, and Tresca, who all came during the early 'forties. Mrs. Tresca, now Mrs. Ware, is still living in the neighborhood. One of the early settlers was Mr. Glazier, from New Orleans.

These men established the town of Manatee, the name of an amphibious animal weighing five or six hundred pounds, that then abounded in these waters, but is now nearly extinct.

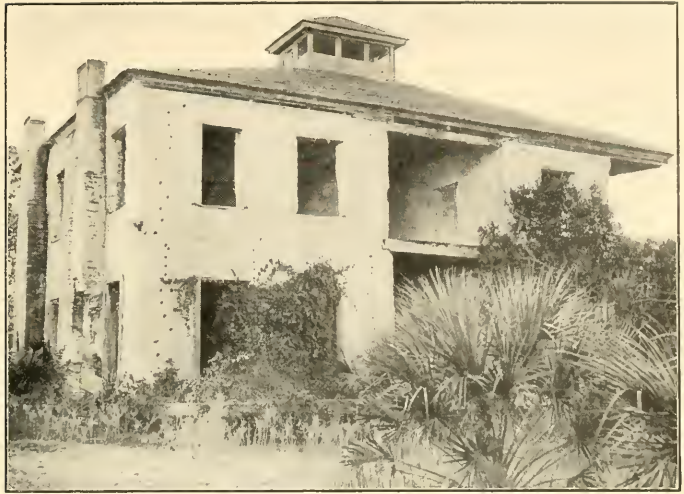
About the same time Mr. Robert Gamble, also from Tallahassee, settled on the north side of the river and there established an enormous sugar cane plantation and

*The  
First  
American  
Settlers*

sugar works. There is little left even of the ruins or the latter, as they supplied the brick for most of the chimneys that were built in the neighborhood for years after the building was wrecked. The Gamble mansion, since known as the Patten mansion, is still in a comparatively good state of preservation.

Another of the early arrivals was Mr. Edmund Lee, a consumptive, who came to Manatee in the 'forties, hoping to preserve his life a few years. He died about ten years ago. One day he suddenly exclaimed: "I believe I'm dead," and he died in the instant. All of the other consumptives who have ever gone there to make their dying as prolonged as possible are still living and have long ago given up all idea of dying at all.

Before recounting the interesting history of the Gamble plantation and of "Braiden Castle," the two most pretentious establishments of those old days, it will not do to omit from the list of early settlers the name of Madame Julia Atzeroth, "Madame Joe," as she was universally called up to the time of her death, comparatively a few years ago. She and her husband were Bavarians, who came to America in 1841 and went South in the hope of restoring Madame Atzeroth's health. They went to Florida in 1843, and "homesteaded" a place on Terra Ceia Island, which is on the north side of Manatee River, separated from the mainland by a narrow inlet from the bay. Here the little family of three—they had a girl baby—lived at first in a tent and afterwards in a palmetto hut that they themselves built. This in time gave way to a log house, Madame Joe doing her share of the work of felling the trees and cutting the timber. They soon had a vegetable garden and sold their produce at Ft. Brooke, now Tampa. They had to endure many hardships and many difficulties due to the primitive and unsettled conditions that prevailed. Mr. Joe engaged in the Indian war of 1855 and was a Confederate soldier in the civil war. He died on Terra Ceia island in the '70s and in 1876 Madame Joe moved to Fogartyville, just



"BRAIDEN CASTLE"





"OLD GAMBLE MANSION  
NEAR ELLENTON





below Braidentown. Here, in 1876, she planted some grains of Mexican coffee, and in 1880 she sent to the Commissioner of Agriculture at Washington the first pound of coffee ever grown in the United States, for which she received \$10. She continued the cultivation of coffee sufficiently to demonstrate its entire practicability in this part of Florida, though it has never been raised there on a large scale.

An early attempt to raise tobacco, like a later one, proved a failure. Some of the settlers made a serious effort in this direction, importing the plants and the labor including a number of cigar makers, from Cuba. The effort was abandoned after two years, and then sugar cane became the chief product of the neighborhood.

**MR. ROBERT GAMBLE**, who was among the pioneers from Tallahassee, had the largest plantation. It was midway between what are now Palmetto and Ellenton, on the north side of the river. At one time he had 1,400 acres in cane and employed several hundred slaves. He built a large mill, bringing the brick and machinery from the north in ships. The sugar was taken to Tampa, then Ft. Brooke, the county seat of Hillsborough county, and the principal communication with the outside world was by means of the boats that called for the sugar crop. The farmers produced everything they used except coffee and flour, though a few of the sugar raisers bought corn for their stock. Generally they raised their own supply. As for meat the ranges were filled with wild cattle and hogs, and all kinds of game were abundant. The river and other streams teemed with fish, as they still do, and shell fish could be picked up as they were wanted. Vegetables grew for the asking, and it was a time of plenty. The Indians were generally peaceable, coming in to trade and being guilty of only an occasional outbreak, except in 1855.

The civil war put a rude end to this condition of peace and prosperity, and forever ruined the sugar industry of

*Where  
They Just  
Helped  
Them-  
selves*

his section or country. The Gamble place then belonged to Cofield and Davis, of New Orleans. Soon after the breaking out of the war they returned their slaves to that city and all attempt to manufacture sugar or even raise the cane was given up. But not satisfied with this and with the blockade that was maintained at the mouth of the river, a force of Northern soldiers was sent up to the mill on a gunboat called "the Chicken Thief" with orders to destroy the place. This they did by blowing it up, leaving it a shapeless mass of bricks and scrap iron. Even the bricks as they left them have now been carted away. The accompanying illustration is made from a photograph taken before the bricks were carried off.

With the ruin of its leading industry the county went into a period of inactivity from which it was aroused less than ten years ago, when it was reborn.

In 1875 the Gamble plantation was bought by Mr. George Patten, under a foreclosure. The place has been divided and much of it sold, though the Pattens still own part of it. Mr. Geo. Patten, son of the original purchaser of that name, owns the home place.

*Mr.  
Ben-  
jamin's  
Hiding  
Place*

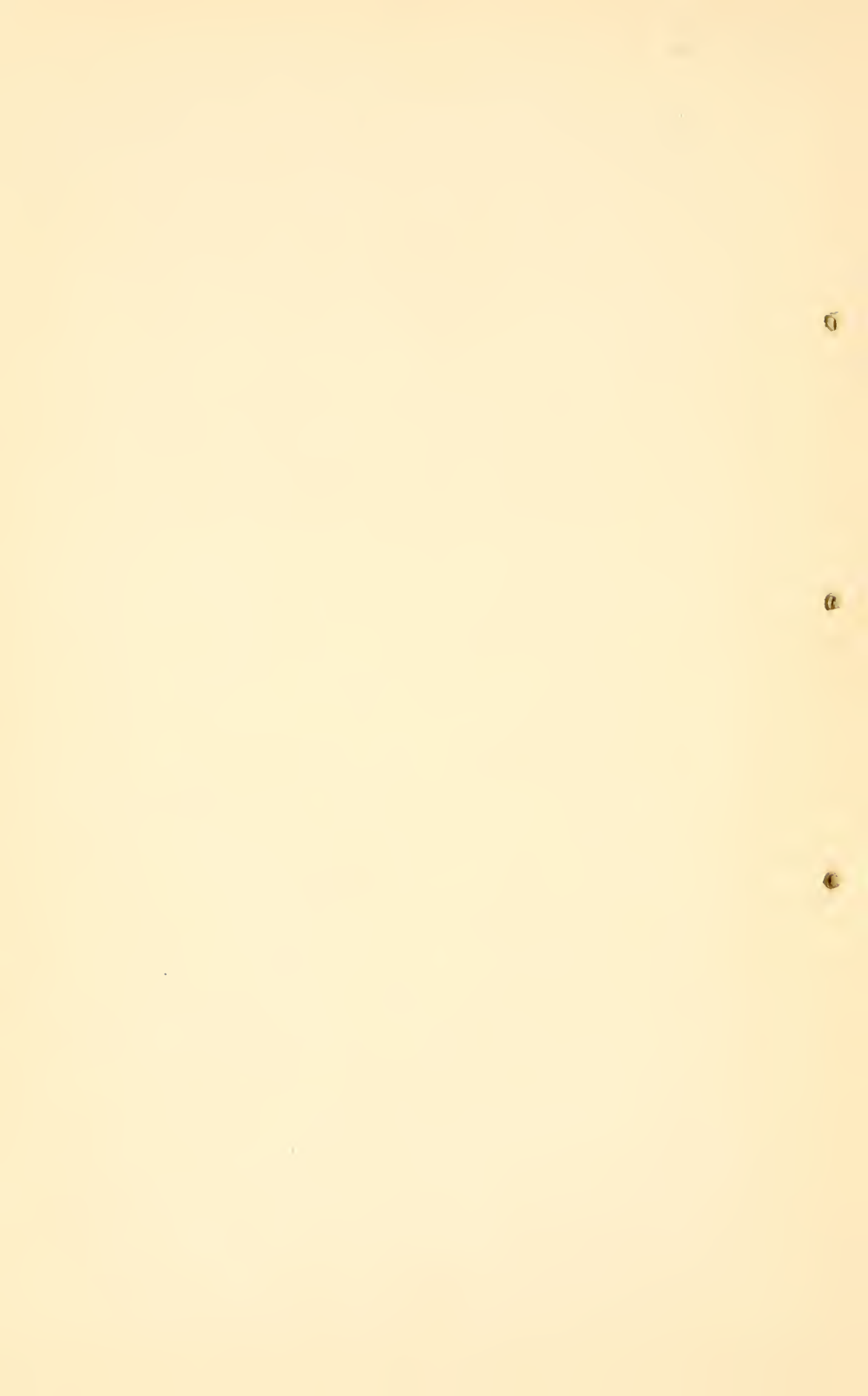
**THERE IS AN INTERESTING BIT** of Confederate history connected with this old house. After the close of the war, when Mr. Archie McNeil was managing the property for its owners, there arrived at the house one day Capt. L. G. Leslie, accompanied by a "Mr. Boyd." Mr. McNeil told Capt. Leslie that he had seen Mr. Boyd in the courts at New Orleans, and recognized him as Mr. Judah P. Benjamin, Secretary of State of the late Confederate Government. Mr. Benjamin remained in hiding at this house for two months. His presence being suspected, he made his escape across the country to Sarasota and thence by water to Nassau, and from there to England. In this escape he was assisted chiefly by Mr. Fred. Tresca whose descendants still live in the neighborhood.

Another interesting old house, now a complete ruin, is Braiden Castle, situated a little to the east of Manatee and



"WOODS BELOW BRAIDEN CASTLE"





at the junction of Braiden Creek and the Manatee River. It is a substantial, two-story square house, with a wide hall running through the center. The building is of shell, lime, and cement, like so many of the old "tabby" houses of the neighborhood. The walls of this material are still perfectly sound, but the woodwork and the brick chimneys have fallen to pieces long ago. The house was built by Dr. Joseph A. Braiden, who was one of the early arrivals from Tallahassee. The substantial character of the house doubtless gave it the name of the "castle," together with the fact that it withstood a severe assault by Indians in 1855 or 1856. Why the savages selected the strongest place in the county for their attack is a mystery, but they did, and about dusk a large body of them surrounded the house. Dr. Braiden was a most cautious man and did not allow himself to be taken by surprise. With him as guests there happened to be the Rev. J. J. Sealy, a traveling preacher, and Mr. Furman Chaires, of Tallahassee. They drove the Indians off, but the latter carried with them a number of Dr. Braiden's slaves and mules. The marauders were pursued and overtaken at Peace Creek. A number of them were killed in the battle that followed, and Dr. Braiden's property was recovered. This was the last Indian outbreak of this section. Dr. Braiden left the neighborhood soon afterwards and died in Georgia.

**THE GROUND ABOUT THE CASTLE** IS wild and picturesque. Live oaks, cedars, palmettos, and hickory trees grow around it, with wild grape and other vines climbing over them, and an undergrowth of shrubbery speaks of what once was an ornamental garden. Quail as tame as chickens run among the bushes, heedless of the intruding visitor. But it is below the castle, on the banks of the river and the creek, that the scene evokes exclamations of delight and surprise at the picturesque beauty of the forest there. One cannot see this labyrinth of palmettos and oaks and fail to recognise the inspiration of Moorish architecture that made such a palace as the Alhambra pos-

*A  
Woodland  
Moorish  
Palace*

sible. There are long, cool vistas formed by tessellated columns, the trunks of tall palmettos, fretted by the stems of dead leaves or many seasons, from which spring arches that roof the ground. The leaves of the live oaks form a delicate lattice work, and tapering masses of hanging moss are graceful pendants from the arched roof. The ground is nearly clear of underbrush, and one catches glimpses of the shimmering water of the creek or river gently lapping the white sands of the beach. The scene is one to delight the eye of an artist. It is quite impossible to reproduce its mysterious beauty in an illustration.

So much for the past of the Manatee country. The early inhabitants were for the most part sugar raisers, with here and there one who opened a store and engaged in trade. In the old days the cattle industry was also important, and remained so until the first Cuban war, when the Spaniards put a duty on American cattle imported to Cuba and ruined the business. Since our own war, however, it has revived and is resuming its former importance. Thousands of cattle are shipped annually from Palmetto and Braidentown directly to Cuba, and other thousands are sent up to Tampa to be shipped from that port.

To those who are interested in the remarkable growth and present prosperous condition of the Manatee country, and in its promise of future importance both in orange raising and truck farming, as well as to those interested in fishing and shooting, found here in perfection, and to tourists and investors, it may be proper to say that these subjects are treated of fully in other booklets of this series, one of them being devoted exclusively to the horticulture and agriculture of the region.

\* "Hammock" is a local term applied to a peculiar soil, covered with a dense growth of trees and underbrush. The word is said to be of Indian origin and is not to be confounded with "hummock."

*Music of the Manatee*

What is your song, mysterious river,  
In whose depths the shadows quiver—  
Shadows of the long ago  
That you dream of as you flow,  
Grandly sweeping to the sea ;  
What do you sing, great Manatee ?  
“ The song of life,” it murmurs low ;  
“ I love the sea ; to her I go.”

17

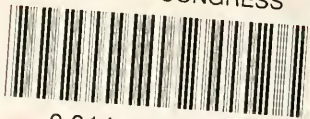








LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 497 124 3

