

CHAPTER XI

THE SEMINOLE MUST GO

THE Seminoles must be removed. The clamor of the land-speculator, the slave-hunter, and a host of others interested in driving the Indian from his home had at length been listened to at Washington, and the fiat had gone forth. The Seminoles must be removed to the distant west—peaceably if possible, but forcibly if they will not go otherwise.

A new treaty had been made by which the Indians agreed to remove to the new home selected for them, provided a delegation of chiefs appointed to visit the western land reported favorably concerning it. These went, saw the place, and upon their return reported it to be a cold country where Seminoles would be very unhappy.

Upon hearing this, the Indians said that they would prefer to remain where they were. Thereupon the United States Government said through its commissioners that it made no difference whether they wanted to go or not; they must go.

In the meantime, outrages of every kind were perpetrated upon the Indians. The whipping of those discovered off the reservation, that was begun

with Coacoochee, was continued. Several Indians were thus whipped to death by the white brutes into whose cowardly hands they fell. The system of withholding annuities and supplies was continued, and the helpless Indians were recklessly plundered right and left.

General Andrew Jackson, who was now President, had no love for Indians. He had in former years wronged them too cruelly for that, while teaching them lessons of the white man's power. He therefore appointed General Wiley Thompson of Georgia, as the Seminole agent, and ordered him to compel their removal to the far west without further delay. He also sent troops to Florida, and these began to gather at Fort Brooke and Tampa Bay under command of General Clinch.

It was evident that the Seminoles must either submit to leave the sunny land of their birth, their homes, and the graves of their fathers, or they must fight in its defence, and for their rights as free men. If they consented to go west to the land that those chiefs who had seen it described as cold and unproductive, they would find already established there their old and powerful enemies, the Creeks, who were eagerly awaiting their coming, with a view to seizing their negro allies and selling them into slavery. It was evident that a fight for his very existence was to be forced upon the Seminole in either case, and it only remained for him to choose whether

he would fight in his own land, of which he knew every swamp, hammock, and glade, and of which his enemy was ignorant, or whether he should go to a distant country, of which he knew nothing, and fight against an enemy already well acquainted with it.

This was the alternative presented to the warriors of Philip Emathla's village assembled about their council fire on a summer's evening a few weeks after that with which this history opens.

On Coacoochee, now sitting in the place of honor at the right hand of the chief his father and earnestly regarding the speaker who laid this state of affairs before them, the weeks just passed had borne with the weight of so many years. During their short space he had passed from youth to manhood. Having directed the search for himself that followed the death of Salano, toward the Okeefenokee, while his village lay in exactly the opposite direction, he had escaped all intercourse with the whites from that time to the present. But from that experience he had returned so much wiser and graver that his advice was now sought by warriors much older than he, while by those of his own age and younger he was regarded as a leader. Thus, though still a youth in years, and though he still revered and obeyed his father, he was to all intents the chief of Philip Emathla's powerful band.

It was in this capacity that the speaker, to hear

whom this council was gathered, evidently regarded him, and it was to Coacoochee that his remarks were especially directed.

This speaker was a member of a band of Seminoles known as the Baton Rouge or Red Sticks, who occupied a territory at some distance from that of King Philip. His father, whom he had never known, was a white man, but his mother was the daughter of a native chieftain, and though he spoke English fluently, he had passed all of his twenty-eight years among the Seminoles, and they were his people. Although not a chief, nor yet regarded as a prominent leader, he was possessed of such force of character and such a commanding presence that he had acquired a great influence over all the Indians with whom he was thrown in contact. His name was Ah-ha-se-ho-la (black drink), generally pronounced Osceola by the whites, who also called him by his father's name of Powell.

This dauntless warrior was bitterly opposed to the emigration of his tribe, and was anxious to declare war against the whites rather than submit to it. He believed that the Seminoles, roaming over a vast extent of territory abounding in natural hiding-places, might defend themselves against any army of white soldiers that should undertake to subdue them for at least three years. Could the conflict be sustained for that length of time without the whites gaining any decided advantages, he declared they

would then give up the struggle and allow the Indians to retain their present lands unmolested.

Osceola was now visiting the different bands of the tribe, preaching this crusade of resistance to tyranny. As he stood before Philip Emathla and his warriors, with his noble figure and fine face fully displayed in the bright firelight, they were thrilled by his eloquence. With bated breath they listened to his summing up of their grievances, and when he declared that he would rather die fighting for this land than live in any other, they greeted his words with a murmur of approving assent.

Never had Coacoochee been so powerfully affected. The sting of the white man's whip across his shoulders was still felt, and he was choked with the sense of outrage and injustice inflicted upon his people. His fingers clutched nervously at the hilt of his knife and he longed for the time to come when he might fight madly for all that a man holds most dear.

As his gaze wandered for a moment from the face of the speaker, it fell on a group just visible within the circle of firelight. There sat the beautiful girl to whom he had so recently plighted his troth, and beside her Chen-o-wah, the daughter of a Creek chief and his quadroon squaw. She was the wife of Osceola, and the one being in all the world whom the fierce forest warrior loved.

For a moment Coacoochee's determination wavered as he reflected what these and others equally help-

less would suffer in a time of war. There came a memory of the manner in which Nita's mother and brother had been consigned to slavery by the white man. No word had come from them, but he could imagine their fate. Might not the same fate overtake her most dear to him and hundreds of others with her? Would it not be better for them to incur the dangers and sufferings of war rather than those of slavery? Yes, a thousand times yes.

And then, perhaps the whites were not so very powerful, after all. Their soldiers, so far as he had seen them, were but few in number, and moved slowly from place to place. He and his warriors could travel twenty miles to their five. Besides, there were the vast watery fastnesses of the Everglades and the Big Cypress in the far south, to which the Indians could always retreat and into which no white man would ever dare follow them. Yes, his voice should be raised for war, no matter how long it might last, nor how bloody it might be, and the sooner it could be begun, the better. But he must listen, for Philip Emathla was about to speak.