CHAPTER VII

THE SEMINOLE WAR PERIOD

Gradually the Seminoles were driven southward in advance of the white man as settlement in the peninsula of Florida increased. Finally the desire arose to get rid of the Seminoles altogether and they were enticed into an agreement to emigrate to the West and occupy lands in what is now Indian Territory. Some of the chiefs, among them the famous Osceola, did not enter into this agreement to emigrate, and when the time came for them to go they refused. The attempt to force the removal brought on the Seminole war, which developed into the longest and most disastrous Indian war in the history of the United States.

In the summer of 1835, it was known that the Indians were on the verge of outbreak, but every one thought the war would be of short duration and after a few skirmishes the Indians would be so badly punished they would be glad to emigrate to the West. A prolonged war was simply out of the question from the view-point of the whites. Planters went about their farm operations as usual and trade with the interior continued unabated. In the fall there were ominous mutterings of coming trouble, still the popular belief was that it would not last long. Short-time volunteers were called for to frighten the Indians into agreeing to emigrate.

The war opened December 29, 1835, when Osceola and twenty followers shot and killed General Wiley Thompson and others at Fort King, now Ocala, and Major Dade's command was massacred in Sumter County, near the present town of Bushnell, two separate events on the same day. The news of these disasters spread through the country like wildfire. People everywhere in the interior abandoned their homes and collected in the towns for protection. Many of them came to Black Creek and on to Jacksonville. Trade with the interior gradually ceased, and although it was expected that hostilities would be confined to the middle portion of the peninsula, the stoppage of trade with the interior, a large portion of which was handled through Jacksonville, was perceptibly felt in business circles here.