

THE EMPIRE OF THE ST. LAWRENCE

CHAPTER I THE ECONOMY OF THE NORTH

I

WHEN, in the course of a September day in 1759, the British made themselves the real masters of the rock of Quebec, an event of apparently unique importance occurred in the history of Canada. There followed rapidly the collapse of French power in North America and the transference of the sovereignty of Canada to Great Britain; and these acts in the history of the northern half of the continent may well appear decisive and definitive above all others. In fact, for France and England, the crisis of 1759 and 1760 was a climax of conclusive finality. But colonial America, as well as imperial Europe, had been deeply concerned in the long struggle in the new continent; and for colonial America the conquest of New France had another and a more uncertain meaning. For Europe the conquest was the conclusion of a drama; for America it was merely the curtain of an act. On the one hand, it meant the final retirement of France from the politics of northern North America; on the other, it meant the regrouping of Americans and the reorganization of American economies.

The conquest had a double significance, American and European, because the struggle in North America had not been one war, but two. It was a part of the history of both the old world and the new. In its more obvious and more imposing aspect, it was an extension of that war between France and England which filled the century from the Revolution of 1688 to the Peace of Paris in 1763. North America was merely one theatre in a world conflict, a struggle between imperial giants, which invaded the extremes of east and west; and this conflict appeared, in America, as in every other continent which it visited, to dominate the lives and to decide the destinies of lesser men. Its shocks and pauses both stimulated effort and imposed quiet on the seigniories of the St. Lawrence and the towns of New England. And when the war was won by the