

CHAPTER III
CANADA AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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THE Quebec Act and the American Revolution shaped the policy of the commercial class in Canada for the next decade. John Brown, the agent of the Boston committee of correspondence, met the merchants of Montreal on April 3, 1775; and on May 1 of the same year, the Quebec Act went into effect. The new constitution and the revolution, which entered Canada together, were in some important respects complementary in their results. The feudal and bureaucratic régime, legalized by the letter of the Quebec Act, was sanctified by the necessities of the war and the spirit of national defence. The merchants, their demands for reform answered with unending reiteration by the patriotic parrot-cry that the times were unsuitable for innovation, found it almost impossible to break Carleton's and Haldimand's illegally reactionary application of a reactionary constitution. Though they could not win their way to power in Quebec, the merchants could at least continue their efforts to defend the St. Lawrence as a competitive and independent economy in North America; and during the period of the American Revolution, there was as much need for this defence as there had ever been before. In the Quebec Act the British made public the abandonment of the scheme for the imperial control of the west; but, no sooner had they done so, than the Americans, irritated by this acknowledgment of the separateness and importance of the St. Lawrence, attempted to impose a second continental system of their own. They failed. The independence of the Thirteen Colonies was not the only conclusion of the revolution. Great Britain could not keep the whole of North America as a political unit dependent upon herself; but the Thirteen Colonies were equally incapable of making the whole of North America a political unit independent of Great Britain. The colonies gained their freedom from Europe; but the St. Lawrence kept its independence in America.

When, in the first spring days of 1775, John Brown talked with the merchants of Montreal, there was every reason to expect that