

CHAPTER V

THE RISE OF THE NEW STAPLE TRADES

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THE decade which followed the Constitutional Act of 1791 and the establishment of representative government in the Canadas formed an important stage in the great transition through which the commercial state was passing. The decline of the fur-trading society in the region of the Great Lakes was now accompanied by the solid settlement of the fat, rich, forest-covered land. The rise of the new industries and the new staple trades was coincident with the beginnings of parliamentary government. This uninterrupted onrush of change demanded constant effort and adjustment; it inspired the enterprising and perturbed the conservative; and it brought forward new men and discredited old reputations.

The governors who presided over the two provinces in the first years of their existence were affected, like everybody else, by the spirit of the transition; and their very responses, which were either whole-hearted or timorous, reveal the nature of the challenge which they were forced to meet. Dorchester, the soldier aristocrat who had been so sublimely sure of himself in the days of the Quebec Act, was now uncomfortable and uninspired in the midst of the problems of the new régime. It was Colonel John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, who found in the new frontier society of the lakes a stimulus sufficient to arouse all his ingenuous enthusiasm and tremendous energy. Simcoe was a comparatively young man, whereas Dorchester was old and irritable and emptied of ideas. The new lieutenant-governor, like his superior at Quebec, was a soldier; but he had fought through the Revolutionary War as commander of the provincial regiment of the Queen's Rangers, which was mainly recruited by Loyalists. His plans for the future of that great "peninsular country" between Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron were conceived in terms of the established British-American habits of settlement, agriculture and commerce in farming produce. Impatient of the fur trade, contemptuous of the laws and usages of French Canada, Simcoe