

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF THE FUR TRADE

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THE War of 1812 was the final episode in the long struggle between settlement and the fur trade in the region of the Great Lakes. Ever since 1805, the Indians and the fur traders, the two elements in the old northern society, had been making their last, their belated effort to break through the Treaty of 1783, the Jay Treaty and the Treaty of Greenville; and it was the suspicion and fear of this alliance between the Indians and the fur-trading state which helped materially to provoke the American declaration of war.¹ There were, of course, other reasons for American resentment—grievances which no doubt assumed a greater prominence in the diplomatic interchanges which preceded the opening of the struggle. The *Chesapeake* incident, the British claim to impressment on the high seas and the British restriction of neutral commerce by the orders-in-council all rankled seriously.² But it is not without significance that the war to avenge these purely maritime injustices was opposed by maritime New England and hotly supported by the agrarian west. It was the drive of the west and the urgings of western men which largely committed the United States to war. Their purpose was, undeniably, to uphold the dignity of the United States in oceanic commerce; but, at the same time, their more immediate object was the free, secure and uninterrupted expansion of their western frontier at the expense of the fur-trading economy. Already, at Tippecanoe in 1811, the followers of Tecumseh had been broken; but behind Tecumseh was divined the vague, pervasive, sinister influence of northern fur traders and northern officials. The war, directed against this ambiguous union, promptly converted it into an open alliance. The Indians were not destined to fight alone for the St. Lawrence as they had fought at the battle of Fallen Timbers. At the last extremity of the long conflict between the seaboard and the St. Lawrence, the fur-trading society stood united in defence of the unity of the river and its lakes.