BOOK REVIEWS


In 1689 the North American continent east of the Mississippi River was divided among the empires of Great Britain, France, and Spain. They had occupied parts of the coastal and adjacent river regions, and had rival claims to the interior country. By 1763 all this vast expanse of territory had come under British sovereignty. The story of the wars, intrigues, frontier clashes, and Indian raids which brought about this tremendous shift in the political geography and the historical development of North America is exceedingly complex. To cover in detail the Anglo-French aspect only of this era of American conflict, Francis Parkman required no less than nine volumes; and Lawrence H. Gipson needed eight volumes for his exhaustive study of the period from 1748 to 1763. The size and scope of these works provide a measure of the achievement of the present brief volume by Howard H. Peckham, director of the William L. Clements Library and professor of American history at the University of Michigan.

It brings the entire complex story within the compass of a short book, surveying military events and developments and also giving enough of the background of international politics and colonial life to give the military story its proper frame of reference. Despite the compression and condensation necessary to keep the book within the limits of the great series to which it belongs, the main thread of the story never becomes lost in a mass of detail, the style remains clear and entertaining, and the story is told in an interesting way.

Since this brief survey ranges widely over a crowded period, it is not surprising to find a few points of fact and interpretation which may be open to question. Thus, the Hurons rather than the Eries were destroyed by the Iroquois in the 1640's; the Eries fell victim to Iroquois power in the following decade. To say that Governor Denonville rebuilt the French fort at Niagara gives credit to a doubtful claim that La Salle built one there — a claim made to justify French possession. The present town of Warren, Pennsylvania, where Céloron buried the first of his lead plates, taking possession of the Ohio River
in 1749, is actually far below "the head of the Allegheny River, then considered the beginning of the Ohio." It was not Joncaire de Chabert but Philippe de Joncaire, his older brother, who seized Fraser's trading post at Venango on August 28, 1753, as Philippe himself reported on September 1. Nor was Chabert a half-breed half-brother of the elder Joncaire; the impression which the British had of this Frenchman merely reflects his skill in adapting to Indian life.

It may be doubted that the French Canadian habitants failed to "put down roots" in the soil of the New World and that they were "insulated" from the "frontier influence." Down to the end, the colony of New France and the Indian country interpenetrated each other, and the way was open for young men to seek adventure and fortune in the wilderness. As a result, officers from France in the 1750's wrote of the stubborn and independent spirit of the Canadians with as much exasperation as British officers might write about their colonials. Moreover, the attachment of French Canadians to their soil and to their country has remained strong from that day to this.

None of these marginal matters can be said to affect the value of the book. For the reader seeking to learn about the period it provides an interesting introduction, and it will be a useful handbook for the student and historian. There is a judicious and well-balanced bibliographical essay, as well as a helpful list of important dates. The index would have benefited by the inclusion of entries for the various colonies.

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In all fields, but particularly in the social sciences, worthwhile and permanently valuable books are likely to be the result of years of reading, research, collection of data, study and planned organization. This publication belongs in the list of such books, though probably not near the top but certainly not at the bottom. Its authors are notable researchers, collectors and writers. They have invested both time and