

PREFACE

IT will be agreed by all, I believe, that Denys' *Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America* is the most important early French work on Canada which has not until now been either translated or reprinted. The reasons for this tardy recognition of a worthy work are, however, manifest. They arise in part from its restricted geographical interest, for, despite its wide-ranging title, it is really confined to Acadia only. They result in larger part from its unattractive style and composition, for it abounds in every possible literary fault. But chiefly are they due to the confusion in the presentation of much of its most valuable material, a confusion which is intensified by divers sorts of errors to such a degree that some scholars have dismissed its statements as unintelligible. The task presented to a translator, accordingly, has been not simply to render a book of bad French into one of good English, but also to discover, and to show by proper annotation, the author's real meaning when he is obscure, and the actual truth when he is in error. In other words, the book demanded not only a translator, but also a commentator who had local knowledge of the places, the objects, and the contemporary records bearing on the events which Denys describes. It is some knowledge of these matters, gained through a good many years of loving study, which has been my chief qualification for undertaking this work, rather than my knowledge of old French, which is but mediocre and has had to be supplemented by much help from others. And I cannot forbear to add this further personal