

Their inclination for frequenting the woods, which was that of the first colonists, had been wisely restrained within the limits of the territory belonging to the colony. Permission was, however, granted every year to twenty-five persons to go beyond these limits in order to trade with the Indians. The superiority which New York was acquiring, was the cause of increasing the number of these permissions. They were a kind of patent, which the patentees might make use of either in person or by proxy, and continued a year or more. The produce of the sale of these patents was assigned by the governor of the colony, to the officers, or their widows and children, to hospitals and missionaries, to such as had distinguished themselves by some great action, or some useful undertaking; and sometimes even to the creatures of the governor who sold the patents himself. The money, he did not give away, or did not chuse to keep, was put into the public coffers; but he was not accountable to any one for the management of it. This custom was attended with fatal consequences. Many of these traders settled among the Indians, to defraud their partners, whose goods they had disposed of. A greater number settled among the English, where the trade was more free and the profits greater. The immense lakes, frequently agitated with violent storms; the Cascades, which render navigation so dangerous up the broad rivers in the new world; the weight of the canoes, the provisions, and the bales of goods, which they were forced to carry on their shoulders at the carrying places, where the rapidity or shallowness of the water obliged them to quit the rivers, and pursue their journey by land, proved the destruction of several persons. Some perished in the snow and on the ice, by hunger or by the sword of the enemy. Those who returned to the colony with a profit of six or seven hundred per cent were not always on that account more useful members, as they gave themselves up to the greatest excesses, and by their example produced in others a dislike to attention and industry. Their fortunes were dissipated as suddenly as they were amassed; like those moving mountains which a whirlwind raises and destroys at once, on the sandy plains of Africa. Most of their travelling traders, exhausted with the excessive fatigues which their avarice prompted them to undergo, and the licentiousness of a wandering and dissolute life, dragged on a premature old age in indigence and infamy. The government took cognizance of these irregularities, and changed the manner of carrying on the fur trade.

The French had for a long time been incessantly employed in erecting a number of forts, which were thought necessary for the preservation and aggrandizement of their settlements in North America. Those built on the west and south of the river Saint Lawrence were large and strong, and were intended to restrain the ambition of the English. Those which were constructed on the several lakes in the most important positions, formed a chain which extended westward to the distance of three thousand miles from Quebec; but they were only miserable pallisades, intended to keep the Indians in awe, to secure their alliance, and the produce of their chase. There was a garrison in each, more or less numerous, according to the importance of the post, and of the enemies who threatened it. It was thought proper to entrust the commandant of each of these forts with the exclusive right of buying and selling in the whole district under his dominion. This privilege was purchased; but as it was always advantageous, and sometimes was the means of acquiring a con-