

CHAPTER II.

One of the first duties of Haldimand after assuming the government of the province in June, 1778, was the improvement of the navigation of the Saint Lawrence to Carleton-island. He had established a post at this point in view of commanding the eastern approaches to lake Ontario, and it was equally a necessity to assure a good channel by which the island would be accessible. The consequence was the establishment of the early canals between lakes Saint Louis and Saint Francis,* the remains of which may be still traced. They were the forerunners of that incomparable system of canals for which Canada is renowned. There is always a satisfaction in establishing the starting points of great events, and in tracing back the several stages through which a successful enterprise has passed to its development. We are in this case enabled to do so with tolerable accuracy; and although we do not possess in completeness the perfect detail of the work, it is possible generally to describe it with correctness.

This improvement of the channel was begun in 1779, the effort being directed to the removal of obstacles in the shallow water situate near the shore. While passengers at that date travelled by canoe, with which *portages* could be readily made, the heaviest freight was carried in the *bateau* then a stoutly built craft of from eighteen to twenty feet long, about six feet wide, with a draught of two feet, capable of carrying about three tons, equal to thirty barrels of flour: at a later date the Durham boat came into use. Their light draught enabled them to follow the river side in the spots

* I refer my readers to Vol. VI., p. 169, for the description of these Rapids; the obstructions to the navigation of the Saint Lawrence are there set forth in detail.