

A CENTURY OF SAIL AND STEAM ON THE NIAGARA RIVER

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST ERAS OF CANOE AND SAIL.

SINCE ever the changes of season have come, when grasses grow green, and open waters flow, the courses of the Niagara River, above and below the great Falls, have been the central route, for voyaging between the far inland countries on this continent, and the waters of the Atlantic shores.

Here the Indian of prehistoric days, unmolested by the intruding white, roamed at will in migration from one of his hunting-grounds to another, making his portage and passing in his canoe between Lake Erie and Lake Oskwego (Ontario). In later days, when the French had established themselves at Quebec and Montreal, access to Lake Huron and the upper lakes was at first sought by their voyageurs along the nearer route of the Ottawa and French Rivers, a route involving many difficulties in surmounting rapids, heavy labour on numberless portages, and exceeding delay. Information had filtered down gradually through Indian sources of the existence of this Niagara River Route, on which there was but one portage of but fourteen miles to be passed from lake to lake, and only nine miles if the canoes entered the water again at the little river (Chippawa) above the Falls.

On learning the fact the French turned their attention to this new water-way, but for many a weary decade were