

## CHAPTER X

### COMMERCE *VERSUS* AGRICULTURE

#### I

THE year 1828 marked a momentary and uneasy pause in Canadian affairs. A concurrence of several events, which was partly but not wholly accidental, implied that the commercial state had finished one stage of its development and was hesitating on the edge of another. The worst of the depression of 1825-1827 was over; and this slow upturn of the business cycle was accompanied by the beginnings of the first great migration of British peoples to Canada. In England, that stoically conservative bureaucrat, Lord Bathurst, left the colonial office; and the new governors, Sir James Kempt in Lower Canada and Sir John Colborne in Upper Canada, were more accommodating in spirit and more politically adroit than Dalhousie or Maitland had been. The colonial office became benignantly liberal. And 1828 was the year of the Canada Committee, a British parliamentary committee which heard a mass of ill-assorted evidence concerning the Canadas and penned a report which combined a few wise suggestions with a lot of liberal ambiguities and futile benevolence.

This investigation, which was the first serious attempt made by the imperial parliament since the Union Bill to review the Canadian problem, was brought on by Dalhousie's rejection of the speaker and the "constitutional crisis" which followed. There was immense excitement in the province; and though a few of the merchants looked doubtfully at Dalhousie's inflexibility and ineptitude, they took an active part in the meetings which were called in Quebec and Montreal to give moral support to the governor.<sup>1</sup> With a newly exalted moral fervour, they spoke of the "prerogatives of the crown" and the "British connection"; and already they were beginning to denounce the assembly as a body which was despotic in spirit and revolutionary in intention. "Every democrat is at heart a Tyrant", wrote a correspondent in the *Montreal Gazette*, "and when he attains office, invariably proves it. Of all tyrannies a popular tyranny is the most hopeless and unrelenting."<sup>2</sup> The merchants, though they posed as the