

CHAPTER XI BREAKDOWN

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THE two provinces passed from the mood into the act of violence through a few intermediate stages of rapidly increasing militancy. After 1833, the drift towards revolt increased definitely in speed; and this acceleration became noticeable in 1834, which was a year marked by an ominous combination of commercial distress and political excitement. The difficulties under which the Canadas struggled—the strains imposed by their relations with Great Britain and the United States, and the stresses created by their own internal contradictions and disputes—were combined in this year to impose an almost intolerable burden. The Canadian parties, driven on by their angry sense of deadlock, were now led to form associations, draft manifestoes and fight elections in a more determined spirit. In England the year 1834 witnessed a new and disturbing attack upon the timber preference; and in the United States the speculative and already unstable prosperity, which had developed since 1830, was shaken by the war between President Jackson and the Bank of the United States.¹ When, in the late summer of 1833, the federal deposits were withdrawn from that institution, there followed a financial and commercial panic which invaded Canada as naturally as it spread through the United States. In the autumn of 1833 there were failures in Quebec, Montreal and Kingston; and in the first months of 1834 the Montreal merchants looked back upon a dismal season and forward, in apprehension, to a year which appeared likely to be still more gloomy.²

The slump was accompanied and followed by political definitions and the organization of political hatreds. In Lower Canada, where the commercial programme was at a standstill and the civil government rested in uneasy suspense, the two parties were led by their very sense of impasse into that penultimate stage of drafting manifestoes and striking morally indignant attitudes. The assembly, which could spare no time for the consideration of