

CHAPTER IV

THE IDEMNIFICATION ACT

THE legislature opened on January 18th, 1849, when Lord Elgin had the gratification of informing French Canadians that the restrictions imposed by the Union Act on the use of their language in the public records had been removed by a statute of the imperial parliament. For the first time in Canadian history the governor-general read the speech in the two languages; for in the past it had been the practice of the president of the legislative council to give it in French after it had been read in English from the throne. The session was memorable in political annals for the number of useful measures that were adopted. In later pages of this book I shall give a short review of these and other measures which show the importance of the legislation passed by the LaFontaine-Baldwin ministry. For the present I shall confine myself to the consideration of a question which created an extraordinary amount of public excitement, culminated in the destruction of valuable public property, and even threatened the life of the governor-general, who during one of the most trying crises in Canadian history, displayed a coolness and patience, an indifference to all personal considera-