

CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

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1. The Issue

What was Catholic Emancipation?

The advocates of Catholic emancipation wanted the repeal of certain Test Acts which excluded Roman Catholics from certain offices of State. Discrimination against Roman Catholics has been practised ever since the Reformation, but in the eighteenth century there had been a gradual repeal of penal laws in Ireland. Most notably, in 1793, Roman Catholics were omitted to the vote in Ireland, though not in England. Nevertheless, certain Acts remained to discriminate against Roman Catholics in public office. The Test Act of 1673 called upon all office holders and members of the House of Commons to take an oath against transubstantiation; and the act of 1678 extended this oath to Peers. Thus, Roman Catholics were effectively debarred from sitting in Parliament. It was against this oath, denying the transubstantiation, that the agitation for Catholic emancipation was directed.

The Act of Union and Catholic Emancipation

Roman Catholic expectations

Roman Catholics in Ireland had thought that relief would follow the Act of Union of 1800. Indeed, William Pitt had given them this impression, and Catholics regarded this as a pledge. Pitt really believed that the United Parliament could safely grant Catholic relief. On the one hand, since Catholics would be in a minority in the United Kingdom (whereas they were in a majority in Ireland), Protestants could afford to act generously and grant civil liberty. On the other hand, emancipation or relief could be accompanied by various safeguards, designed to ensure the loyalty of the Roman Catholic clergy to the United Kingdom. These safeguards might have included state payment of the Catholic clergy to 'render them', it was said 'more respectable in station, more independent of their flocks and more disposed to support the established government'.

George III's opposition to emancipation

As it turned out, Peel miscalculated, and the Union was accompanied by neither emancipation nor safeguard. The reason for this failure was party apathy and hostility on the part of Members of Parliament - 'I care no more for a Catholic than I care for a Chinese', one M.P. remarked. More important, however, was the outright hostility of George III and his naïve interpretation of his Coronation oath. On one occasion, George remarked that the emancipation proposal was the 'most Jacobinical thing' he had ever heard of, and that he would reckon any man 'his personal enemy' who proposed any such measure. Furthermore, George III warned Pitt that his Coronation

oath prevented him from even discussing 'any proposition tending to destroy the groundwork of our happy constitution' arguing that 'my inclination to union with Ireland was principally founded on a trust that the uniting of the established churches of the two kingdoms would forever shut the door to any further measures with respect to the R.C.'.

Discrediting the Union

The king's abhorrence of Catholic emancipation had two consequences. In the first place, it undermined the credibility and acceptability of the Union. From a Catholic viewpoint, the Union turned out to be a cheat, since relief was not forthcoming. Worse still, shorn of its supposed reform trimmings, the Union emerged as a bastion of Protestant ascendancy even stronger than the old Irish parliament.

From the outset of the Union, Irish Protestants claimed an integral and indissoluble relationship between Protestantism and the Constitution of the United Kingdom. For example, in 1805, John Foster, the last Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, told the united House of Commons:

Remember that you have settled us in Ireland under the faith of your protection: that on that faith we claim as our inheritance all the blessings of the glorious constitution which our ancestors and yours have fought and bled for - and Hanoverian succession, the illustrious House of Brunswick on the throne, a Protestant king, with Protestant counsellors, Protestant laws, and Protestant commons. That is what I call Protestant Ascendancy in the true sense of the phrase, and while I can utter my voice in this House I will ever demand it for my country.

Catholic Emancipation in British politics

The second consequence of the king's refusal to consider emancipation meant that the question became one of the most burning issues in British politics in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. There began an agitation for emancipation, an agitation which fell into two parts: the years 1800-22, years of relatively low-key agitation; and the years 1823-29, when, as one of Peel's correspondents put it, the Catholic question was 'mixed up with every thing we eat or drink or say or think'.

2. Slow Progress, 1800-1823

Committees and Boards

The first phase in the agitation for Catholic emancipation belonged to successive committees and boards, at first aristocratically dominated, but after 1808 dominated by a combination of middle-class and clerical forces. The most charitable thing that could be said about this first phase is that it kept the issue alive. Indeed, the highlights of the first phase were sevenfold.

1. In October 1804, a committee of leading Catholics discussed whether or not to petition Parliament for emancipation. Their great fear of popular agitation and their fear of antagonising the government made them delay, so that it was not until February 1805 that a petition was actually submitted to Downing Street.
2. In May 1808, Henry Grattan proposed Catholic emancipation with certain safeguards, a motion rejected by the House of Commons by 281 votes to 128.
3. In 1810, a new committee, more widely representative than any of its predecessors, was set up, and reconstituted in the following year as the Catholic Board.
4. In June 1812, the House of Commons accepted, by 225 votes to 106, a motion in favour of considering Roman Catholic claims, but in the following February, an Emancipation Bill was lost in committee.
5. In June 1814, the Catholic Board was dissolved by government order, and there was not even a public protest in its favour.
6. In 1819, Grattan introduced a new Bill, which was defeated in the House of Commons by only two votes.
7. In 1821, William Plunkett, Member for Dublin University, who had succeeded Grattan, and the leadership of the Roman Catholic cause, came even nearer to success. His Emancipation Bill passed the Commons but failed in the Lords.

Obstacles to progress

There had, in fact, been progress, but not much. Why had so little progress been made? The answer is that there are two reasons for the slow progress - divisions among Irish Catholics, and the state of British politics. Both militated against the early success of the agitation for Catholic emancipation.

Divisions among Irish Catholics

Roman Catholics in Ireland could not agree among themselves upon what emancipation entailed. Some wanted straightforward emancipation without any conditions. Others, however, were willing to accept limitations and some State control over the Roman Catholic Church as a corollary to emancipation.

Government controls

The idea that the Government should have a negative control over Catholic episcopal appointments had been current at the time of the Union. It had been revived in 1808, and included in the schemes of 1813, 1821 and 1823. Each scheme provided that Catholics should be permitted to sit in Parliament and hold civil and military offices, and set up Boards and Commissioners in Great Britain and Ireland respectively, to watch over Catholics. In the first two schemes, the Boards were to be composed of Catholic Bishops and Catholic and Protestant laymen, and were to sanction the appointment of Catholic Bishops and Deans, and to inspect ecclesiastical documents received from Rome in their respective areas. In the third scheme, the Commissioners were to be composed of Catholic Bishops and the British Commission was merely to examine documents from Rome.

The veto controversy

This veto controversy, as it was called, split Irish Catholic leaders. Some supported the veto as a means of quieting Protestant spheres and reconciling them to Catholic emancipation. However, others were alarmed and angry at the suggestion that the government should have even a measure of control of episcopal appointments. The veto, it was said, would twine the faith around the sceptre of an anti-catholic king. The veto would encourage the tendency of Bishops to keep in close contact with the government and reduce priests to spies and informers. In fact, all confidence between priests and people would be destroyed and all Irish Catholics turned into Protestants or rebels. It was said that the type of priest likely to become a bishop was the man 'of family connection, of electioneering interest, a keen sportsman, or gambler, a jolly toper, a hearty fellow who sings a good song' and the people would be exasperated by seeing the man they preferred 'cast off, reprobated, scouted and dishonoured by the government'.

Dispute with the Papacy

This dispute continued to divide Irish Catholicism, despite the fact that the veto was acceptable to the papacy. In the spring of 1914, the Secretary of the Propaganda issued a rescript declaring that Catholics should receive with gratitude the Bill offered in 1913 - Emancipation Plus Veto. It was easy to challenge the validity of this rescript on the grounds that the Secretary of the Propaganda was a subordinate officially acting *ultra vires*, and the Irish Bishops promptly declared that it was not binding. However, it was awkward for the anti-vetoists, when in the following year a letter from Cardinal Litta was published, stating that the Pope was willing when a See became vacant to permit electors to submit a list of candidates to the government, which might delete names before transmitting the list to Rome. The Catholic Bishops promptly declared that to grant such powers to the Crown would seriously injure the church in Ireland, and a great meeting of the laity in Dublin drew up a strong worded remonstrance addressed to the Pope, warning him, 'with less ceremony than is usual', that if this pernicious measure was persevered in, it would lead to 'such a state of distrust and dissatisfaction that it might end in the dissolution on that confidential connection in spiritual concerns' which existed between Ireland and the Holy See.

3. British Politics and Emancipation

I. Opposition

Divided opinion in Britain

The state of British politics also meant that a low priority was put upon Catholic emancipation. Although there was, in Great Britain, a good deal of support for Catholic emancipation among politicians, it cut across party lines; and, what is more, there was a good deal of strategically placed opposition to Catholic emancipation. These two factors combined to put Catholic emancipation on the back-burner as far as most coalition cabinets were concerned.

Opposition in British politics to Catholic Emancipation

There was in Great Britain a good deal of strategically placed opposition to Catholic emancipation. The basis of the anti-Catholic strength was the majority of Tories, backed by a dozen or so almost misfit Whigs.

Two factors made this opposition formidable. In the first place, some of the Tories, the Ultras, were extreme in their views and active in propagating them, especially in the House of Lords. In the second place, these determined opponents felt that they could appeal to anti-Catholic sentiment in Great Britain and that they could rely upon the support of the Crown. George III's views were well known, and his opposition to Catholic emancipation, if not his pious conviction in the matter, was inherited by George IV. George III, had championed Protestant ascendancy so successfully, that its preservation had come to symbolise the integrity of royal power, and it was for this reason that George IV wished to resist Catholic emancipation.

Inviolability of the Revolution Settlement, 1688-89

This opposition to Catholic emancipation was based upon three broad grounds. First, the revolution settlement of 1688-89 was held to be inviolable. It was agreed that the revolution had provided the State with a fixed and perfect structure which had brought many blessings to England since its establishment. Its alteration was bound to bring infinite harm. The quintessence of the settlement with the Anglican Constitution - the union of Church and State and the exclusion of Catholics and Dissenters from civil power. Such an exclusion, argued one anti-Catholic M.P., was as fundamental as Magna Carta.

Divided Catholic loyalties

Secondly, anti-Catholics held that there still existed a Catholic threat to the State. Catholics had divided loyalties between Church and State, and could always be influenced by an aggressive Papacy. Thus, Lord Chancellor Eldon, speaking in 1821, drew on current rumours to invoke the horrors of the former age:

We are led not to doubt that the present Pope has re-established the order of the Jesuits - that the Inquisition was revived - we have heard of bulls against Protestant societies distributing the scriptures - we have heard of transactions respecting Bishops in Belgium. We hear of Jesuits there, though we are told that the Pope does not consent to their establishment in countries which are not willing to receive them.

Eldon's was an extreme statement of the case. Not all anti-Catholics thought that there was an immediate and direct threat from the Papacy in the 1820's; but they did insist that the Catholic threat was always liable to recur so long as the Papacy retained powers over Catholics which could make it a rival to the authority of the English Crown. Give Catholics the right to sit in Parliament, and then the whole Constitution could and would eventually be subverted. This opposition deterred Governments from taking up Catholic emancipation, and assured that Private Members Bills would be defeated in the House of Lords.

Loss of Protestant ascendancy in Ireland

Thirdly, anti-Catholics were concerned about the consequences of emancipation for Ireland. Anti-Catholics feared that when admitted to Parliament Irish Catholics would form a large and tightly-knit pressure group absorbed in the pursuit of its ambitions, such ambitions to include taking over the Church establishment for Catholicism and, perhaps, the eventual severance of political ties with England. And these theories were stimulated by Irish upholders of the Protestant Ascendancy, like John Foster, who claims as their inheritance 'all the blessings of the Glorious Constitution.'

4. British Politics and Emancipation

II. Support

Support in British politics for Emancipation

At the same time, there was a good deal of support for Catholic emancipation among British politicians, support which cut across party lines. The basis of the pro-Catholic support was the great majority of the Whig party, whose numbers approached 200 after the election of 1826. To these were added some 60 or so 'liberal Tories', and some Tories, such as the Marquis of Londonderry, who could not be considered liberal. Such British politicians were kept on their toes by Irish M.P.'s who, for electoral reasons were more whole-hearted than their British colleagues in their enthusiasm for emancipation. As far as public opinion was concerned, English Roman Catholics supported the demand for emancipation, and had done so actively since the 1780's.

Justice and reconciliation

Supporters of Catholic emancipation supported it on a number of grounds, but largely on the grounds of justice, and on the grounds that Catholics would thence be reconciled to supporting the State. They rejected their opponents' arguments about the inviolability of the revolution settlement, arguing instead that for many years the penal code had been undergoing repeal and modification. The benefits which the Constitution withheld from Catholics had been, inconsistently, granted, through the annual indemnity acts, to dissenters. They ridiculed the idea that the Papal threat might revive, and held, instead, that the way to make Catholics loyal, both in Britain and in Ireland, was to grant them emancipation.

Sydney Smith, for instance, believed that emancipation would strengthen the established church and national security. He argued:

My cry is 'No Popery'; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may not join with foreign papists in time of war. Church forever; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may not help to pull it down. King forever; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may become his loyal subjects. Great Britain for ever; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may not put an end to its perpetuity.

5. Barrier to Emancipation : 'The Open System'

The limits of tolerance

This support for Catholic emancipation in Britain may have reflected the growing spirit of tolerance in Britain, but it was not very effective in securing Catholic emancipation. Because the support cut across party lines, because governments consisted of coalitions of politicians, and because of strong areas of opposition, no government felt able to take up the question of emancipation. Neither pro- or anti-Catholic ministerialists were strong enough to decide the question as they wished.

The anti-Catholics could count on a majority in the Lords and (at least until George III died) on the support of the Crown. But, in the Commons, they were either in a minority or had a majority so narrow as to be indecisive. Further, they had not sufficient ministerial quality in their ranks to fill a front bench with confidence and success.

The pro-Catholic Tories, on the other hand, though they were talented, were too small in number to form a lasting ministry. They could count on Whig support for Catholic emancipation, but with this support they could only push relief measures through the House of Commons. They were still faced with the anti-Catholic barrier of Crown and Lords.

Compromise: 'the open system'

Because of these difficulties a compromise had been arranged in 1801. This compromise meant that Catholic emancipation was shelved so far as it concerned the government as a whole. Pro- and anti-Catholic ministers could express their individual opinions on the matter, but they were to respect the principle that the government, as a body, would neither encourage nor suppress the constitutional demand for Catholic emancipation.

Catholic emancipation suffered from this 'open' system, as it was known. The convictions of pro-Catholic statesmen were weakened by the necessity of working together with colleagues who held contrary views on the Catholic question but were in agreement on other issues. Canning is a good example. He pointed out that Catholic emancipation was the only question on which he disagreed with Peel, and it is not surprising that Canning came to regard the question as a troublesome one which hindered the co-operation of ministers and should be kept quiet so long as there was no prospect of carrying it.

Divisions among Irish Catholics and the state of British politics thus combined to hinder the progress of Catholic emancipation. What was needed to overcome opposition in Great Britain and to put Catholic emancipation on a higher priority, was a severe shock, and this was eventually provided by the Catholic Association formed in May 1823.

6. The Catholic Association

Formation and aims

The background to the formation of the Catholic Association was a famine in 1822. Two barristers, Daniel O'Connell and Richard Lalor Sheil, took advantage of the situation to organise the Association in May 1823. Capitalising on agrarian distress, the Association had two aims:

- (a) to obtain a complete repeal of the Penal Laws; and
- (b) to protect Irish tenant farms from unjust landlords, rack-rents, evictions, etc.

Strength of the Catholic Association

The strength of this new association lay in the fact that it won the support of all sections of Catholic Irish life; the Catholic aristocracy, the clergy, the middle-classes - especially the tradesmen of Dublin, and the Irish peasantry. Its unity was emphasised in its source of finance. This was the 'Catholic rent', a subscription of one penny a month, a sum so low that even the poorest felt able to afford. As a result, thousands joined the Association, and it soon had a larger income from the pence of the poor than previous Catholic bodies had ever obtained from the subscription of the rich - £8 in the first week, but £1000 per week within a year.

Catholic confidence

Just as important as the income brought in by the Catholic rent was its psychological effect. To pay a subscription to a movement increases ones interest in it, and now many thousands of Catholics, in all walks of life, were identified with the Catholic Association. Contemporary observers noticed the improved morale and corporate spirit of the Catholic body. As one Church of Ireland bishop noted:

There is what we of this generation have never before witnessed, the complete union of the R.C. body in truth, an Irish revolution has, in a great measure, been effected.

This was the achievement of the Catholic Association. It mobilised the Catholic resources of Ireland, and within six years developed from a small club of about sixty persons, into a central directory at the head of fifteen thousand regular and three

million associate members. As one historian has put it: 'The demagogues created the agitation, the priests blessed it, the nobility made it respectable, but it was the coal porters of Dublin and the ploughmen of Tipperary who carried emancipation.'

Irish supporters of the Catholic Emancipation

This mass support raises the question: what did the peasantry hope to get out of the movement? Were they merely coerced by their priests, as opponents sometimes alleged? The association undoubtedly used the priesthood and the hierarchy to mobilise the mass of Irish Catholics. The pulpit was a useful platform, and the church a useful collecting point, for the Catholic rent.

Yet, the mass of Irish Catholics were being led in the direction they wanted to go. The admission of Catholic emancipation would not affect them directly, but O'Connell made the issue much broader than the admission of a handful of landlords to parliament. He stressed that emancipation would give Roman Catholics of all ranks and conditions the equality of opportunity hitherto denied for them. He often spoke on Utopian terms, associating the mass of Catholics with an heroic struggle against the Protestant oppressor.

Difficulties

Divisions within

This is not to say that the Association was free from difficulties, internal and external. In the first place there were internal dissensions. A few radicals, such as John Lawless, an exuberant Catholic journalist, wanted a programme that included parliamentary reform and the controversy over safeguards which arrived in 1825. That year the radical Sir Francis Burdett introduced a new Relief Bill, which was accompanied by two 'wings', two sets of securities intended to allay Protestant unease. The 40 shilling freehold franchise in the counties was to be abolished, and a ten pound franchise established in its place. In addition, some measure of government influence over the Church was to be secured by a provision for the payment of the Roman Catholic clergy from public funds.

Government repression

The second difficulty was external - government repression. Alarmed by the growth of the Association and by the violent language regularly employed by O'Connell, the government determined to break O'Connell's power. When attempts to prosecute him for incitement to rebellion failed for lack of evidence, the government, in 1825, suppressed the Catholic Association which was then re-established under a new name.

7. The Agitation

In Britain

The Association agitated on two fronts - in Ireland and in Great Britain. In particular, O'Connell wanted to propagate the Catholic Association's proceedings amongst the English. He thus stimulated English pro-Catholic newspapers, and encouraged the English Catholics to form their own associations. Important business of the Catholic Association was inserted in English newspapers at advertisement rates. Certain pro-Catholic newspapers received subsidies from the Catholic rent. There was established the *Truth Teller*, an English paper devoted wholly to the Catholic cause. Finally, O'Connell had a London agent, one of whose duties was to keep an eye on the metropolitan press. And, indeed, English Catholics did soon begin to emulate the Irish Association, founding in June 1823 their own association in London.

Lancashire

In the following year, branches sprang up throughout the provinces. Lancashire was, perhaps, the most sympathetic area. For example, the *Liverpool Mercury* was a most devoted pro-Catholic newspaper, describing itself as one of the 'unpensioned, unpaid champions of the rights of Irishmen'.

In Ireland

'The Popish Parliament'

The bulk of the Association's work was, of course, in Ireland. In Ireland the Association arranged meetings and petitions and established, by its gatherings in the Corn Exchange, Dublin, a Popish parliament. The object of this work in Ireland was to mobilise Catholic strength and to oppress upon British politicians how widespread and insistent was the demand for Catholic emancipation.

Mass meetings: constitutional intimidation?

The mass meetings were useful in this respect. Then O'Connell was able to embrace the principle of non-violence and constitutional agitation, but was able to suggest the possibility of civil war if the demands of the Association were not conceded.

1826 general election

As well as organising mass meetings, the Catholic Association eventually intervened, with the help of the clergy, in the 1826 General Election. By mobilising the forty-

shilling free-holders, the Association and the clergy secured the return of six pro-Catholic candidates.

Waterford

The most dramatic contest was in Waterford, where the Beresfords had held almost undisputed control for generations - for over 70 years in fact. Lord George Beresford was confident that he could retain the seat, and his supporters' control over their tenants, but he sadly miscalculated. Under the influence of the clergy, even his own tenants deserted him for Villiers Stuart, a Protestant and staunch ally of O'Connell, and Beresford withdrew from the poll.

Louth

More significant, if less dramatic, was the Louth election. Villiers Stuart in Waterford, a man of considerable influence and a relation of the Duke of Devonshire, one of the great landlords of the county, would have been in any case a formidable opponent, but the successful candidate in Louth, Alexander Dawson, could never have ventured to come forward without the assurance of clerical backing.

Significance of the 1826 general election in Ireland

There is a minor historical debate about the significance of the 1826 election, but whatever the pros and cons of the debate, there is no doubt that the election successes improved Catholic morale no end, and it did so because of what it portended. The gaining of six pro-Catholic seats in 1826 did not alter the balance of opinion in the new parliament, but the victories did point the way for future policies.

O'Connell now had in his hands an aggressive force which, if exploited in the future, was likely to bring emancipation far more quickly than renewed attempts at conciliation on the 1825 model. As the victorious Villiers Stuart said after his success in Co. Waterford:

I look to the next General Election, and then we shall see if there will be a city or county in Ireland from which one member shall be returned who openly avows his determination to vote against Catholic emancipation.

At the next General Election, due in 1833, the Catholic Association could look forward to contesting most seats in Ireland and returning a good number of pro-Catholic candidates.

8. The Breakthrough

Changes in British Politics

Agitation might have been carried on along these lines until the next General Election, but changes in British politics prompted the Catholic Association to take decisive action. In 1828 the Duke of Wellington took office and, under pressure from the Whigs, repealed the Test and Corporations Act insofar as they affected Protestant dissenters. This concession was merely formal, for the Acts had long been inoperative, but it was an indication of the growing liberalisation of parliament and a warning to the government. It seemed, therefore, that, although pledged to oppose Catholic emancipation, Wellington's government could be harried into concession.

County Clare by-election

O'Connell decided the attack, and the opportunity came when the member for Clare, William Vesey Fitzgerald sought re-election after his appointment as President of the Board of Trade. This was an interesting situation. Vesey's standing in Clare was a strong one. He had sat for the constituency for the previous ten years, and was a resident landlord with, apparently, a good reputation amongst his tenants. Moreover, he was himself, friendly to Catholic emancipation. The trouble was that he had taken office in a government opposed to Catholic claims, and the Catholic Association was bound by resolution to oppose every member of such a government.

Since no Protestant could be found to stand against the popular Vesey, the Catholic Association decided to put forward O'Connell to oppose him. During the election campaign, O'Connell was supported by the well-tested electioneering machinery of the Catholic Association, and was returned by 2057 votes to 982, a majority of 1075.

Challenge to government

The defeat of a government minister by a Roman Catholic caused a sensation. Protestant apprehension of this demonstration of Catholic power was illustrated by a cartoon entitled 'Catholic petitioners, or symptoms of peaceable appeal', showing O'Connell at the head of a band of roughs. At his left-hand side was a monster entitled 'Persecution', with its keeper saying 'Arrah! Be aizey honey till we get emancipation - then *we'll let ye loose on the Heretics*'. In England opponents of Catholic emancipation organised and through the Brunswick Clubs, tried to stir up public opinion to keep the Government firm in face of the pressures to grant emancipation.

Threat to the landed interest

In fact, two aspects of O'Connell's resounding victory prompted the Government to act. In the first place, O'Connell's election challenged the landed interests' traditional control over country politics and provided a disturbing illustration of the power which could be wielded by a popular organisation managed by middle-class liberal politicians.

No longer, as one indignant Conservative put it, were elections to be decided by freeholders voting as directed by 'generous benefactors, steady friends, extended information, and superior judgement'. Or, as Wellington put it, 'the Irish gentlemen have at present none of the influence which belongs to men of property in a well-regulated society'.

Prospect of a nationalist revolution

The second disturbing aspect of the Clare election was that it opened up the prospect of a nationalist revolution. Hitherto, the Catholic freehold vote had been used to support Protestant pro-Catholics against Protestant anti-Catholics. Now it had been used to support a Roman Catholic against a Protestant. It seemed that in a General Election O'Connell's victory might be repeated many times by Roman Catholic candidates who, when elected, would be unable to take their seats. Debarred from the Imperial Parliament, they might well form their own unofficial Irish Parliament and perhaps even lay plans for dissolving the Union. And there was even the possibility of a Nationalist war, such was the growing tension in Ireland and 'the unhealthy condition of the public mind in Ireland', as Peel put it.

Wellington would very much like to have crushed the agitation and restore the proper influence of property. Nevertheless, such was the strength of feeling in Ireland, and such was the support for Catholic emancipation among members of the House of Commons, that he had to proceed by two sets of measures.

9. The Carrot and the Stick

Emancipation

First, there was the concession of Catholic emancipation with the minimum of safeguards. The Government did consider a state payment and licensing of clergy, but decided that such safeguards would create a fresh grievance and produce general resistance, martyrs, and annual petitions. Therefore, on 13 April 1829, the Catholic Relief Bill became law with only 'little securities'.

Three points are worth noticing.

1. By the terms of the Relief Act, Roman Catholics were made eligible for all offices of state, except those of Regent, Lord Lieutenant, and Lord Chancellor of either country.
2. Roman Catholic members of either House of Parliament were relieved of the obligation to take an oath of supremacy, but were instead to take a long and comprehensive oath denying that the Pope had any symbol of authority within the kingdom, undertaking to defend the existing settlement to property, and disavowing 'any intention to subvert the present church established as settled by law within this realm'.
3. An attempt to limit the strength of the Roman Catholic Church by prohibiting religious orders for men, the wearing of ecclesiastical habits in public, and the use of territorial titles, prohibitions which proved ineffectual and irritating.

Coercion

The second set of measures were coercive, designed to put down agitators and to restore the influence of men of property, as the government saw it.

Outlawing the Catholic Association

In the first place, an Act was passed suppressing the Catholic Association by name, and since previous legislation with this object had been evaded by 'various shifts and devices', the Lord Lieutenant was empowered for a year to suppress any association deemed to be a danger to the public peace.

Reducing the Irish electorate

In the second place, the Irish County Franchise Act of 1829 raised the freehold qualification in the counties from 40 shillings to £10. This measure underlines the desire of the government to restore the influence of the landlord, for a £20 qualification had been suggested but ministers had been advised that this would withdraw political influence from the landlord and give it to the inhabitants of larger towns, where a £20 freehold was of far less value than in the countryside. By this means the Irish electorate was reduced from over 100,000 to about 16,000.

Generosity or necessity?

In sum, Catholic emancipation was not granted out of any generous spirit of religious toleration. It was granted out of political necessity: to avoid civil war in Ireland; and to make accepted coercive measures against the Catholic Association. As Mrs Arbuthnot wrote to Wellington:

A safe measure as so far satisfying the friends of Catholic emancipation in England by setting that question upon fair and safe grounds, as to enable him at the same time to obtain from parliament such powers as will be efficient for checking the progress of the *Agitators* and putting down the rebellion that seems hanging over our heads.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations, O'Connell was delighted with the measure. 'Great and glorious triumph,' he wrote exultantly.

10. The Significance of Catholic Emancipation

For Irish Catholics

Catholic Emancipation was, above all, a symbolic victory for the Catholic people of Ireland: 'the first token of national rehabilitation and self-respect obtained by the efforts of the people themselves'.

For reform in Britain

The Irish crisis became central to the great reforming debates in Britain. The granting of Emancipation was central to the growing official commitment to impartiality between the claims of the different religious groups in the United Kingdom. That impartiality was most clearly seen in Peel's career as he moved from the leading advocate of church and state to his conciliatory measures for the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland in the 1840s. The state was beginning to imply that religion was increasingly a private matter, a question of individual morals and ethics, *not* the underlying basis for the entire structure of government and society.

For Anglo-Irish relations

Catholic Emancipation also had a formative influence on Anglo-Irish relations. According to Fergus O'Ferrall in his book, *Catholic Emancipation. Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin 1985):

The manner of its achievement - the calculated brinkmanship of O'Connell's constitutional struggle which depended for its force on the threat of massive social disorder and violence - moulded the political reflexes of Irish politicians faced with an ill-informed and often callous Westminster.