

WELLINGTON, IRELAND AND THE CATHOLIC QUESTION, 1807-1827.

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ABSTRACT

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HISTORY

Doctor of Philosophy

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by Karen Ann Piggott

The Duke of Wellington was an Anglo-Irishman who, throughout his career, was aware of the problems posed for the British state by the Irish Catholics in their campaign for full political rights. This was the case even when his career removed him from immediate contact with Ireland and her problems. This thesis traces the evolution of his attitude to the Catholic question from his period of office as Chief Secretary for Ireland to the end of the Liverpool administration, when he resigned from the cabinet for reasons at least in part connected with this issue. The context within which Wellington's views developed, in British domestic politics, in Anglo-Irish and in International affairs is discussed, as far as is relevant. Particular attention is paid to the issue of 'securities' which was central to the debates on Catholic relief throughout this period.

The main conclusion is that Wellington, although a member of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, and closely connected with those opposed to Catholic relief, was never rigid or purely repressive in his attitude to the Catholics and Catholicism. In particular he hoped through an understanding with the Papacy to reach a once for all solution to a question in which religion, nationalism, the sovereign state and many other factors interacted with great complexity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in the references:

Add. MSS. Additional Manuscripts, British Library.

DM Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue Preserved at Dropmore, Historical Manuscripts Commission Report ref. no. 30, edited by W. Fitzpatrick, 10 vols., 1892-1927.

JA The Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot, ed. by Francis Bamford and the Duke of Wellington, 2 vols., 1950.

RM Richmond Manuscripts, National Library of Ireland.

PD1s Parliamentary Debates, First Series.

PD2s Parliamentary Debates, Second Series.

WD The Dispatches of Field Marshall the Duke of Wellington during his various Campaigns, compiled by Lt. Col. Gurwood, 13 vols., 1834-9.

WND Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshall Arthur, Duke of Wellington, (ed. by his son), 8 vols. 1867-80.

WP Wellington Papers, Southampton University Library.

WSD Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence
and Memoranda of Field Marshall Arthur, Duke of
Wellington K.G., (ed. by his son), 14 vols. 1858-72.

INTRODUCTION.

When Arthur Wellesley was elected as member of parliament for Trim in August 1791 Irish Catholics were excluded by law from all official positions of authority within the country, and from the exercise of political power. They were denied the franchise, prohibited from sitting in parliament and on Corporations, and were not permitted to act as Sheriffs, to be called to the Bar, to be appointed as Judges, or even to serve on Grand Juries. They could not serve in the higher ranks of the army, or in any offices of the State. Only since 1782 had they been able to hold freehold land, to be schoolmasters or to act as legal guardians of children. This was the legacy of the legislation passed at various times during the reigns of William III and Queen Anne in order to protect the Protestant settlement made after the 1699 revolution, when Catholics were seen as the greatest enemy of the State.

Wellesley's period as an Irish member of parliament did however see some significant changes in the position of the Irish Catholics. Under pressure from the English government, who feared that Irish Catholics excluded from many of the privileges of citizenship might be inclined to join forces with France during the Revolutionary Wars, relief acts were passed in Ireland which gave the Catholics a significant share in the political nation. The franchise was opened to them, as were several of the offices and positions of political power from which they had previously been excluded. They were not,

however, admitted to seats in parliament, or to the higher government offices, and so significant grievances remained. With the passing of the Act of Union in 1801, the Catholics' campaign for full political equality acquired a central place in British politics. In 1829, when the Duke of Wellington (as Arthur Wellesley became in 1818) was premier, a Roman Catholic Relief Act was passed. This was a major change in the position of the Catholics, although it was by no means the end of the Irish question in British politics.

There have been several detailed studies covering the development of Catholic agitation for political rights during the nineteenth century, including Ward's The Eve of Catholic Emancipation, and Machin's The Catholic Question in British Politics, 1820 to 1830. There have also been many excellent biographies of Wellington's life as a politician, not least Elizabeth Longford's Wellington, Pillar of State, and more recently Thompson's Wellington After Waterloo. Little attention has, however, been paid to Wellington's personal attitude to the Irish Catholics and their cause before his premiership, beyond establishing that he was not simply a reluctant convert to the cause in 1829 as a response to the threat from the New Catholic Association. This thesis examines the development of Wellington's thoughts on, and approach to, the Catholic question from the beginning of his political career to the end of the Liverpool administration, in the context of the growing importance of the Catholic question in British politics.

Between the passing of the Act of Union and his becoming Prime Minister in 1828, Wellington appears

to have been for much of the time on the periphery of the Catholic question. Although from 1807 to 1809 under an anti-Catholic government, he served as Chief Secretary for Ireland, a post in which it was impossible to avoid some involvement in the affairs of the Irish Catholics, he did not publicly identify himself with either the Catholics or their opponents. His involvement in the Peninsular War, and later with the Army of Occupation in France, took him out of British politics for some years, and he had little time then to devote to thinking about the Catholics' claims. He did, however acquire a reputation for fairness towards the Catholic inhabitants of the countries in which he served. On his return to England, while serving as Master General of the Ordnance in Liverpool's government, he spoke in only one debate on the subject, the first after his return. In this speech he appeared, at least on the surface, to identify himself with the anti-Catholic party, and thus having made his mark, he left others to make the public declarations of opposition to Catholic emancipation, and contented himself with silent votes.

Wellington's correspondence, and accounts of his conversations with his personal friends make it clear, however, that his lack of public involvement and reputation as an opponent of relief belied his keen interest in the question. He was in fact deeply concerned that something should be done to bring an end to the continued agitation by the Irish, and to a lesser extent the English, Catholics, and their parliamentary supporters. Unlike many of the latter, however, Wellington was not 'pro-Catholic' in the sense that he believed that the concerns raised by opponents to relief were unfounded; nor did he

consider that the wishes of the Catholics in this matter must be paramount. Rather he accepted that there was a potential danger to the Protestant establishment from Catholic relief, in the independence of the Catholic Church from the State, and its connections with the Papacy. He was, therefore, to place more emphasis on the question of securities for the Protestant Church as an accompaniment to Catholic relief than on the actual issue of relief itself, which he was inclined to consider rather as a matter of political expediency. To Wellington, the vital aspect of the question was to find the most appropriate method of guarding against the dangers posed by the Catholics and their Church, and this was central to his thinking on the subject throughout his political career.

CHAPTER ONE

ARTHUR WELLESLEY AS CHIEF SECRETARY FOR IRELAND,
1807 TO 1809.

From its outset the Duke of Portland's ministry, which took office in March 1807, was clearly associated in the political mind with anti-Catholic sentiment. As the successors of the Ministry of all the Talents, who had resigned rather than pledge that they would not raise the Catholic question again, it was generally assumed that they had taken this pledge as a condition of office. It was also rumoured that some of the men who took high office with Portland had been instrumental in encouraging the king to take the stand which had led to the resignation of the Talents ministry. Pamphlets against Catholic emancipation proliferated throughout the country, apparently provoked by the attempt by the previous ministry to introduce a measure of concessions, and the ministry was accused of fermenting anti-Catholic feelings among the populace. The decision to call a general election apparently to make the most of the excitement raised in the country further confirmed their reputation as the 'No Popery' ministry. It was as part of this administration that Arthur Wellesley took his first political post, as Chief Secretary for Ireland.

Wellesley was the first Anglo-Irishman to hold this post since the Union. Many Anglo-Irishmen were renowned for their strong anti-Catholic stance. They were stimulated in their feelings by a reverence for

history, which reinforced their awareness of their special position within the land, and their separation from the native Irish. Determined to uphold the Protestant ascendancy, they wished to maintain the exclusion of all Catholic 'natives' from political power, lest their position of pre-eminence be threatened. Wellesley had been born into this class, and had served as an aide-de-camp to Lords Buckingham and Westmorland at Dublin Castle, the centre of ascendancy politics. An Anglo-Irish ascendancy-supporting Chief Secretary might seem the natural choice for the Portland ministry.

Wellesley had, however, never made a stand as a supporter of the ascendancy. Rather, while at the Castle he had spoken in the Irish Parliament as an advocate of the 1793 Catholic Relief Act, although he did oppose the entry of Catholics into parliament.¹ His stand on that occasion was probably dictated by the wishes of his elder brother, a devoted adherent of Pitt. Since that time, however, he had dedicated himself to a military career. His interest in politics was limited; although he entered parliament in 1806, this was solely to defend his brother from the threat of impeachment.² While he did advise Grenville on various military matters, he avoided party politics and spent most of his time seeking active employment with the army. He had left Ireland an unknown soldier and returned relatively well known, after serving with distinction in India. As Governor of Mysore he had proved to be a good administrator, capable of dealing with people of a different religion and culture. It was probably this ability, rather than his Irish origins, which suggested the appropriateness of his appointment.³

Family connections reinforced his proven talents, and made his accession to the government desirable. The Wellesleys, led by the talented Marquis Wellesley, were currently uncommitted in terms of political allegiance. Although the Marquis was a personal friend of Lord Grenville, he had not been able to support the Talents administration openly, as members associated with the Whig party were leading a campaign criticising his conduct in India. Consequently when the new administration was formed, Portland approached him on 24 March with an offer of the post of Foreign Secretary. On 25 March, Portland proposed 'sounding out' Arthur Wellesley to see if he would be willing to go to Ireland. Offers of places were also made to Henry and William Wellesley. These offers were likely to have been made in the attempt to secure the Marquis' support by dealing kindly with the younger members of the family. The praise with which Portland lauded the Marquis for allowing his brothers to accept office confirms this.⁴

In accepting office Arthur Wellesley made no specific reference to the Catholic question. In a letter to his brother he insisted that his primary reason for accepting the position was because he believed that it would be beneficial to his military career. He also later commented that if he had refused office the government would have been in great difficulties in Ireland, and thus he had felt unable to decline it.⁵ This was because he believed it to be his duty to serve the king whenever and wherever he was called so to do, regardless of his personal preferences. It was not, however, a duty he anticipated with much pleasure, for although he made no political comment on the subject, it is clear from his personal correspondence that he would not have

relished living in Ireland or dealing with the Irish. For example, he had informed Olivia Sparrow that he would prefer his wife to make her home in England because 'Ireland [would] not be a fit residence for any woman of this generation,' and if he had to leave her he 'should feel the same kind of uneasiness about her if she lived in Ireland that [he] should on leaving her in a camp in the enemy's country.'¹⁸

Setting aside his private feelings, Wellesley was distant from, and apparently unconcerned with, Irish affairs. This may have been a positive point in his favour. The Duke of Richmond, under whom Wellesley served, possessed many similar qualities. He too was primarily a soldier, not a politician. Although he later became a strong anti-Catholic, a letter to Grosvenor implies that he had not entirely made up his mind on the issue when he went to Ireland. Certainly his views were not publicly known, for he had neither spoken nor voted on the issue. It appears that when he accepted office he chose, with the agreement of the cabinet, to keep his views on the Catholic question hidden, presumably to maintain the appearance that he was uncommitted on the issue.¹⁹ This may have applied to Wellesley also, as he appears not to have spoken in parliament on the question during the 1808 debate on the subject.

The Irish government did contain some noted anti-Catholics: John Foster was re-appointed as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and William Saurin became Attorney General. There had, however been a sincere effort to retain the pro-Catholic William Plunket in the latter office, and the Solicitor-General, Charles Bushe, favoured concessions. Hence there does seem to have been an attempt to hold a

balance of opinions. This may have been prompted by the desire to avoid provoking the Catholics unnecessarily. There was a general fear that unrest in Ireland might encourage a French invasion. The danger was perhaps increased because the Portland ministry was replacing one perceived as favourable to the Catholics; when Camden had replaced Fitzwilliam as Viceroy, he shortly afterwards had to deal with a violent rebellion, in 1798. There were also other advantages to neutrality. Grenville's ministry had discovered to its cost that it was dangerous to be overpledged to one particular party in Ireland. Elliot, their Chief Secretary, had suggested that the government of Ireland should be transferred to persons who were favourably disposed to the Catholics, but who were not pledged to support them, and on whom, therefore, they would have less claim. 'Such an administration,' he contended, 'might probably have more authority over the Catholics, and more control over the Protestants'.* Working on this principle, two soldiers, unpledged on Irish politics, were a natural choice for troubled times.

Irish governments tended to fluctuate between those planning conciliatory policies and those determined to uphold the existing system. Despite the apparent neutrality of the executive government, Portland's Irish ministers were firmly in the latter camp; no alterations in the existing laws were to take place while Richmond was at the head. The Richmond/Wellesley government was not, however, intended to be repressive, and it was stipulated that the Catholics were to receive all the benefits of the laws already passed in their favour.* Wellesley's first task in Ireland was to make the government's position clear to the Catholics. In an interview

with Lord Fingall he emphasised that the Catholics were 'not to expect any farther concessions, that the present government were determined not to recommend any to the Parliament, but that the existing laws would be administered with mildness and good temper, and that the Roman Catholics would be considered by the government in all arrangements in which the law allowed they should be considered, in the same manner as the rest of His Majesty's subjects, according to their respective merits and claims.'¹² The general impression he gave was that the Irish government would act towards the Catholics as the benevolent upholders of the status quo, and it is within this framework that Wellesley's attitude to the Catholics at this stage of his career must be understood.

Throughout his time as Chief Secretary, in accordance with his brief, he acted judiciously with respect to the proceedings of the Catholics as a body. In his first interview with Fingall he had pointed out that, although the Talents' administration had been prepared to negotiate with the Catholics in order to avoid the inconvenience of a petition, Richmond's government, not being pledged in their favour, was indifferent as to whether petitions were presented: therefore the Catholics were to be left alone, to conduct their own affairs. He made no attempt to prevent legal Catholic meetings, or to infiltrate meetings, to influence their decisions. He did, however, dutifully keep well informed about their proceedings.

In the daily tasks of his office Wellesley often used his authority in the Catholics' favour, in accordance with the existing laws, and in order to keep the peace. For example, he dissuaded the Dublin

Clergy from petitioning the king to thank him for resisting the Catholic claims. He worked to prevent the Eniskillen militia from commemorating the battle of Vinegar Hill, and thus reviving old animosities. He sought to recommend Catholics for army and navy commissions, and the government also continued the precedent of consulting Lord Kenmare, a Roman Catholic, regarding the presentation to his living at Cabircomery. Notably Wellesley refused to appoint the Duke of Cumberland's son to a position in Dublin, because he was a violent anti-Catholic; 'we may say what we please of our moderation,' Wellesley declared, 'but no one [would] believe us if we employ such a fellow.'¹¹

Wellesley's conduct in these situations may have led some to believe him more favourable to the Catholics than he was in practice. It has been maintained, for example by G.R. Gleig, that Wellesley was by this time already opposed to the disqualifying laws. In support of this claim Gleig quotes Wellesley as stating that he wished 'to obliterate, as far as the law [would] allow, the distinction between Protestants and Catholics.'¹² This does not, however, imply that he was opposed to existing legislation. Rather, although it emphasises his conciliatory attitude to the Catholics, it draws an important demarcation line; his behaviour was constrained by the laws currently in operation. This holds the key to Wellesley's attitude to Ireland and the Irish Catholics during his Chief Secretaryship. As a soldier he was accustomed to giving and obeying orders. Now as an obedient servant of government he was concerned only to administer the laws according to his brief, and to perform the duties allocated to him, however mundane or disagreeable these might be.

He was not a legislator, but an administrator. In his view it was his duty 'to obey, and to see that others obeyed, the laws. It rested with the Government and the legislature to change or to retain them',¹³ and this was how he perceived his task as Chief Secretary.

Sometimes this strict adherence to the law led Wellesley into actions favourable to the Catholics. For example he investigated a complaint from some Kildare soldiers that they were being prevented from attending Mass, and informed Lord Hawkesbury that 'the law in Ireland allows Roman Catholics to be soldiers [so] it is probable that some regular mode has been adopted of allowing them to attend at Mass, and if this be the case, it ought to be adhered to in this instance.' If no such provision had been made, Wellesley was prepared to draw up regulations so that the law would be clear to all.¹⁴

On other occasions he relied on this principle in supporting in parliament actions taken by the Irish government which were interpreted as anti-Catholic. He supported the reinstatement of John Giffard, who had been dismissed from an office by Lord Hardwicke for making a violent speech against the Catholics, on the grounds that Giffard's actions had been perfectly legal, involving no breach of his official duty. 'Though he might have urged these opinions indiscreetly ... that was not a reason why he should be perpetually excluded from office.'¹⁵ Similarly he defended the appointment of Patrick Duigenan to the Privy Council, despite the latter's notorious antipathy to the Catholic claims. He maintained that it was usual for the person holding the office of Judge of the Prerogative Court to be a member of the

Privy council; 'the learned gentleman may have allowed his zeal for the established church to carry him into language too warm, and perhaps indiscreet, but that was no reason why he should not be called to the service of government.'¹⁶ If a person were legally qualified for an office, Wellesley saw no reason why he should be deprived of the opportunity to serve simply because the appointment was disliked by the Catholics and their supporters.

Wellesley's emphasis on 'the law' coloured his attitude to the Catholic college of Maynooth. On several occasions he was critical of the institution because government had virtually no control over its operations; it was totally independent of, and was therefore all but acting outside of, the law.¹⁷ He therefore had no wish to encourage the institution or to see it expand. He did not deny the principle that it was appropriate for the government to help to provide education for the Catholic priesthood, but did, however, feel that, in return, the government should have some influence over the college's proceedings.

In the debates in 1808 on the subject of the Portland government's decision not to proceed with a significant increase in the Maynooth grant, Wellesley took a very reasonable approach in support of the decision. He maintained that figures showed that sufficient numbers of priests were already being supplied by Maynooth and other seminaries, so that no expansion of the college was required, and also emphasised that it had never been intended that the institution should be supported solely from public funds.¹⁸ He was here clearly speaking as the government's official spokesman on Irish affairs, for

this line had been adopted in cabinet in order to persuade those members who were favourable to the Catholics to accept the reduction in the proposed grant.¹²⁸ Other supporters of the reduction, including some ministers, however, argued on more fundamental grounds; Perceval, for example, insisted that 'it was no part of religious toleration to make a provision for the education of the tolerated sect', while Duigenan declared that if anyone would move for the total abolition of the Maynooth grant, he would willingly support it!¹²⁹

The reduction in the Maynooth grant, particularly in view of many of the speeches made by government supporters, coupled with the apparently anti-Catholic appointments of Duigenan and Giffard, added to the opposition's perceptions of the ministry as avowedly anti-Catholic. The combined effects of these measures also clearly affected the attitude of those in the cabinet who favoured the Catholics. Canning, for example, confided to Richmond his great dislike of Duigenan's appointment:

'Taken by itself, it is full of evil, but coupled with Maynooth, it gives a new character of hostility to that measure, which, alone, it might not have exhibited. It is vain to assure the world, or the House of Commons, that the two things have nothing to do with each other. They do tell upon each other, and so strongly that, had the Maynooth reduction been in all other respects right, it would, in my opinion, have become wrong from the single circumstances of Duigenan's contemporary honours.'¹³⁰

As far as Wellesley was concerned, however, each measure was to be treated on its own merits. He always had clear reasons for his support, unrelated to the wider scope of the Catholic question.

Wellesley's concern to uphold the existing laws, which directed his attitude to the Catholics, also affected his approach to the agrarian disturbances which were an everyday part of life in Ireland. While he recognised that the nature of conditions in Ireland meant that often those who committed such offences had 'some reason to complain,' it was his basic principle that 'he who breaks the law must be considered in the wrong, whatever may have been the nature of the provocation which he has received.'²² It was in his view essential 'to make the people of the country feel that the public peace [could not] be violated and the law broken ... with impunity',²³ and he worked hard on measures to put this into practice. He constantly urged the magistrates and peace-officers to action, and as an extraordinary measure introduced stipendiary magistrates from outside districts, believing that they would be more inclined to act against offenders. He put much effort into the planning of the Dublin Police Bill. He supported Special Commissions in disturbed districts, to punish offenders as an example to others, and was also a strong advocate for the introduction and maintenance of an Insurrection Act. He called frequently for more troops in Ireland, to assist with peace-keeping, even though he must have been aware of the desperate need for soldiers on the continent.²⁴

Wellesley was all too aware that, in general, the mass of the Irish population did not share his concern for the law. He implied that they lived totally outside the law, with no regard or respect for it. They were hostile to the government, only waiting for a suitable chance to overthrow it. Within a few weeks of his arrival in April 1807, he informed Hawkesbury that 'no political measure which

you could adopt would alter the temper of the people of this country. They are disaffected to the British Government ... we have no strength here but our army.' This was not a fleeting opinion; in December 1808, he insisted that Ireland was 'always liable to the effects of conspiracy.'²⁵ Information received from informants about the progress of disaffection in the country, the general hostility to 'the government and to the English connection', and the expectation of a French invasion which would liberate the people from both, only served to fuel such feelings.²⁶ Given the European situation, the prospect of serious upheavals in Ireland took on a greater significance, and could not be ignored; it was only nine years since the French had taken advantage of an Irish rebellion to execute a landing in that country. Ireland was the weak spot in the United Kingdom, and would provide an excellent base from which Bonaparte could launch an attack on the mother country.

It is now generally contended that there was no real danger of such an attack after the Battle of Trafalgar; this conclusion is, however, reached with the benefit of hindsight. To those living in 1807 the Treaty of Tilsit marked the beginning of a new threat to the United Kingdom, as by its provisions Bonaparte attempted to build up his naval power. Canning was convinced that he aimed at an invasion of Ireland or Scotland. The subsequent British expedition to Denmark, and the efforts to keep the Portuguese fleets out of French hands show how seriously the threat was taken. Even these setbacks, however, did not dissuade Bonaparte, and further French plans for a grand naval alliance in May 1808 were only set aside because of the Spanish uprising. There were also problems with the British navy; old

warships were beginning to decay, while new ones were being constructed out of unsuitable wood. The British navy's fitness for further intensive service, and its ability to defend the country against invasion can certainly be questioned.²⁷

Living in Ireland in these troubled times, Wellesley often spoke of the possibility of invasion by the French. He believed that this would be welcomed by the majority of the populace, who would give full support to the French. The operations of the British army under these circumstances would be 'of the nature of those in an enemy's country in which the hostility of the people would be most active.'²⁸ The international situation, and the possibility of invasion gave him the opportunity to give considerable attention to military matters, which he no doubt found preferable to the endless requests for places and pensions which made up his daily routine. He therefore spent much time on matters relating to defence, planning positions for fortifications, and means of communication and supply. He also drew up a detailed plan for the defence of Ireland in case of invasion. On a more personal note, he recommended that he should be given an appointment to the staff of the army in Ireland, to be used if necessary. He hoped that his preparations, as well as serving in case of an emergency, might also dissuade the rebellious from expecting any success. For example, in speaking of a planned system of fortifications along the coast he declared that this would be of value even if the French never came; it would give the British government 'a secure footing' in Ireland and would be 'a check to the spirit of revolution and rebellion which prevails among the disloyal, by pointing out to

them clearly the impracticability and small chance of success of their plans.'²⁸

Wellesley's concern with defence is primarily a feature in his correspondence during 1807, and early 1808. By July 1808 he saw invasion as less likely, for Bonaparte had no army free to assist the Irish. He was still concerned that Bonaparte might try to divert British attention from Spain by using agitators to stir up rebellion in Ireland, although he was convinced that this could be dealt with more easily; he had no fear of Irish rebellions in which the French were not directly involved.²⁹

In all types of agitation, unrest, and talk of rebellion, about which Wellesley received information, the Catholics, as the majority of the population, were clearly implicated. For example James Trail explained that when his informants referred to 'the people', he interpreted this as 'the Catholics'. The lower orders of Catholics were regarded as 'universally disaffected' in November 1807. Information from a Frenchman stated that Frenchmen in Ireland were working with the priests to organise the Catholics, and that there was 'not a Catholic in the militia, should the French land that [could] be counted upon.'³⁰ Reports were often circulated that the French were particularly interested in the Catholics, especially after the Pastoral Address of the French Bishop of Quimper in June 1807 became publicly known. This Address drew attention to the 'suffering' of the Irish Catholics, under the 'tyrannical oppression' inflicted by England, at the same time as Bonaparte was aiding the Catholic religion, and appointed prayers to be said in churches 'to pray God to put a stop to the

persecution which the Catholic Church of Ireland suffers.'²²

In this atmosphere of suspicion it was not surprising that Wellesley began to question the Catholics' motives for their political action. Only in one letter, to James Trail, did he openly express his suspicions. In May, Trail sent him a paper from Lord Melville, in which Melville recommended that copies of a paper from one of the Cardinals, describing Bonaparte's treatment of the Pope should be circulated, in order to turn the Catholics from the French. In a scathing reply, Wellesley insisted that Melville totally misunderstood the situation: '[the proposal] proceeds on an erroneous principle; viz that the Roman Catholics in Ireland are a party in the state acting on a principle of religion. Now I think that the history of the two last centuries, and particularly that of the last twenty years will prove clearly that they are a religious party combined for political purposes and objects, and that with [very] few exceptions, they are indifferent upon the fate of their religion.' He went on to explain that Melville's idea would have had a great effect if the Catholics were 'more concerned about their religion than their politics.' However, in this instance, 'it [would] be found that they laugh at the Pope, his guards, and Cardinal Capone and only increase their admiration of Bonaparte.'²³

Wellesley cannot have meant his statement literally, for he must have known many sincerely religious Catholics. He was, however very much aware that the benefits now sought by the Catholic body were solely secular; they were uniting to campaign for political, and not for religious motives. If

they were inclined towards the French, it would be for the fulfilment of their political aspirations, and not for reasons connected with religion. The fact that Daniel O'Connell and other Catholics had also taken part in the beginning of agitation for the repeal of the Union also increased his wariness.³⁴ He was concerned that, when added to the independence of their Church from the State, the growth of the Catholics as a political group could be dangerous, as a threat to law, order, and stability. This attitude directed much of Wellesley's future thinking on the Catholic question, for he was always to see the matter as a political, rather than a religious issue. It also influenced his attitude to the question of the royal veto over the appointment of Catholic bishops, which was first seriously proposed in the 1808 debate on Catholic relief, and which was to dominate discussions on this question, in various forms, for the next thirteen years.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE VETO CONTROVERSY, 1808 TO 1809.

The debate on 25 May 1808, on Grattan's motion for a committee of the whole House of Commons to take into consideration the petition of the Irish Catholics, was noted for its moderate and reasonable tone. Unlike in 1805, when several of the speeches had been directed towards pointing out the errors of, and dangers in the Catholic religion', those opposed to the motion did not ground their opposition primarily upon issues of principle. The discussion rather centred upon the wisdom or otherwise of bringing forward a discussion at that time; Canning and Castlereagh for example opposed the consideration of the question at that time, contending that a discussion would not conciliate Ireland as Grattan hoped, but would rather have the opposite effect.² Supporters of the government contended that the Whigs were making the Catholic claims a party issue, by setting the question of relief aside while they were in office, but raising the matter while in opposition, in order to embarrass the ministers. The Whigs however held that the question was being brought on at that time not by a party, but by the whole Catholic body of Ireland.³ There was also much discussion as to whether or not any pledge, explicit or otherwise, had been given to the Catholics at the Union that their claims would be granted.⁴

In the House of Lords the tone of the opponents of relief, while still generally moderate, was more uncompromising. Sidmouth, for example, referred to the 'objectionable tenets' of the Roman church, 'which had ever been the handmaid and instrument of oppression.' Lord Hawkesbury, the main spokesman for the government, made his position very clear; he opened his speech by emphasising that his opposition 'did not rest on time and circumstances, but on principle ... founded on his conviction that a protestant government alone was consistent with the law and constitution of the British empire.'⁵ There were, however powerful speeches in favour of the Catholic claims. Grenville, for example, sought to reassure the House about the nature of the Catholic religion, and to emphasise that the Oath of Supremacy did not prevent the granting of concessions. The Bishop of Norwich also declared his support for relief, for the first time, and thus distinguished himself from his fellow ecclesiastics in the House.

It was in the context of these debates that the subject of the veto was first raised in parliament. This issue centred upon the manner in which the Irish Catholic bishops were appointed. At that time, when a bishop died, the other bishops of the province selected the three most suitable candidates for the office; this list was sent to the Pope, who usually chose the first to be the new bishop. With the veto, the government or monarch was permitted, at some stage, to pass judgement on the suitability of the candidates, and was thus given a say in the appointment. In general, those referring to a veto had in mind one of two schemes, involving either a negative or a positive interference in the electoral process. The negative scheme granted the right to

object to the name of the person selected by the bishops to be put forward to the Pope. The positive power actually granted to the government or monarch the right to select the new bishop, perhaps by choosing one from a list presented by the bishops of the province. Either of these schemes might be accompanied by a Concordat with the Pope, to regularise the position of the Catholic church within the United Kingdom, and/or a scheme for paying the Catholic clergy by the State, in order to link them more closely with the government.

Advocates of the veto believed that either scheme would counter the arguments against Catholic relief stemming from distrust of the Papal nomination of the Catholic hierarchy, which admitted the authority of a foreign power in the country. This distrust and fear was even greater while the Pope was under the control of Bonaparte, and there were fears for the safety of Ireland as regards an invasion. 'Bonaparte [had] control over the Pope, the Pope over the Catholic Clergy in Ireland; and the Catholic Clergy over the laity ... it [followed] that Bonaparte [had] control over a very large proportion of the army and navy.' By curtailing foreign influence in appointments to the episcopate in Ireland, the veto would limit similar control over the laity, ensuring that the bishops power would be used to support the government and British interests. The veto would ensure that only those loyal to the State would be appointed, and would also tie the hierarchy to the State, rather than leaving them independent of it.

The history of the first serious consideration of such a proposal in 1799, when certain Irish Catholic bishops were brought to accept in principle the idea

of a royal negative, has been well documented.⁷ In that instance, the first approach had been made by the government. In 1808, however, proposals seem to have emerged initially from the Catholics themselves, originating with the aristocratic members of the Catholic Committee in January or February 1808. Reports clearly represented the plan as conceived by the laity, to be put forward by them to the clergy.⁸ When Lord Fingall brought the Catholic petition of 1808 to England, discussions were held concerning the veto with Ponsonby and Dr. Milner, the agent of the Irish Catholics in England, and Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District. At this stage, the latter gave his support to a scheme for a negative veto, and implied that the Irish Catholic bishops would accept it.⁹

Fingall had first apparently offered the Catholic petition to the Duke of Portland.¹⁰ His refusal to present it placed the advocacy of the Catholic claims in parliament firmly in the hands of the Whigs. Now out of office, they were no longer constrained to avoid the question. Moreover, a discussion on Catholic relief was likely to give them a chance to embarrass governmental supporters of the question, and perhaps thus provoke disunity. Grenville and Grattan therefore presented the Catholic petitions in parliament, and were prepared to move motions upon them.

In the debate, the subject of the veto was first raised by Grattan, who announced that the Catholic body had themselves agreed that 'in the future nomination of bishops, His Majesty [might] interfere and exercise his royal power, by putting a negative upon such nominations; that ... no Catholic bishop

shall be appointed without [his] entire approbation.'¹¹ Unfortunately, however, he went further, and in his enthusiasm, remarked that this proposition would make the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church 'as one', with 'the king at the head.'¹² Ponsonby similarly got carried away, and, claiming Milner's authority for his statement, outlined in detail a proposal to give the Crown a positive and unlimited interference in appointments, which he claimed would give 'the real and effectual nomination to the Crown'. He insisted that appointments to the Catholic episcopate 'should finally rest with the king.'¹³ He also, however, mentioned the possibility of the Crown having a negative interference in appointments. There can be little doubt that both men made their statements with the best intentions, convinced that the Catholics were agreeable to the veto, and that their cause would benefit from a public airing of the proposal. In the House of Lords, Lord Grenville was more cautious, merely referring to an 'effectual negative' for the Crown over appointments to Irish Catholic bishoprics, to which the Catholics of Ireland were 'willing to accede.'¹⁴

The day after the debate in the House of Commons it became clear that there had been a misunderstanding, for Milner, who had not been informed that the subject was to be raised in parliament, produced a written protest against Grattan's and Ponsonby's applications of his statements. He did, however, continue to avow his belief in the acceptability of a limited negative. The details of the misunderstanding, and how this may have occurred are not of particular importance in this context; what is more significant is the

response of the Catholics' parliamentary advocates, and the Catholics themselves, to the proposals put forward.

The initial reaction in parliament was favourable. Although motions were defeated by large majorities in both Houses, the general feeling was that the debates had gone well for the Catholics, particularly as a result of the introduction of the idea of the veto. Whitbread informed Grey that the announcements in both Houses had made 'a great impression', and this sentiment was echoed by Grenville.¹⁴ Grenville was also encouraged by letters from two of the more conservative Irish bishops, Dr. Troy and Dr. Dillon.¹⁵ These letters, which assured Grenville that the earliest opportunity would be taken to discuss means to assure the legislature that 'none but loyal and peaceful subjects' would be appointed to Irish bishoprics, seem genuinely friendly, and willing to consider the proposals. Both Troy and Dillon had been signatories of the 1799 Resolutions, and at this stage they had no reason to believe that the other bishops did not share their views. Both also wrote letters to Milner, in favour of the veto. G. O'Brien is therefore unjustified in seeing in the letters 'frosty gratitude and indignant assurances' that only loyal persons would be appointed to bishoprics.¹⁶

The problems began when reports of the debate reached Ireland. The 1799 Resolutions were not public knowledge, and when inaccurate reports of Ponsonby's speech attributed to him a wish to see the king as head of the Catholic Church, Catholic opposition to the veto scheme developed rapidly. Some historians have seen the influence of Daniel

O'Connell already at work in this opposition.¹⁷ However, although his first reported speech in the Catholic Committee was made in this year, there is no evidence that he was at this stage anything more than an ordinary, if extremely talented, member of the vociferous group of middle class Catholics which now formed the backbone of the Dublin Committee, and took a leading role in the opposition to the veto.¹⁸ This group formed the more forceful and dynamic section of the Committee, and was beginning to take the lead in its deliberations; under their influence the more passive policy recommended by the aristocratic Catholics had been set aside, in favour of the regular presentation of petitions to parliament, and to their lead is attributed the more forceful language of the 1808 petition, in comparison with that of 1805.

It was suggested at the time that opposition to the veto was largely rooted in the determination of this group not to accept anything put forward by the traditional, aristocratic leaders of the cause, and some historians have echoed this view.¹⁹ It is more likely, however, that they rejected the veto because they were genuinely determined to resist any further links between England and Ireland. The proposal for a veto was perceived as a governmental ploy to control, and surreptitiously to destroy, the Catholic Church in Ireland. The independent Irish hierarchy was a symbol of the autonomy of the Irish Catholic Church, the last thriving sign of national life and freedom.²⁰ Bishops appointed by the government would be tied more to the State than to their flocks, and Ireland's links with England would be increased. Appointments could also be approved more for the benefit of the State than the church. The manner in

which the veto had been represented by the Catholics' parliamentary advocates showed its dangers, even in the hands of well-meaning Protestants; in the hands of the anti-Catholic government, the consequences were not to be contemplated.²¹ Subsequent events support this interpretation, for members of this group were to reject the veto on national grounds, even after Papal sanction was obtained for the principle of a royal negative.

That the Catholics were right to be concerned about the interpretations which Protestants might give to the veto may be seen in the immediate, informal reactions of the Irish government to the House of Commons debate. The proposal of the veto was even sufficient to catch the interest of the Duke of Richmond, who suggested to Wellesley that it could be used as a basis for the payment of the Catholic clergy by the State. He did not, however, relate this to the granting of any concessions to the Catholics. In reply, Wellesley remarked that he could see no problems with Richmond's suggestions; the only difficulties he foresaw were not with the Catholics, but with the 'red-hot' Protestants, like Perceval, who would reject any concessions at all as leading to further demands. He mentioned also the 'general objection' which some people had to raising the question during the king's lifetime.²² Wellesley too made no reference to concessions to the lay Catholics in return for the veto, but rather, like Richmond, connected this only with payment for the clergy. Given his great distrust of the independence of the clergy, he naturally saw a great benefit in thus connecting them to the state.

The strength of general Catholic opposition to the veto rapidly showed that there would, in fact, be considerable difficulty in implementing any such scheme. Opposition was stimulated by attacks in the press against those who spoke in its favour. Pamphlets were circulated, extolling the virtues of the free hierarchy, and the evils of any interference by the government.²³ The lower clergy also stood up for independence. This clerical opposition to the veto was perceived in various ways. Some represented the clergy as taking this stand because of their close relationship with their flocks; the clergy needed to support the laity's stand because they relied upon them for finance. It was also held that the laity were in fact being stimulated in their opposition by the clergy, who wished to remain independent.²⁴

It was against this background that the Irish bishops met, in September 1808, to come to a joint decision on the matter. Before this meeting, Milner had visited Ireland, and had spoken to some of the bishops on the subject. Despite the vehement opposition to the veto, Milner was convinced that, at this meeting, the bishops would decide to support the proposal.²⁵ He was, however, greatly mistaken. Many of the younger bishops opposed the proposal on principle. Others were probably motivated by a desire to prevent a split in the Catholic body, or to prevent the hierarchy from sinking in the public estimation. Instead of giving their approbation to the veto, the bishops formally recorded their 'decided opinion' that any changes to the manner in which Catholic bishops were appointed would be 'inexpedient'. They did however also pledge that they would continue to recommend to the Pope only

such men as were of 'unimpeachable loyalty and conduct' to fill Irish Bishoprics.²⁶

Naturally the Catholics' parliamentary advocates were angered by the bishops' attitudes, as their credibility was threatened by this apparent duplicity. Matters were made worse because it was not entirely clear whether the bishops' resolutions were intended as a rejection of the veto *per se*, or under the present circumstances. Milner and Troy contended that the latter interpretation was correct; there would be a different attitude if the government were not decidedly hostile to their claims.²⁷ This did not, however, mollify the Whigs. Grenville was furious with the line the bishops had taken. He complained angrily that while most people believed that the Catholic hierarchy led their flocks 'in blind submission,' the truth was far different; the bishops were 'men afraid to avow what they have done; driven by mere newspaper clamour from measures which they, or at least a considerable part of them, have deliberately sanctioned; disclaiming their friends and stooping to their assailants; and at last wording their resolves in such terms as may convey to one party the impression that change would be inexpedient at the present time, and to the other that it is so only under the present circumstances.'²⁸ Generally the Whigs were agreed that the Catholic cause had been greatly damaged by the rejection of the veto, temporary or otherwise, and were convinced that little could be done for the cause in parliament unless the bishops withdrew their resolutions.²⁹

While the Whigs complained, the majority of the Catholic body in Ireland rejoiced in the stand their bishops had taken, and the hierarchy received many

addresses of support and votes of thanks. By contrast, supporters of the veto were denounced as 'traitors who [wished] to sell their religion', and who were willing 'to transfer the spiritual authority of His Holiness the Pope to a Protestant King.'³⁰ In some areas those who could be influenced were put under considerable pressure to withdraw their support for the measure; attempts in Kilkenny and Louth to get up an address to Fingall, in approbation of his conduct and the proposal of the veto failed dismally, presumably because of this pressure. Vetoists found that their businesses suffered, and, in Kilkenny, the refusal of three Catholic partners in the city bank to sign a petition praising the bishops led to a run on that bank, the lower classes refusing to accept notes from it.³¹ Fingall and his party, however, continued to support the proposal, and it rapidly became clear that there was a serious division of opinion within the Catholic body, which it would be very difficult to reconcile.

Wellesley was out of Ireland, serving in Portugal, while this opposition to the veto emerged. On his return, he was very suspicious of the developments which had taken place, as he was concerned that these were likely to lead to disturbance and lawlessness. He saw dangers even in the divisions within the Catholic body. Although some suggested that the splits within the Catholic body were likely to lead to conversions to Protestantism, Wellesley maintained that the divisions would lead in the long run only to greater unity of sentiment within the body, 'and that sentiment the most violent.' The offer of the veto had never really meant anything.³² Extrapolating from his views of Irish Catholicism as expressed to James

Trail, it may be assumed that he believed the Catholics to be playing a political game. The veto may have been proposed with the deliberate aim of stimulating an adverse reaction, and thus raising national consciousness. The Catholics' actions simply confirmed his views that they were united not as a religious, but as a political party. He was fuelled in these views by letters from some of his regular correspondents. Edward Littlehales, for example, informed him that the proceedings of the Catholics should be viewed not as 'merely a schism among the laity and clergy,' but rather as 'likely to tend to disturb the peace of [the] country', primarily because the disagreement was dividing the lower and upper classes from each other.³³

Wellesley's written comments on the veto proposal and its consequences are limited. Although he received much information on the subject, and occasionally actively sought it, his main preoccupation at this time remained the establishment and maintenance of the public peace. His correspondence is particularly concerned with a violent outbreak of agrarian disturbances in Limerick and Kerry. He was also busy catching up with the routine work of distributing patronage. It was in the context of the veto question that Wellesley commented that it was not his job to change the laws, and because of this he maintained that he 'did not think much about [the veto] in those days'.³⁴ Although this was a comment made in retrospect, it fits in with his general attitude to his duties. Consideration of the veto proposal was a matter for the British government; unless he were told otherwise, his job was simply to deal with the realities of life in Ireland, and to keep the peace.

There is, however, one document which, despite his comments to the contrary, does show that Wellesley gave some thought to the question; in 1808, he set down his views on the subject in an outline for a pamphlet, written for J.W. Croker.³⁵ The pamphlet implies that Wellesley marshalled his arguments to counter a pamphlet by J.B. Trotter, presumably his Letter to Lord Southwall on the Catholic Question, which was published in 1808. This entry into the world of polemics seems out of character for Wellesley. It may be presumed that this was a private document, written for the benefit of a friend, within which he felt free to express his own opinions. Wellesley was probably prompted to reply by the tenor of Trotters' arguments. Trotter argued against the veto from a nationalistic standpoint, viewing it as an attack on Irish independence. Given Wellesley's belief in the importance of the British connection and the Union, together with his concern to uphold the existing laws, it would be natural for him to oppose anything which, even indirectly, strengthened Irish nationalism. P.S. O'Hegarty rightly states that Wellesley 'always saw the National question behind the Catholic question.'³⁶ When the veto was opposed on national grounds, his suspicions were aroused, and he wished to see the record set straight.

Wellesley, in this pamphlet, claimed that it was ridiculous to see the veto as an attack on national independence. The Papal appointment of bishops necessitated an interference by a foreign power in the country. While such interference existed, a country could not be truly independent; autonomy could be established only by freeing that country from the foreign power. 'It has been considered

desirable in every country,' he wrote, 'to free the executive power from the exercise of the power of the Pope; as the first step towards establishing the independence of that country from foreign domination, and the freedom of the people.' Every other country in Europe had achieved this without seeing the alteration as a threat or as diminishing independence. Rather it was seen as a gain. Only in Ireland, he complained, was it suggested that 'to free the country from all interference on the part of any foreign power, and to place all power ... in the hands of the lawful King of the country, is an invasion of liberty and independence.' He entirely opposed this view, rather believing that the greatest threat to independence was 'the continuance of the existence of an establishment not known to the law, the individuals comprising which are appointed by a foreign power'.

From his English standpoint the position was self-evident: the veto was a spiritual matter for the Pope and the Catholics, and a political one for the government and parliament. Never was it an issue of national independence! The discussion had only been slanted in this way in order to create disturbance. It is clear from his arguments that, for all his awareness of Irish national feeling, he did not understand it. He did not appear to grasp that, while he saw the only 'foreign power' in Ireland as that of the Pope, the Irish regarded the British government in this light, and wished to keep their church out of these foreign hands. Other nations, in negotiating Concordats with the Papacy to limit the Pope's role in the appointment of bishops obtained the right of appointment for themselves; for the Irish, however, the decisions would be in the hands

of another country. As an Englishman, Wellesley could not comprehend these feelings.

The pamphlet also reflects Wellesley's concern for the law, for in it he sought to establish the basis upon which the veto could be brought into action in accordance with the existing laws. He contended that any attempt to give the king a royal veto would be illegal at that time, for although the Catholic Church and its clergy were tolerated, their existence was not recognised in law. If the veto were to be introduced, the first step must be to give the Catholic Church some establishment in law. Without this, 'the power vested in the Crown ... would be ... illegal, as it would be to appoint a person to fill an office, the existence of which the law did not recognise.' Without this legal recognition, there would be no way to compel the Catholics to accept a bishop chosen by the government, and they would be legally entitled to select someone else themselves. Wellesley was also concerned that the laws of the Catholic Church should not be neglected. He was convinced that any formal discussion of the veto must commence not with the laity, but with the Pope, to whom, in law, the right of appointment belonged; the arrangements 'must be settled by the Pope, and can be settled by no other person whatever.' Under all circumstances, the constituted authorities must be obeyed, and established chains of command followed, even if to ignore them might bring beneficial consequences. From this standpoint, the issue did not concern the laity at all, except that it would be very difficult to exercise the power of the veto without the Catholics' consent.

In the pamphlet, although he was aiming to refute a particular type of opposition, Wellesley did not declare himself to be an advocate of the veto. Remembering his concern about the existence of the Catholic Church as an independent body, however, he doubtless would have welcomed the introduction of the veto as an opportunity for the Church to be brought within the bounds and under the control of, the State. The veto would be one way of overcoming the 'secret power' of the Catholic Church in Ireland as it then existed, outside the law. The views he recorded here, and the impressions he had formed of the Irish Catholics during his Chief Secretaryship were to remain with him during his absence in the Peninsula. They were also to be a great influence upon his approach to possible solutions to the Catholic question, in the future.

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CHAPTER THREE

CABINET FORMATION AND THE CATHOLIC QUESTION, 1809 TO 1812.

Britain's involvement in war on yet another front, with the commencement of extensive campaigns in Portugal, and then in Spain, did not remove the Catholic question from the centre stage in politics. It continued to be of great interest and importance, not only as a subject for discussion in parliament, but also in the wider sphere of general politics. In a period of political instability, when changes, and rumours of changes, were rife, the question came to play an important role in the various attempts made to form successful administrations.

In 1809, Canning and Castlereagh, both leading members of Portland's cabinet, fought a duel. This was the culmination of a series of events which had begun in March of that year, when Canning had initiated manoeuvres to secure Castlereagh's removal from the War Office. The succeeding machinations, including Canning's personal bid for the premiership, have been frequently recorded in detail.¹ As a result, Castlereagh, Portland, and finally Canning, all resigned. Consequently, what had been a stable and fairly strong administration, was reduced to a state of desperation. As Liverpool commented in a letter to Arthur Wellesley, 'it is painful to reflect, that a government which had nothing serious to apprehend from its enemies should be brought to

the point of dissolution by the divisions of its friends.'².

The Portland government had been formed in the midst of a furore involving the Catholic question, and the rump of the cabinet who met to discuss the future of the administration, found themselves confronted by the same issues when they tried to strengthen their parliamentary position. The cabinet met on 18 and 19 September 1809, and, after much discussion, it was resolved to inform the king that their only hope of gaining support was in seeking to unite with Grey and Grenville, with a view to forming an extended and combined administration.³ Naturally the proposition was not popular with the king, who refused even to contemplate negotiations without an assurance from the Whigs that the Catholic question would not be raised. Once again he proposed to demand a written pledge to this effect. Perceval well knew the effect which such a demand would have; he therefore tried to steer the king away from taking this step, while at the same time calming his worries. He emphasised that Grey and Grenville must recognise from the very nature of the government that Catholic relief could never be one of its measures. He insisted that such a coalition would be the best way to prevent the issue from being pressed. The present ministers would always refuse to accept any measure of relief - therefore Grey and Grenville would not be able to force the point without breaking up the government. By contrast, if the present men tried to carry on alone, and failed, they would not be able to protect the king from the Whigs' measures.⁴

The king was finally brought to agree, and on 22nd September he informed the cabinet that an approach could be made. He did not accede graciously, for his letter laid much stress upon the reluctance with which he accepted their proposition and emphasised that he would not be bound by the results of the negotiations. All was to depend upon whether he could be protected from pressure over the Catholic question. Further proceedings would be impossible 'unless means [could] be found to secure him against a renewal of attempts to which he [could] never submit.' In an emotional appeal to the cabinet, he declared that his principles upon that issue could never be set aside. To do so would be to abandon his duty to God and his country, and to set at naught his family's honour. He was determined to stand fast, whatever might be the result of that tenacity.⁵

Recalling the Opposition leaders' attitude in 1807, and their persistence in the Catholic cause, the success of any negotiations therefore seemed doubtful. Perceval's letters to Grey and Grenville, inviting them to consider forming an 'extended and combined administration' bore no fruit, and no deliberations between the two parties took place. Grey refused even to go to London, convinced that any junction would be totally impossible! The Opposition leaders appear to have misunderstood Perceval's approach, interpreting it as a request that they should join his government, rather than as an invitation to discuss the formation of a new one. Although Perceval later disclaimed this, his explanation came too late. The king had seen their replies, and took the opportunity to decline any further communication with them. Expressions used by

the two leaders, however, make it clear that the intransigence of both sides over the Catholic question would have prevented much further discussion.

In his letter to Perceval declining further communications, Grenville based his decision upon his aversion to 'the principle of the Government ... and to the circumstances which attended its formation'.⁶ This comment was understood to refer to the government's attitude to the Catholics. The Whigs, including Grenville himself, had always been concerned about the political dangers which could arise if negotiations raised the Catholic question, and Grey regretted Grenville's comments, as prematurely introducing the subject.⁷ Grenville however later explained to Grey that he had felt it essential to refer to the question, despite the dangers. He made the comment as a statement of principle, being determined not to take office again without a clear explanation on the issue. He also pointed out that the Irish Catholics would have been critical of them if no mention had been made of their claims. Moreover, he had felt it important to be open about the issue from the very beginning. 'The advantage which the Court has on this subject,' he declared 'is one of which we cannot deprive them; and in such a state of things, the more directly we appear to meet it the better I think it is both for us, and for the cause.'⁸

Perceval deplored Grenville's comments as unnecessarily raising the question. By commenting upon the 'principle' of the government, he felt that Grenville had shown his intransigence upon the subject: '[Bringing] it forward in such a way not

only to preclude the possibility of our negotiation with him going on, but so as to confirm the King in all his alarms that if [Grenville] should return to power, he would again harass the mind of his Majesty with the renewal of it [the Catholic question.]' The king took a similar line, understanding Grenville's declaration as 'avowing the intention of bringing forward the Catholic question whenever he shall have the means of so doing.'¹²

Grey entirely concurred with the position taken up by Grenville. He too maintained that he could never take office under any engagement not to bring on the Catholic question, whether expressed or implied. To do so would mean total loss of honour. If this excluded him from office during the king's lifetime, then he was prepared to pay that price. He was, however, ready to satisfy the king's mind by providing securities, even if these were of no practical value. In his view, it would not be desirable to carry the question without the provision of the veto.¹³ Grenville also emphasised the importance of appropriate securities. He explained to Hodson, Principal of Brasenose College, Oxford, that 'In every consideration which [he had] ever given to the subject, the security of the establishment [had] been one of the leading and most prominent features to which [his] attention [had] been directed.'¹⁴ He also enshrined this principle in his Letter to Lord Eingall, published the following year. All was clearly set for a major clash between the anti-vetoistical Irish Catholics, and their avowedly security-conscious parliamentary advocates.

By taking their stand on the Catholic question in 1809, even as modified by the emphasis on securities

the Whigs had identified themselves more clearly as the party of the Catholics. Although some, like Tierney, questioned the advisability of condemning themselves to perpetual opposition over the issue, most accepted that the group would not take office unless able to propose something for the Catholics. By contrast, the shaky administration maintained by the king after the attempted coalition acquired a more decidedly anti-Catholic complexion. Although Canning and Castlereagh had opposed the consideration of Catholic claims in 1808, they were known as favourable in principle. They were now in opposition. Portland, who had never expressed any opinion on the issue while at the head, was replaced by Perceval, well known for his vociferous opposition to the cause. The accession of Marquis Wellesley was not seen as a gain for the concessionists, for his views were not widely known. Indeed, Plowden viewed him, and his brother, Wellesley-Pole, as greatly adding to the administration's anti-Catholic character.¹² Perceval's government saw themselves as the last bastions of the king's conscience, against those who would try to force concessions upon him. It was therefore their duty to stand by him, despite all the difficulties they faced.¹³

The new government appeared to be a weak and hopeless one, containing few men of proven talents. Attempts to strengthen the administration by the accession of Canning, Castlereagh, and Sidmouth all failed, and its weakness was still very apparent when, in October 1810, the king became mentally ill. However, during the proceedings for a regency, which were set in motion on 31st December, Perceval's parliamentary reputation was greatly enhanced. Men on all sides came to admire his determination in

adhering to Pitt's Regency Plan of 1788, despite the great opposition he faced. The premier's personal character and abilities carried the government's arrangements through parliament, and this in turn encouraged more support for the administration. This was not, however expected to change the government's fate in the long-term. The Prince of Wales had been a close friend of Fox, and his personal friends were opposed to Perceval's policies, particularly respecting Ireland. The prince was presumed to favour emancipation, and few people expected him to maintain his father's Pittite, anti-Catholic ministers in office. Throughout January 1811 there were constant speculations about this anticipated change of ministers. The regent made it clear in many ways that the government did not have his confidence. He held secret communications with the Whigs and his friends, while Grey and Grenville busied themselves planning potential cabinets.¹⁴

Nevertheless, despite all expectations to the contrary, the prince announced on 4th February his intention to continue the ministers in office. He made it clear, however, that he had not changed his attitude towards them; his actions were to be attributed to his abandoning personal preferences in favour of loyalty to his father.¹⁵ His decision was probably to be attributed both to reports of the king's impending recovery, and, to a lesser extent, to his quarrel with the Whig leaders over his reply to parliament accepting the regency. The regent feared that placing the Whigs in office might lead to a set-back in the king's health once he heard of the change. Already publicly unpopular, he could not further risk his position by doing anything which might be interpreted as harming 'the good old king'.

Moreover, the Whigs' attempts to assume control of his actions before they were even officially appointed as his ministers irritated him, and perhaps for the first time, led him to question his relationship with this group.¹⁶

The prince's decision naturally upset those who had been counting on assuming office. Friends favouring Catholic emancipation warned that such actions could lead to great injury to Ireland. Their hopes were not, however, entirely destroyed. The regent gave no indication that Perceval's reprieve was anything but temporary, and continued to discuss future arrangements with his friends. Nevertheless the premier tried hard to make himself acceptable to the prince. His position was helped by his high standing in parliament, and his reputation for honesty. His policy seemed to have good results, and the atmosphere gradually thawed between them. Despite many clashes, often caused by the regent's persistence in making appointments without consulting the cabinet, their relationship developed more smoothly than anyone had expected.

The Catholic question, in the form of the Irish government's over-zealous and independent proceedings against the Dublin Catholic Convention, threatened to destroy the developing equilibrium. However, on both occasions when the issue was raised (February and July 1811) the regent was willing to accept all the government's decisions. The prince's friends and the Whigs were very worried by the situation. Moira warned him that perhaps the ministers were indirectly trying to make it possible for themselves to remain in office, by involving the regent in a conflict with the Catholics. Thomas Grenville tried to excuse the

regent by suggesting that he did not personally agree with the government's actions but was allowing his ministers freedom to pursue their own policy.¹⁷

The major problem for everyone involved was that no one actually knew the regent's current views on the Catholic question. As a friend of Fox, and a focus for opposition to George III's Protestant ministers, it was always assumed that he favoured concessions. Certainly the Catholics placed much hope in him, and many expected that the regency would result in the granting of their claims. Daniel O'Connell announced, in March 1811, that 'to the kind interposition of...the Prince of Wales he looked forward for the full and speedy extinction of [Catholic] slavery. [His] past conduct...assures us that those disabilities which distinguish the Catholic from the Protestant can no longer continue.'¹⁸ The Catholics continued to express such views as long as was at all feasible, not wishing to appear to doubt the prince's beneficence.

The continuance of Perceval's government, however, introduced doubts, for the regent was thus identified in the public eye with the views of that party. The regent was in a difficult position. To uphold a position favourable to the Catholics while acting as the focus for opposition was one thing; to espouse such an unpopular cause when holding real authority was quite another. He knew of his father's great popularity, and must have wondered whether his conscientious stand on this question had brought him to that position. What then would be the result if he, already unpopular, were to openly declare in favour of the Catholics? However, without losing the good will of the Irish Catholics, and appearing to

abandon all his former promises, he could hardly renounce them as soon as he gained any authority. He therefore seems to have played a vacillating game - not necessarily from malicious or deliberately double-dealing motives, but from fear and indecision.

As a result, many contradictory reports circulated concerning the prince's opinions. On 2nd December 1811, it was reported that the behaviour of the Irish Catholics in continually pressurising him had made him determined to do nothing which might be interpreted as conceding anything. The supplier of this information interpreted this as a declaration of intent to keep the present ministers; a decision, he said, to be attributed to the regent's laziness and timidity. However, the same writer announced later that, while the prince was annoyed with the Catholics, he still intended to help them.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he continued to keep Perceval in office, despite the availability of pro-Catholic alternatives. The Whigs soon began to suspect that his aim was to 'play for time' and avoid the question. Grenville expected him to announce that it would be 'indelicate' to do anything on the subject in the king's lifetime.²⁰ All this time the prince was coming into closer contact with the Pittites, and appeared to be finding them increasingly acceptable.

Uncertainty respecting the regent's views almost certainly aggravated reports that the cabinet was about to break up over the issue. The major split was rumoured to be between Perceval and Marquis Wellesley, who did agree on very little during their service together. However, in a document written by Richard Wellesley's son, detailing the grounds of these disagreements, no mention is made of the

Catholic question. Perceval told Wellesley Junior that they had never exchanged a word on the subject.²¹ Although it has been suggested that Wellesley resigned over the issue in 1812, he never mentioned this when explaining his conduct; his decision to resign was probably rather the result of disagreements over arrangements for the regent's household.²² Having tendered his resignation, however, he did announce in cabinet his intention to speak in favour of the Catholics in a forthcoming debate. That the issue was not a major point of contention among ministers can be seen in Perceval's reply; the premier accepted the decision without argument, commenting that Canning had also disagreed with them over the issue, yet such differences had never caused the break-up of the government!²³ There is no indication, therefore, that the cabinet was racked with dissensions over the question.

Marquis Wellesley's tender of resignation followed by his decision to speak in favour of the Catholics may have been a deliberate play for the premiership as the end of the regency restrictions approached. Since 1811 he had been seen as a strong contender for that position. He was preferable to the present ministers because he held views favourable to the Catholics, and to the Opposition leaders because he supported the Peninsular War. Soon after first offering his resignation Wellesley set out to distinguish his views on the question from those of both Perceval and the Whigs. He stressed to the prince that, in contrast to the premier who considered the existing laws to be beneficial, he viewed the restrictions on the Catholics as 'evils in themselves', which should be abolished.²⁴ He also however distanced himself from the Opposition who, by

giving notice of a motion on the state of Ireland when even the Irish Catholics were prepared to let the issue rest, seemed anxious to press the question with unnecessary haste. By contrast Wellesley, although anxious for the regent to declare his concern for the Catholics, was working towards gradual concessions.²⁵ He also maintained that nothing could be granted unconditionally.

The debate on Fitzwilliam's motion on the state of Ireland in the House of Lords gave Wellesley a perfect opportunity to declare his opinions publicly. His views were shared, and even more emphatically stated, by Canning in the Commons. They expounded the view that it was possible to support the Irish government's actions, oppose unlimited and immediate concessions, and yet still be in favour of the principle of emancipation. They hoped to imply that such was the view the regent took of the question, and that 'consequently...the government had no ground to reckon on him implicitly, nor the Catholics ultimately to despair of him.' The regent did apparently concur in these views, and was later reported to be delighted that people had expressed his sentiments in both Houses of Parliament.²⁶

By their speeches, both Canning and Wellesley felt that they had put themselves forward as the basis for a potential 'middle-ground' government. They believed that the debate had provided the regent with perfect public grounds to separate from Perceval. In addition, as ministers had now been forced to declare their opinions it would become very difficult for Perceval to strengthen his government with any but anti-Catholics, unless he were prepared to lose face by giving up the extreme

position he had taken. This strengthened the views of the 'moderates' against the existing government. Canning felt however that to secure their position it would be necessary for the regent to make an approach to the Opposition, and have it refused. Then, with a weak ministry, and an Opposition which declined office, parliament and prince would turn willingly to the only real alternative. In this situation, Canning was convinced he could control the Commons. He would have support from the existing Opposition on the Catholic question, and from the present ministers on other issues, including the war. Canning and Wellesley even began considering their potential cabinet ministers, always placing much stress on members' attitudes to the Catholic question.²⁷

Wellesley must have been much encouraged by the regent's refusal, after Castlereagh declined to take his place in the Foreign Office, to allow Perceval to approach the Sidmouth group, and also by the prince's insistence that he (Wellesley) continue in office. However, although the prince refused to confirm Perceval as premier, or allow him to state that the government had his confidence, it is almost certain that by that time he had decided to change neither his ministers, nor the status quo on the Catholic question. He had become used to Perceval's efficiency, and always disliked change. While still professing himself in favour of Catholic concessions, he began to claim that the issue should be postponed during the king's lifetime. A regent merely administered the country in the name of the king. He, therefore, must consider himself as restrained by the Coronation Oath from making concessions, because the king had felt scruples upon that point.²⁸

Naturally he no longer wanted a government which would agitate this subject in any form.

There is no evidence that the regent ever considered seriously at this stage the third option as represented by Wellesley and Canning. He had another scheme to enable him to maintain the present system without appearing to abandon blatantly his old friends and the Catholics. On 13 February 1812, he authorised the Duke of York to approach Grey to invite him, and Grenville to 'strengthen [his] hands, and constitute a part of [his] Government,' with the aim of creating 'a vigorous and united Administration, formed on the most liberal basis'.²⁹ Wellesley had advised the necessity of such an approach, to avoid giving the public the impression that the regent was neglecting pledges supposedly made to old friends. However, the impetus and reasoning behind the approach at that time was probably provided by Castlereagh, who had refused to replace Wellesley while the future of the government was uncertain. He had suggested that, if the regent had decided to continue Perceval's administration, he should try to persuade some of his old friends to join them, for 'without this, the political world would not suppose [his] decision taken to stand by the Government'.³⁰

Rumours of the regent's intentions had circulated before the letter was sent, and from the first the Whigs were suspicious of the plan. Many of their doubts stemmed from their new distrust of the regent and his motives. Grenville referred to his 'utter disinclination to such an undertaking, grounded on [his] total want of confidence in the Prince's steadiness and good faith'.³¹ In expectation that

the prince's aim was to trap them in some way, Grey and Grenville had decided by 6 February, to reject any such proposition. Rather they would insist that a strong government could not be achieved except by a 'union of sentiment on all the important questions of the day between all those whom [the Prince called] to his service'.³³

The tenor of the letter certainly gave the approach the appearance of insincerity. It was not calculated to provoke a favourable response from its recipients, for it was filled with rejoicings over successes in the Peninsula, and praised the government who had 'honourably distinguished themselves' in support of the war there.³³ Such comments would hardly influence Grey in favour of the plan. Nor was it clear what form the junction was intended to take. The Whigs, and the prince's friends, understood it as an invitation to join the existing administration, which they could hardly accept.³⁴ The presentation of the letter to the Whigs by the anti-Catholic Duke of York provided further grounds for suspicion.

Despite evidence to the contrary, the regent insisted that he had wanted the junction to succeed, and that he had refused to confirm Perceval as premier in order to encourage negotiations.³⁵ If this were so he did not make it clear to the Whigs until much too late. The regent appears to have played his usual hand, refusing to commit himself clearly to one course of action and follow it through. Given his tendency to vacillate, it is unlikely that he did plan to mislead the Whigs, and the letter probably did express a genuine wish to connect his personal friends with the government of

his choice. He must have known, however, that, given the political situation, this was unlikely to succeed. It may be conjectured that the plan was a final attempt to rekindle Whig loyalties to his person by recalling his past relationship with them, without losing the Pittite government, or being forced into a decision on the Catholic issue. They would decline the junction, yet return to their old friendship with him. The Whig reaction to the approach, however, coupled with their comments upon his insincerity during the Catholic debate, destroyed the last vestiges of this relationship.

The Whigs' reply made it obvious that they would not compromise on the Catholic question. They returned a determined refusal at once, declaring their total opposition to all the government's measures affecting Ireland, and their determination to recommend the repeal of Catholic disabilities as their first duty of office. A junction was rejected on the grounds of basic differences in principle; the gulf between ministers and Whigs was so great that it would be impossible for either side to serve together with honour.⁵⁶ By making such declarations they were effectively excluding themselves from office if the regent finally decided against concessions. Thus, more even than in 1809, the Whigs identified themselves with the Catholics. Their reply was, in general, approved by everyone, including ministers. The Irish Catholics were delighted, and many aggregate meetings coupled resolutions of determination not to support Perceval's ministry with votes of thanks to Grey and Grenville.⁵⁷

The regent's approach to the Whigs, and their refusal, threw the political world into turmoil

again. Those who saw such an offer and refusal as a necessary preliminary to the formation of a middle-ground government must have been delighted with the result. Canning and Wellesley must have been especially pleased with the Whigs' stress upon the Catholic question; if the regent intended to form an intermediate government of his own friends, the Opposition's intransigence would be a strong point in its favour. Wellesley must have anticipated a summons to form such an administration, but no call came. Instead, his expectation turned to fury, when Perceval was continued in office! Confirmation of Perceval's premiership led Wellesley to tender his resignation again, an offer which was this time accepted, much to his disgust. The Marquis pronounced bitter tirades against the regent, accusing him of false-dealing, trickery, and treachery, and rudely declined an offer, direct from the prince, of a place in Ireland.³⁹

Wellesley was even more humiliated to find his place now taken by Castlereagh. Even in this arrangement the Catholic question played a role. Castlereagh reserved to himself the right to take his own line upon that subject.⁴⁰ Rumours began to circulate that the issue had been set aside as a government question, and every member was to act as he chose upon it. Jupp, in examining Irish members' votes on this question gives some indication that this was indeed the case, as several individuals voted for the Catholics who were otherwise supporters of Perceval.⁴¹ Roberts also argues that this was the government's policy after this time.⁴² However, the question did not officially become 'open' under Perceval. It was not specified as government policy that every cabinet member was free to act as he

pleased upon the issue. Perceval explicitly denied that such was the case; while members differed as to the basic principles underlying the question, and held their own views in this sense, all were united in considering it inexpedient to make concessions at that time. As the cabinet all concurred in this there was no reason why they could not continue to serve together.⁴³ As for individual members of parliament, several had made arrangements with the Irish government to vote for relief, perhaps to win influence with the Catholics, to please their constituents, or to help with their own election prospects.⁴⁴ While a large majority in the Commons opposed concessions it was possible to do this, without risking defeat.

The failure of the approach to the Whigs confirmed Perceval in office, and also ended the regent's close association with the Whigs and the Catholics. The decision in favour of Perceval moved Canning and Wellesley specifically into opposition, particularly because of the government's attitude to Ireland. The regent's personal friends also warned him that to continue Perceval in office would lead to convulsions in Ireland. Nevertheless, the prince was not to be swayed. In Perceval, he had found a minister who would not raise the Catholic question. While the government argued that concessions were inexpedient many moderate concessionists were likely to agree, and the issue would be kept quiet. Thus the regent hoped to keep out of the limelight on the issue.

That the regent was well satisfied with his Pittite government was confirmed after the assassination of Perceval, on 10 May, 1812. After

the initial shock, rumours immediately circulated as to the prince's intentions. However, the regent did not take this event as a chance to form a new administration. Rather he prevailed upon the weakened remnants of Perceval's government to continue in office. The cabinet members, although recognising their weakness, agreed to make the attempt to continue, providing that the regent entirely supported them.⁴⁴ Believing that additional strength would be necessary for even the chance of success, the new government, under Liverpool, planned an approach to Wellesley and Canning.

The scheme, however, foundered upon the rock of the Catholic question. Canning and Wellesley now stressed the importance of considering the question as much as did the Whigs. On 17 May, when Liverpool saw them individually to discuss the plan, both immediately requested to know what would be the government's stance on that issue. The premier explained that his opinions, and those of his colleagues, remained unchanged. Canning's reply in these circumstances was firm, rejecting the proposition solely on the grounds of disagreement over the Catholic question. Wellesley also stressed this issue in his answer. He contended that for Liverpool to approach him was to imply that no difference of opinion or principle prevented them from working together, whereas in fact, he differed totally from ministers regarding the Catholics. 'Without any other obstacle, therefore,' he declared, 'this alone compels me to decline the proposition.' He also criticised ministers' attitude to the Peninsular War, and contended that the time had come for an extended administration to be formed which

would both pursue the war vigorously, and support moderate concessions to the Catholics.⁴⁵

Liverpool did not give up. Rather, in a letter to Wellesley on 19 May, he tried to counter the idea that he and his colleagues opposed concessions in all times and circumstances.⁴⁶ It has been claimed that this document offered Wellesley and Canning freedom of action on the Catholic claims.⁴⁷ This cannot, however, necessarily be inferred from the contents, for Liverpool still insisted that, as under Perceval, the cabinet were united in rejecting any consideration of the question in present circumstances. For himself, Liverpool denied wishing to shut out the Catholics permanently, as a matter of principle; he wished to hear specific proposals as to which laws were to be altered, and what securities were to be required, but as yet had heard nothing to satisfy himself on these points.

This correspondence did not alter the outcome of negotiations, except to sour relations. Wellesley made a cutting reply, asking how Liverpool could expect to hear specific propositions if government always resisted inquiry into the issue, and questioning his sincerity in denying a wish to exclude permanently the Catholics as a matter of principle.⁴⁸ The tenor of this reply naturally displeased Liverpool. Wellesley further damaged himself in the eyes of the government by the great haste with which he published his letters to Liverpool. Moreover, a statement of his reasons for resigning was also published, containing insulting references to Perceval. Consequently, when the ministers' defeat on Wortley's motion for an efficient administration made it necessary for them

to resign, and the prince authorised Wellesley to plan an administration, they refused even to discuss the issue. Wellesley laid down two principles as the basis for his scheme: strong prosecution of the Peninsular War, and intermediate proceedings on the Catholic question. Political principles however were not the issue in this instance. All former ministers were so outraged by Wellesley's actions that they were determined not to serve under him.⁴⁹

It might appear strange that the regent was apparently now prepared to accept Wellesley's stipulations in favour of the Catholics. He probably took the view that Wellesley's limited schemes were at least preferable to those of the Whigs, who pressed for total concessions at every conceivable opportunity. By this stage the prince had been further distanced from the Whigs by their attacks upon him in the wake of his decision to retain Perceval, and he therefore no longer wanted these men in power. He appears to have accepted Wellesley's principles with the hope of persuading some of his old ministers to continue to serve, as their presence might minimise, delay, or even prevent any concessions. The regent clearly had no intention of including the Whigs even in the intermediate scheme, as he instructed Wellesley 'not to connect himself with opposition, for if he did, he [the regent] would have nothing to say to him.'⁵⁰

Despite these strictures, Wellesley did approach the Whigs, and finding them delighted with his stress upon the Catholic question, anticipated that negotiations with them could bear fruit. However, on 24 May 1812, the prince further expressed his hostility to the Whigs, and his wish that Wellesley

unite with Liverpool. The regent accepted Wellesley's principles, yet would neither authorise him to form an administration on that basis, nor allow him to negotiate officially with the Whigs. He still hoped to continue a substantially Pittite ministry, and on 25 May, again tried to persuade members of the former government to accept Wellesley. Liverpool and his colleagues however persisted in their refusals, even when the prince asked them to give their opinions in writing, as individuals. These documents show how far opinions were also crystalising on the Protestant side. Those opposed to concessions stressed their differences with Wellesley on that subject as a major reason for their refusal. Those more inclined to the Catholics tended to state more general objections.⁵¹

Finally, on 1 June, Wellesley was authorised to form an administration. The prince still showed reservations as to the Catholic question, desiring Wellesley 'that he would be very careful not to engage for anything more than a full and impartial consideration of the subject', although agreeing to recommend to parliament whatever the cabinet advised on the issue.⁵² Official negotiations with the Whigs, however, proved fruitless, when the leaders refused to accede to Wellesley's planned distribution of cabinet offices. At the time, and subsequently, they faced much criticism for their decision. Roberts, however, suggests that, in fact, the whole approach was a trap by the regent designed to discredit the Whigs for refusing, and provide a reason for causing Wellesley's commission to fail, so that he could return to the Pittites.⁵³

Roberts attributes similar motives to Moira's later approach to the party, which collapsed over arrangements for the royal household: Moira had originally planned to form an administration with the Pittites. Feeling that he could not appear deliberately to exclude the Whigs, he therefore made an approach guaranteed to fail, in such a manner as would add strength to his government. Moira appeared to stand a good chance of forming an administration, for he was a long-standing friend of the regent. However, the regent's clear wish to retain his Pittite ministers meant that the attempt collapsed.⁵⁴ The regent's approach to Moira might appear unexpected, given his desire to postpone the Catholic question, for Moira frequently urged the importance of concessions, and had even broken with the prince at one stage over the issue. The prince may however have hoped that the Pittites would be more prepared to serve under Moira than under Wellesley, because of the former's personal relationship with himself, and thus would be there to prevent the government adopting Catholic relief as a measure. These hopes, however, proved illusory, as Liverpool declined office because of differences of opinion over the Catholic question, although he was willing to support Moira's government out of office.⁵⁵

Failure of all negotiations meant that the prince was now free to return to his old ministers. The attempts, and failure, to put the wishes of the House of Commons into practice gave the ministers a far greater chance of success, as other alternatives had proved unworkable. Few members of the House at this stage would have preferred a totally Whig administration, pressing for reform and Catholic emancipation. 'At last...[the regent] had got the

Government he had all along been endeavouring to establish; Perceval's government without Perceval, a government that would pursue the war with vigour, and leave the Catholic question alone.'⁵⁸

The administration now formed under Liverpool was to remain substantially the same until 1822. A large degree of this success may be attributed to Liverpool's decision to designate the Catholic question an 'open' one, no longer a government measure. The discussion of the subject was to be 'left free from all interference on the part of the government,' and every government member was to be 'left to the free and unbiassed suggestions of his own conscientious discretion.'⁵⁹ There were probably several reasons for this decision. The former negotiations had shown the problems in getting members for administrations designated either pro or anti Catholic, and had also revealed the importance now placed on this issue by both sides. Liverpool's solution eased this situation. Castlereagh explained that they had also been influenced by the growth of opinion in favour of the Catholics in parliament.⁶⁰ They may have designed this system so that a victory for the issue in the House would not be a defeat for the government. This system could also appeal to the moderates of both sides. Protestants could feel that the issue was unlikely to succeed without the full support of government. The pro-Catholics were prepared to serve in such an administration, imagining that their presence would be a sign to the Catholics that they would be treated fairly.

Reactions to the arrangement were mixed. Creevey expected it to lead to the passing of some form of concessions, arranged by Liverpool and Eldon.

Richmond deeply regretted that no strong Protestant government could be formed, and expected dreadful consequences from the arrangement. Canning and Peel deplored the measure, regretting that the government did not hold a decided opinion upon such an important subject. Others, however, were certain that the decision would strengthen the government against its political enemies.⁵⁸ The system was at least to prove a lasting one, and was to prevail until 1829, when Wellington's cabinet decided in favour of concessions. Under its cover, Liverpool was to weather many storms raised over the issue, and survived the continual agitation of the question, which was a major feature of parliamentary life in this period.

References: Chapter Three.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE VETO AND THE CATHOLIC COMMITTEE, 1809 TO 1811.

Throughout 1809, the majority of the Catholic laity and lower clergy continued violent denunciations of the veto, and those who advocated it. By November 1809, Charles Butler reported that merchants, peasants and lower clergy viewed it 'with a degree of horror' difficult for the English to conceive. He was convinced that 'every attempt to conciliate the Irish to it will only serve to inflame them to a degree of fury.' His correspondence with the Whigs, however, made him realise that, although a few of the Catholics' parliamentary advocates saw the veto as a matter of little importance, the majority were convinced that parliament had the right to require some such provision before granting emancipation. Grey in particular, continued to stress, not only the need for securities in general, but the centrality of the veto in any arrangements. Without this provision, he could not be satisfied.²

Tierney tried to convince Grey of the importance of securing the Catholics' agreement to their measures; 'I do not see the use of talking about it [securities] until we see what securities the Catholics are disposed to give, for unless they are satisfied as well as the King with what is proposed, we shall not advance a step towards the main point -

the removal of religious dissensions, and we shall entangle ourselves in new and unnecessary disputes.'³ Grey, however, continued to advocate the veto, declaring in its favour in parliament in June 1810. He clearly expected to decide what was good for the Catholics, whether or not they shared his views. He was not alone in this. Thomas Grenville, for instance, wanted his uncle to declare Catholic acceptance of the veto as a sine qua non of his presenting their petition.⁴ It has been suggested that the Whigs were keen to emphasise the veto not only because they saw it as beneficial in itself, but also because they did not wish to open themselves to the charge of inconsistency by rejecting it, once they had recommended it in 1808-09, and because they had no wish to be seen as pandering to the directives of the Catholics.⁵

Other Whigs however wished to avoid too much stress upon the veto, lest it prove to be a barrier to emancipation. Grenville himself never emphasised it as a specific measure once the Catholics had made their opposition clear, although he was initially furious with them for rejecting it. However, he always stressed the need for a general measure of security, especially once he had become involved in the competition for the Chancellorship of Oxford. His concern to publicise his views on the subject led to the publication of a pamphlet, A Letter from Lord Grenville to the Earl of Fingall, in January 1810. Roberts views this letter as a declaration specifically in favour of the veto - the declaration for which Grey had asked in 1808.⁶ However, the pamphlet does not explicitly insist that Catholics accept the veto. Rather it is an explanation of

Grenville's own actions, and a plea to the Catholics to understand the Protestant position.

In the letter, Grenville explained that he supported Catholic emancipation in the belief that it would bring peace and harmony to Ireland. However, to obtain this result, it was necessary to satisfy both Protestant and Catholic. Hence, total emancipation must be coupled with 'provision...for the inviolable maintenance of the religious and civil establishments of [the] United Kingdom.'⁷ The veto was one way to achieve this. Grenville stressed that such a scheme had been discussed at the Union, and had been proposed by the Catholics themselves in 1808. He lamented their rejection of the proposition, which he was sure had hindered their cause. Nevertheless, he was still sure that something could be achieved; not all Catholics opposed the scheme, and similar arrangements had been made in other countries. The letter, however, never contends that this is the only acceptable security, or commits Grenville to it in all circumstances. Rather, he explained, 'To the forms...of those securities I attach comparatively little importance. A pertinacious adherence to such details, in opposition even to groundless prejudice, I consider as the reverse of legislative wisdom.' Moreover he also wished to consult 'every reasonable apprehension' on the part of the Catholics, as to the forms these securities should take.⁸

The letter was also an explanation of Grenville's refusal to make any motion upon the Catholic petition he had been asked to present. Drawing attention to government's and parliament's continued opposition to concessions, as well as to the difficulties created

by the Catholic reaction to the veto, he maintained that to renew discussions could only aggravate difficulties. He implied that he would be prepared to move a motion if the Catholics themselves showed a more conciliatory attitude. The need was for a 'sentiment of reciprocal confidence,' and a 'spirit of mutual conciliation'.⁹ He did not, however, decline to initiate proceedings again until they accepted the veto.

There is no doubt that Grenville intended the letter to distinguish his views from the extreme demands being heard from Ireland. By emphasising his concern for the Protestant Church, and refusing to press the Catholic claims at all times, the letter placed him in a better light with many Protestants, making them more disposed to accept him in a position of authority. The Bishop of Limerick exclaimed, that the letter had 'effectually quieted the Protestant claims, and the general voice of the country is now for a change of ministers.'¹⁰ Arthur Wellesley, informed of the proceedings by Richmond, thought that the letter would be 'one step on his [Grenville's] return to power...as soon as the King will be disposed by the weakness of the existing Government to make a change.'¹¹ The Irish Catholics, however, were furious, both with the letter, and with Grenville's general conduct; Butler informed Canning that they considered the letter as a 'formal and shabby abandonment of their cause.'¹²

The already excited situation in Ireland worsened when rumours reached the Catholic Committee that the English Catholics were determined to force the veto upon them, despite their rejection of it. Although the Secretary of the English Catholic Board wrote

letters insisting that their main wish was to work in co-operation with the Irish, a quarrel broke out between the two groups. The roots of the furore lay in the fact that the English Catholic Board were more inclined than the Irish to act in accordance with the wishes of their parliamentary advocates. Hence, in planning their next petition, their leaders had agreed, after consultation with Lord Grey, to formulate a conciliatory statement assuring the legislature that the English Catholics were ready to do whatever they could, consistently with the tenets of their religion, to give the security required. A resolution to this effect was passed at a meeting of the Catholic Committee on 29 January 1810, and this was later put into the form of a petition.¹³ The petition received many signatures, including those of three English Vicars Apostolic, excluding Milner, who was now implacably opposed to any form of veto, and saw this resolution as conceding that scheme.

The English Catholics, and Lord Grey, always insisted that this petition was not a reference to the veto in any form but was simply a general statement issued for the purpose of conciliation. Moreover, the Vicars Apostolic, meeting on 20 February 1810, rejected any alteration in the appointments to the episcopate, without Papal consent.¹⁴ However, the Irish saw it as a clear declaration of an English intention to accept this security. Following closely in the wake of Grenville's letter, which they interpreted as a plea for the veto, the danger in such a declaration seemed clear, especially when Grey, the instigator of the resolution, presented the English petition on 22 February 1810 with a speech announcing that Grenville's letter entirely represented his views on

the security issue.¹⁵ By contrast Grattan, on presenting the Irish petition, on 27 February 1810, had to withdraw the offer of the veto. A few days later, the most vociferous of the Irish Catholic Committee made their views clear, in a firm resolution: 'As Irishmen and Catholics we never can consent to any domination or control whatsoever over the appointment of our Prelates on the part of the Crown or the servants of the Crown'. The Irish bishops had met prior to this, passing a series of resolutions, re-affirming the stand which they had taken in 1808.¹⁶

The bishops' resolutions were later drawn up into an address to the clergy and laity of Ireland, so that their views upon the subject could not be mistaken. This did contain a conciliatory resolution from the Irish side, in which the bishops insisted that they had never lacked a spirit of conciliation, but sought merely to maintain the integrity of the Catholic religion in its entirety.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this spirit was clearly lacking between the two groups of Catholics. Dissensions over the English Catholics' resolution created a deep chasm between Milner and the other Vicars Apostolic, and also between the English and Irish Catholics. The divisions between vetoists and those rejecting securities were clearly widening.

The continued unrest over the veto was reflected in the parliamentary debates discussing the Catholic petition early in 1810. Several members regretted the Irish Catholics' attitude, as damaging the chances of gaining concessions. In the Commons, Hippisley maintained that the behaviour of some of the Irish prelates, and the Catholics' attacks upon

their parliamentary advocates had strengthened the prejudices of the anti-Catholics. Castlereagh 'regretted to find that increased obstacles to the measure of extending further political indulgences to the Catholics had arisen out of their own conduct and declarations', and added their attitude to the veto to other considerations which counted against discussing the issue at that moment.¹⁸

Some did still favour concessions without qualification. Maurice Fitzgerald rejected the idea that the veto was a 'necessary and indispensable concession on the part of the Catholics,' and referred to it rather as a 'very immaterial collateral part of the question.' He took this ground because relief of the Catholics from political disabilities involved not the hierarchy, but the laity. Milbank viewed the demand for securities as 'a mere pretence of those who oppose the Catholics, to throw difficulties in the way of their success.' In his view, the 'inviolable honour and faith of the Irish Catholics' under Penal conditions was adequate proof of their loyalty.¹⁹

These men, however, were in the minority. The idea having once been raised, the majority of the Catholics' advocates now favoured some kind of protection for the Established Church, although not necessarily the veto. Grattan, for example, insisted that some form of security was essential, to place a check upon the foreign appointment of Irish Catholic bishops. Recognising that the veto could not be obtained, he now suggested another scheme - domestic nomination - whereby, with Papal consent, new Irish bishops would be selected solely by those already holding the office. He claimed that this would not

deprive the Pope of any of his spiritual functions, and that it was accepted by Catholics in other countries. Ponsonby also insisted that there was a dangerous foreign influence from which Ireland needed to be protected, and which made it necessary to secure some control over the Catholic hierarchy. Catholics should therefore accede to any arrangements not inconsistent with their religion, in order to calm Protestant fears.²⁰

Others saw the veto itself as essential to any adjustment of the Catholics' position. Lord Jocelyn maintained that without this, he could never consider granting their claims, for such an action 'would open a dangerous access for the influence of France.' Canning insisted that the government should accept nothing but the veto. Moreover, he held that domestic nomination could never be of practical use without Papal sanction, which clearly could not be obtained under present conditions. Castlereagh emerged as a strong defender of the veto, being concerned above all to connect the Catholic clergy with the State. Some of the British public apparently also saw the veto as central; Knox explained that his constituents had instructed him to agree to a committee only if further proceedings would be based upon the veto.²¹

The stress upon securities created a new range of arguments for the Catholics' opponents. The apparent novelty of the idea of qualified concessions was noted, and the pro-Catholics' recognition of dangers in concessions was eagerly seized upon. Referring to the charge of intolerance so often made against him, Perceval now claimed that, if he deserved such criticism, so too did Grattan, who also saw dangers

in unqualified concession; 'We may differ in our application of our principle, but on the principle itself we are agreed.' Ryder insisted that he could think of no argument against concessions which had not been expounded in the Letter to Lord Fingall, and by Grattan.²² The Catholics' reaction to the veto only served to confirm that they could not be trusted, and Ponsonby's account of his dealings with Milner further confirmed this opinion.²³ Noting this, Perceval questioned the validity of the offer of domestic nomination. There was no evidence that the majority of Catholics would accept the plan, any more than they had agreed to the veto. If the House went into committee and decided to grant concessions under certain conditions, there was no reason to believe that the Catholics would abide by the decision.²⁴

In vain did Whitbread insist that the anti-Catholics' stress upon securities was merely a red herring. He implored the House not to be misled by Perceval's arguments, for the latter would oppose the Catholics, whatever securities they offered: 'If the Catholics were to lie prostrate at his [Perceval's] feet, and to implore him to name his own terms, his answer must be 'I can never be satisfied; I can propose no arrangements; I can accept no terms. You are men whom I cannot trust, I cannot believe you upon your oaths.' With such a man it is idle to discuss arrangements, with his consent none will ever be carried practically into effect.'²⁵ Such arguments could not, however, obliterate the obvious gulf between the recommendations for securities, and the Catholics' unwillingness to co-operate. The large defeat on Grattan's motion (109 to 213) was only to be expected.

In the House of Lords, no one was prepared to advocate unqualified concessions. Although the mover of the motion, the Earl of Donoughmore, saw no need for securities, and favoured concessions without restrictions, he maintained that the Catholics should agree to anything which their religion would allow, in order to satisfy Protestant scruples. Even Lord Holland, who advocated the cause on grounds of abstract rights, was prepared to agree to some restraints upon the Catholics. Grey stressed his 'full and unqualified concurrence' in the sentiments expressed in the Letter to Lord Fingall.²⁶ Others saw Catholic behaviour over the veto as retarding emancipation. Earl Clancarty expressed himself generally favourable to the Catholics, yet as distanced from them by their recent attitude. He insisted that it was not for the Catholics to agree to, or reject stipulations, providing these were not inconsistent with religion; 'when they are seeking indulgences, the State has a right to expect their submission.'²⁷ On the anti-Catholic side, Liverpool insisted that while the Catholics offered no specific securities no concessions could be made, for to do so would be to endanger the State. Eldon echoed Perceval in stressing the dangers which Grenville appeared to see in concessions. He too believed in this danger, but would counter it by refusing to alter the laws.²⁸ At the end of the debate, the motion was defeated by 154 votes to 68.

Both Houses of Parliament thus made their positions on the security issue clear. This, however, did not alter the views of the majority of Irish Catholics, and the controversy continued. Another contentious issue was also raised in Ireland in 1810, when in September the first moves were taken

to petition for the repeal of the Union. Those who, like Arthur Wellesley, feared the healing of religious dissensions in Ireland, as likely to lead to separation from England could look upon the situation with alarm; after the Protestant Corporation of Dublin passed a resolution appealing for the restoration of the Irish parliament, an aggregate meeting of freemen and freeholders of Dublin was called on the issue, to which both Catholics and Protestants were invited. The Whigs were probably alarmed by these proceedings too, for they had received information earlier that the anti-vetoists were becoming connected with the anti-Unionists, to form an Irish party.²⁹

Daniel O'Connell, now a leading member of the Catholic Committee, and a strident anti-vetoist, played a major role at this meeting, being one of nine men selected to draw up the petition. His speech on this occasion sounded even louder warning bells to those who feared united Irish nationalism. He argued that religious dissensions had been the cause of the Union, and that the only way to secure repeal was to abandon those differences, in favour of a united concern for Ireland: 'The Protestant alone could not expect to liberate his country - the Roman Catholic alone could not do it - neither could the Presbyterian - but amalgamate the three into the Irishman, and the Union is repealed....Let us...sacrifice our wicked and groundless animosities on the altar of our country.'³⁰ Although the petition proceeded no further, the meeting was a challenge to existing authority, and was evidence of a more militant spirit abroad in Ireland.

The Catholics also became more militant in their attitudes. Parliament's refusal to grant a committee, coupled with the disagreements over the veto led the Irish Catholic Committee into more forceful and concerted actions. On 1 January 1811, the Committee ordered the issue of a circular letter, calling for the appointment of managers for the Catholic petition from each county. The aim of this proceeding was to increase the number of members of the Committee, in order that the managers of the petition would be connected with every part of Ireland. 'It is highly desirable,' wrote the secretary 'that the Committee should become the depository of the collective wisdom of the Catholic body; that it should be able to ascertain, in order to obey, the wishes, and clearly understand the wants, of all their Catholic fellow subjects.'⁶¹ Now more clearly a united body, the Committee was a more obvious challenge to governmental authority, and therefore posed a greater threat.

The Irish government was already very suspicious of the Committee's meetings. Richmond informed Liverpool that he had observed the body for some time, and had obtained secret information of its proceedings: 'The Committee have assumed to themselves all the forms of the House of Commons,' he wrote, 'they debate as near as possible in the same order as the House of Commons debate - they have regular orders of the day - Regular notices of motions taken down by their secretary in writing, without which they reckon it irregular to discuss any question. They have reporters for their debates, and the Chairman signs all their minutes and proceedings as the Speaker does those of the House of Commons.'⁶² Once they appeared also to be balloting for members,

in a similar fashion to the Commons, the Irish government felt that a halt must be called to the proceedings.

In the Committee's circular letter the Irish government, including the Law Officers, saw a direct violation of the 1793 Convention Act, which proclaimed illegal all bodies of a representative character, or appointed by delegation. That the Catholics had always been aware that their proceedings might be viewed as contravening this act can be seen in the resolutions establishing the Committee in 1809, which clearly stated that members were not representatives of the Catholic body, and should never assume or pretend to such a role.³³ Although the letter of 1811 took the same tone, by maintaining that the Catholics were determined to violate neither the letter nor the spirit of the law, and stressing that no form of delegation or representation could take place, the Irish government now believed that the law had been broken.

Upon this understanding, Wellesley-Pole, the Chief Secretary, after consultation in the Irish government, yet without any discussion with English ministers, issued a circular letter to sheriffs and magistrates, ordering them to enforce the Convention Act, by arresting those involved in the elections in any way.³⁴ The Catholics at this stage, however, decided not to proceed with their plans, and the elections were not held, and a clash between government and Catholics was thus narrowly averted. These events might easily have led to a collision between the government and the throne. News of the circular letter created great problems for Perceval, who became responsible for defending to the prince,

and in parliament, a decision taken without his knowledge or permission. At this stage, the regent still had no attachment to Perceval. This display of apparently anti-Catholic feeling would provide a perfect opportunity for the prince to announce his lack of confidence in the premier, and dismiss his government, on the pretext of supporting the Catholics.

Richmond was aware of the difficulties he had created by moving against the Catholics at the beginning of the regency. Nevertheless he insisted that to have delayed action, and allowed the 'elections' to take place, would have been construed as a sign of weakness. Moreover, respectable people had stopped attending the Catholic meetings, leaving them open to the influence of troublemakers. Once the government had taken action, the respectable returned, thus keeping the others quiet. There simply was not enough time to consult London before proceedings needed to be initiated. He also maintained however, and Lord Manners concurred, that it was not essential for the Irish government to obtain England's sanction in order to enforce the laws. The Irish government viewed the lack of cabinet sanction as advantageous. Politically, this independent action disassociated the prince from the policy they had followed, thus ensuring that his first personal act as regent would not be recorded as an ordering of proceedings against the Catholics.⁶⁵

When Perceval was finally notified of the Irish government's actions, he approved their policy. However, he felt that, before the letter could be enforced, it must be submitted to the regent. Speculation was rife that the proceedings would

herald the end of the government. The prince surely would not sanction such actions against his friends the Catholics? However, on 18 February, the regent accepted the Irish government's policy. Despite speculations to the contrary, his decision should have been expected. He could hardly disapprove of the government taking action against a group which had apparently set itself up as an alternative parliament, even if it were a group united to gain concessions for the Catholics. As a skilled statesman Perceval probably encouraged this line of thinking, stressing the Law Officers' insistence that the Convention Act had been broken, and playing down the 'catholicity' of the Committee.

The Irish government's action was debated in both Houses of Parliament on several occasions, the legality, propriety, necessity and prudence of the measure all being questioned by the Opposition.³⁶ Wellesley-Pole insisted that his action was not aimed against the Catholics. The Irish government, although opposing concessions, always acted in a conciliatory manner towards the Catholics, and hence had forborne to interfere with the Committee until such action was essential. People had begun to complain that the government was doing nothing to stop the Committee expanding. Therefore, when they received a copy of the letter, they could no longer delay, but had to act at once, to prevent the elections taking place. They were not acting against the rights of the Catholics, but rather against plans for an illegal meeting.³⁷

The growing spirit of intransigence among the Irish Catholics was not stifled by the action against the Catholic Committee. Their petition for

emancipation presented in the House of Commons by Grattan, on 20 May 1811 was demanding in tone, and sought concessions as a right. It stressed that Irish Catholic soldiers were prepared to die in the service of their country, yet were not considered trustworthy enough to hold high military rank. The petition was very critical of the government. It stressed that their claims had three times been discussed since the Union, yet nothing had been done for them. Rather, 'men distinguished from their fellow citizens only by their inveterate and offensive opposition to the claims of the Petitioners were raised to situations in the State of trust and emolument!'⁶⁸ Such statements certainly were not calculated to win approbation from moderate men of either side. Moreover, the petition made no reference to the veto, or any other security. The petition from the Catholics of County Cork sought for 'a full and unqualified participation in the benefits of the constitution.'⁶⁹

In moving for a committee to consider the petitions, Grattan no longer stressed the need for securities. He implied that the Catholic connection with the Papacy would be dangerous only if a Frenchman became Pope, in which instance it would be necessary to guard against his influence in the appointment of bishops. Rather, he now made disparaging remarks about those who sought for securities: 'I know there are some who are for entering into certain stipulations with the Catholics - this is foolish. You can never gain anything with a people by conditions: it is the silliest thing on earth to think of conciliating men by merchandising their claims.' At the end of the debate, however, Grattan appeared to go back on this statement.

Replying to a challenge from Perceval, he insisted that he had not changed his mind concerning securities. He still saw dangers in foreign interference, and believed that parliament should take from the Catholics 'that security which the State might require.'⁴⁰ The two speeches should probably be taken together. Grattan intended to reject the idea that an offer of certain securities from the Catholics was a pre-requisite to a committee to discuss the petition. Securities might be necessary, but this was a matter to be decided upon in committee, rather than one to preclude any further discussion.

In general, the security issue was of far less consequence than it had been in 1810. In his opening speech, Grattan stressed the bravery and loyalty of Irish soldiers, and arguments generally focussed upon the fitness of Catholics for situations of trust. However, Hippisley, in a long speech advocating the setting up of a select committee, to inquire into issues affecting the Catholics, continued to recommend the veto, and insisted that the Catholics had not rejected this scheme permanently, but only on grounds of expediency. Lord Jocelyn echoed his speech of 1810, refusing to concede anything until the Catholics freely offered the veto.⁴¹ The lack of references to securities was pointed out by the Catholics' opponents. Perceval noted the omission, which, he claimed, 'was of itself a sufficient reason for him to oppose the motion.' However, he did explain that this was not the sole ground of his opposition.⁴²

In the House of Lords there was also an attempt to play down the security issue. In moving for a

committee, Donoughmore refused to discuss the subject at that stage, insisting that this was an issue for consideration in committee, rather than a point upon which the possibility of further discussion should stand or fall. However, he believed that the willingness of the House to consider their claims would itself bring the Catholics to a more conciliatory disposition on this subject. He also raised the possibility of domestic nomination. Lansdowne also denied that the Catholic refusal to concede securities precluded any discussion, although without such safeguards parliament could not grant 'this great boon.'⁴³ By contrast, those opposing the Catholics who referred to the issue refused even to consider a committee unless specific plans for securities were previously proposed or unless the Catholics gave up certain religious tenets viewed as hostile to the Constitution.⁴⁴

Despite these attempts to turn the discussions away from this controversial issue, motions for committees on the subject were defeated by large majorities in both Houses. The rejection even of a simple inquiry into their claims further raised the violent spirit in the Catholic Committee, and plans were again set in motion to call a meeting of delegates. On 9 July 1811, at an aggregate meeting in Dublin, further plans were made to establish a Committee, including delegates from each county. On this occasion, the Irish government consulted the cabinet prior to taking any action.⁴⁵ Upon the Home Secretary's advice, a proclamation was issued, to put down the committee, in consequence of which, on 9 August, several men were arrested for acting as either delegates, or electors.

The trials of these men, however, resulted in their acquittals by a Dublin Jury. This roused the Committee to further action, and unfortunately led them into folly. They initiated a counter prosecution of Chief-Justice Downes, which failed miserably, a clear judgement being given against them. The government also made it clear that it was in earnest, and several meetings of the Catholic Committee were interrupted by magistrates. On 23 December, this led to the forcible ejection of Lord Fingall from the Chair of a meeting, and his subsequent arrest. The feelings of triumph rapidly melted under such force. The Catholic Committee decided to concede the point, and dissolved itself. Nevertheless, the agitation which had been stimulated was to be continued with equal force, for the Catholics reassembled under a new name - the Catholic Board.

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CHAPTER FIVE

A WAY THROUGH THE MAZE: CANNING'S MOTION OF 1812.

Perceval's confirmation in office in 1812 was a blow to the Catholics. Nevertheless all hope was not lost, and in April, Lord Donoughmore and Grattan, both moved for committees to consider the Catholic claims, still with some expectation of success. There were some hopeful signs; only three petitions were presented against the Catholics, while many came forward in their favour, including one signed by many of the wealthy Protestants of Ireland. The arguments used in the debate were not, in general, new, and centred around the dangers to be anticipated for the country if parliament either accepted, or rejected, the Catholics' claims. The pro-Catholics proclaimed the likelihood of an Irish revolt if no inquiry took place, and stressed the folly of rejecting the talents of so many people during a national crisis. Their opponents, however, saw more danger in altering those laws laid down in the past to protect the constitution, and in admitting to political power those who adhered to religious tenets incompatible with true citizenship.

It was clear that the majority of opponents to concessions above all feared and objected to the Catholic connection with the Papacy; a foreign power which insinuated its way into everyday life in Ireland, via the control exerted over the populace by the priesthood. Danger was increased because of Bonaparte's control over the Pope. Those favouring

the Catholics recognised these fears, and attempts were made to lessen them. They contended that the Papacy had in fact lost much of its power and influence. Grattan recalled the picture of the Pope dragged a prisoner through Catholic States, while none of his 'subjects' raised a hand to save him. Others, while not denying the importance of Papal influence, argued that only concessions could moderate its impact upon the people. The most novel speech upon this issue came from Yorke, an opponent of the Catholics. In his view, Catholics ought to reject the power of the Pope before any concessions could be made. If, however, this were impossible, they should at least remove foreign influence, by appointing a Pope to live in Ireland!'

If Arthur Wellesley had been in parliament at this time, he would have approved of several of the speeches opposing concessions. Notably there were those alarmed by the increasing unity amongst Catholics in Ireland. Bankes contended that 'it is most unsafe to set the seal of success to the bond of unity.' Although Catholics were already united, they were at least a party without political power. Once granted power, who knew how they would use it? Foster was alarmed by the Catholics' political situation: 'a situation the most anomalous that can be conceived; possessed of great real power; bound together into one solid mass by a most ingenious system of machinery; actuated by one mind, and totally unconnected, indeed studiously dissevered from the State.' Echoing Wellesley, he drew attention to the independence of Maynooth, and also claimed that the Catholics had acted together to reject the veto not from religious, but from political motives.²

In this debate there were few mentions of securities. Grattan appeared to have decided against them, and claimed rather that the Catholics required securities against the government's policy in Ireland.¹³ Of the pro-Catholics outside the cabinet, only Hippisley continued to advocate the veto, as consistent with Catholic discipline. Castlereagh, casting a vote against inquiry because of the Catholics' violent behaviour, lamented their rejection of this scheme, and thus also appeared in favour of it.¹⁴ Interest in the subject, however, was minimal. Bankes and Perceval both drew attention to this lessening interest, and demanded that it should be made clear what securities would be proposed before a committee was agreed to. They continued to stress Catholic rejection of the veto as an illustration of the unlikelihood of reaching any arrangement which would satisfy both sides.¹⁵

The debate showed evidence of a souring relationship between the regent and the traditional pro-Catholics, and several references were made to broken promises, and thwarted expectations. Grattan, for example, proclaimed that the Catholics 'came to the borders of the land of promise, when behold the vision of royal faith vanishes, and the curse, which blasted their forefathers, is to be entailed upon their children.'¹⁶ In the House of Lords, criticism of the regent formed a major part of Donoughmore's opening speech; the Catholics had placed much hope in the prince, but found their expectations 'blasted at the moment of full maturity.' The regency had issued in not the expected period of conciliation, but an era 'unequalled for the easy abandonment of all preconceived opinions and former pledges.'¹⁷

As in the Commons, the debate in the House of Lords centred upon the danger from foreign influence, and certain Catholic tenets. The pro-Catholics made little mention of securities, presumably to avoid discussion of the Catholic rejection of the veto. The anti-Catholics did bring up the issue. Liverpool viewed the Catholic refusal of the veto as a sign of their exclusive submission to a foreign power. Most stress was placed upon the issue by Eldon. Quoting from the Letter to Lord Fingall, he accused Grenville of inconsistency in advocating concessions in the debate, having previously insisted upon Catholic acceptance of the veto as a sine qua non of his support.⁷ Grenville, however, maintained that his letter had been interpreted wrongly. He did not see the veto as essential, but rather as a matter of little consequence; general discussion of the question should not depend upon the offer of securities. This statement was in line with the stand which he and Grey had taken in January 1812, when they had insisted that they had given up the veto as soon as they realised its effect upon the Catholics.⁸ This was a slight exaggeration on Grey's part, for he had continued to advocate the veto in 1809; he had, however, given up the measure several years before this speech.

In neither House were the pro-Catholic arguments decisive, and both motions were again defeated, in the Commons by 215 votes to 300, and in the Lords by 102 votes to 174. Before the Commons debate, Perceval had issued a call of the House, intending to set the question at rest by obtaining a decided opinion upon it. These defeats should have achieved this. However, the pro-Catholics were far from discouraged, for the majorities had been large. Grattan commented

that 'the Catholic claim has been supported in both Houses by minorities that promise success.'¹² The general tenor of the debates, and the lack of petitions presented against the Catholics also indicated a mellowing of opinion. In this situation, Canning determined to take advantage of these developments by making a motion to insure further consideration of the question during the recess.

Canning recognised that there were great difficulties involved in initiating a motion for Catholic relief. Those who introduced the discussion were always opposed not only by those who rejected concessions outright, but also by anyone who saw any difficulty, however slight, in the terms of the motion. He also saw problems with the traditional motion to refer the Catholic petition to a committee. For the former reason, success was unlikely. If the motion were carried, however, then the government could choose its own time to use its majorities to defeat the bill. The only possible solution, and his plan, therefore, was to introduce a motion which would receive the votes of all who were not opposed to concessions on principle, enable parliament to express the opinion that the claims should be considered, and 'impose upon the executive government the task of bringing forward the Catholic claims.'¹³

This being the general aim, Canning specifically planned to force Perceval into an explicit statement as to what declarations the Catholics would have to offer before government would grant their claims. On 6 May 1812, therefore, he gave notice that he would in that session be bringing in a motion for an Address to the regent, asking that the recess be used to consider the nature of the securities which might

be required from the Catholics if further concessions were decided upon.'' This reflected Canning's personal interest in the security issue, and was an attempt to secure the support of all who shared his views, or refused to consider the main question until this point was settled. It would also remove any appearance of pandering to the Catholic Committee. Throwing the onus upon the executive government could gain the votes of government supporters who might have previously opposed inquiry in the belief that the issue was merely a party question, forced on by the Opposition to embarrass ministers.

The motion, however, was never debated in this form, for before the date fixed for the debate, the political scene was altered by Perceval's death, and the formation of the Liverpool government. It may be presumed that Canning saw these events as affecting significantly the Catholic question, perhaps altering the balance in its favour. Although it would be useful to obtain a declaration about securities from any government, it would have had more impact if obtained from Perceval. Liverpool's decision to give up the issue as a government question would deprive the declaration of much of its impact, if it were even possible for a government thus constituted to consider the issue.

Under these circumstances Canning therefore returned to his general aim; to attract the votes of all not opposed to concessions on principle, and to provide for the future discussion of the issue when the political situation had settled. During June he discussed the wording of his motion with Wellesley, and also sent a copy to Liverpool, in the hope that the premier would make alterations which would enable

him to support the motion. Although Canning did not succeed in gaining Liverpool's support, the pro-Catholic members of government did make some suggestions which they believed would make the motion more acceptable. Canning was also concerned to get all possible support from the Opposition, who had not approved the terms of his original motion, on both political and constitutional grounds, and gave them an opportunity to comment on his motion; the mention of securities was apparently removed from the resolution at their behest.¹³ The final result was a motion that the House would, early in the next session, take into consideration the laws affecting the Catholics, with a view to a 'final and conciliatory adjustment' which would be 'conducive to the peace and strength of the United Kingdom; to the stability of the Protestant establishment; and to the general satisfaction and concord of all classes of his Majesty's subjects.'¹⁴

The motion was introduced on 22 June 1812, in what augured to be very unpromising circumstances. The previously favourable atmosphere had been disturbed by the increasingly strident tone of the Irish Catholics. On 18 June at an aggregate meeting of Dublin Catholics, several strong resolutions were passed, implying criticism of the regent. They recommended Catholic freeholders not to support candidates who refused to pledge themselves against the government, and in favour of Catholic claims. Moreover, they insisted that 'any arrangements or conditions which might be connected with Mr Canning's motion in the House of Commons would have no influence on the conduct of the Catholics of Ireland, as they were determined to obtain their freedom unconditionally.'¹⁴

Unfortunately for Canning, reports of this meeting first reached London on the day of the debate. The Catholics' declaration could easily be understood as a threat, perhaps to browbeat parliament into granting emancipation without conditions. This could not but be an advantage to the Catholics' opponents. Canning, however, incorporated these resolutions into his speech as points in favour of his motion. He referred to the meeting as a symptom of the continuing discontent in Ireland created by the unresolved state of the Catholic question. To prevent such gatherings the question should be immediately considered in parliament, the only appropriate place for such discussions and decisions. The aim of his motion was to see the question considered in such a manner as to put an end to such violent language by referring the discussion to a future time of peace.¹⁵

In his opening speech Canning directed his arguments against those who rejected further concessions as an innovation and danger to the Constitution. He emphasised that the many relaxations already made to the Penal Laws had proclaimed the Catholics to be loyal citizens, and that the granting of the franchise had admitted them to political power. Above all, he stressed the necessity which lay upon those refusing additional concessions to prove that there was danger to the Church or Constitution in granting any further relief. In allowing Catholics the franchise they had already given them political power. Much, therefore, had been granted. Now his opponents had to show that previous concessions had been harmless to the Protestants, and satisfactory to the Catholics, 'but,

that a single step beyond the point at which we stand, is danger and destruction.'¹⁶

In the debate which followed, the majority of speakers favoured the motion, in speeches of a moderate tone. Both sides avoided discussing the general principles of the question, which had been so often heard, and there were no long quotations from ancient documents, or attacks upon the Catholic religion. Opponents of the measure contented themselves with deplored the lack of specific security plans, and insisting that the Catholics would never be satisfied unless everything was granted to them.¹⁷ The majority of Whig pro-Catholics now favoured unqualified concessions. Castlereagh, however, insisted upon securities to guard against foreign influence, although he denied that he sought for anything inconsistent with Catholic religion. Canning himself accepted that the security issue would be important in the final settlement, but insisted that to raise the subject prematurely would merely lead to misunderstandings and irritations. He was however firm in countering Protestant demands that the Catholics take the initiative on the issue. The formulation of such plans was the duty and the prerogative of parliament.¹⁸

The main fear of the opponents to relief was that in presenting the House with such a motion, Canning's aim was to trap people into accepting concessions. Nicholls referred to it as a 'specious resolution', to delude the House into a pledge in favour of concessions.¹⁹ Canning's motion did attract the votes of those who wished to consider the question in the future, without pledging themselves

to go further. Wilbraham Bootle argued that a vote for the motion promised no more than this. Bankes followed a similar line, although he appeared more reluctant to take any further steps. Both however, emphasised that their decision at the next stage would be greatly influenced by the type of securities proposed. Vansittart, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, believed that to vote against the motion was to vote in favour of perpetual exclusion. He refused, however, to countenance the idea of admitting Catholics to political power, and recommended only minor changes, such as admitting them to higher ranks in the army.²⁰

In summing up, Canning deplored the 'feebleness' of his opponents' arguments. This clearly reflected the general opinion of the Commons, as, for the first time, a motion in favour of the Catholics passed the House, and with a large majority (235 to 106). Why was Canning successful, when Grattan had failed only two months previously? Firstly, the minority on Grattan's motion had been very large, and only a few votes were needed to sway the balance. The motion was specifically designed to catch the votes of all who did not want to exclude the Catholics permanently. Canning's argument was also effective in drawing attention to the logic of further alterations. Moreover, Canning had never advocated the Catholic claims in all circumstances, and his willingness now to bring on a motion may have convinced some people that the time had come to tackle the issue. The apparent change in public opinion, shown by the lack of petitions was also instrumental in securing votes. Wellesley-Pole, who shocked the House by announcing his adherence to the Catholic cause, gave this as an important reason for

announcing his support. He also stressed his previous loyalty to Perceval, declaring that his death had set him free to speak in favour of concessions.²¹ Similar opinions may have influenced other voters. These feelings must have been very general, for a motion introduced by Richard Wellesley in the Lords, and fought along similar lines, was defeated by only one vote.

It soon became clear that despite the government's open stance, and the stimulation given to the cause by the success of Canning's motion, ministers would not interfere to help the Catholics. Wellesley-Pole had resigned as Chief Secretary, and declined another office under Liverpool, in mid-May. This was partly out of loyalty to his brother, but also because he feared that his past reputation might lead people to believe that the government was pledged to permanent exclusion of the Catholics.²² His successor, Robert Peel, appointed in July was a strong Protestant, who made his opinions very clear in the Commons. His appointment, coupled with the continuance of Richmond as Lord Lieutenant strengthened the Protestant nature of the Irish government, and indicated that whatever parliament had resolved, the Catholics could expect no support from that quarter. Furthermore, on 29 September, parliament was unexpectedly dissolved. It was a good time to go to the Country. The harvest had been good, and things were generally peaceful. News of the War effort was also good.²³ However, although it was never mentioned, it was hard to avoid the impression that the dissolution was partly to appeal to the Country against the Commons' pledge on the Catholic question; a new parliament would not be bound by Canning's resolution.

Despite the government's actions, there is no doubt that many pro-Catholics saw the success of the motion as the herald of emancipation. Their opponents shared their views, and believed that their only hope was to stimulate public opinion against concessions. They feared, however, that people were tired of the issue, and would not come forward. Eldon wrote to Swire, 'It is to me abundantly clear, that unless the country will express its sentiments on the Roman Catholic claims...and that tolerably strongly ... the Church is gone. I fought the battle again this winter ... but I cannot fight it, successfully, alone, with a country sunk in apathy.'²⁴ He need not have feared. Protestant reaction, probably unexpected by pro-Catholics, was swift and powerful. It became clear that the lack of petitions in 1812 had not been due to an acceptance of Catholic claims, but to apathy, or to a trust that parliament would continue to reject concessions. Several of the petitions subsequently presented pointed out that previous silence on the subject had been because the petitioners had trusted the legislature to deal with the question.²⁵ Once they realised that silence was taken for acquiescence, they made their opposition clear. The many petitions which poured into the House, from December 1812, were an indication of the Country's interest in the issue.

With the slightest chance of success for the Catholics, the wheels of opposition were put into motion. The Church used pamphlets and preaching to point out the dangers in concessions, while meetings were called to organise petitions. Pro-Catholics tried hard to counter these attacks, and arranged for famous supporters to speak at meetings, and for the publication of sermons and pamphlets on the

subject of religious toleration.²⁶ The English Catholics themselves were not idle in attempting to allay Protestant fears, and Butler's Address to the Protestants of Great Britain was produced for this purpose. Although the English Catholic petition denied the necessity for securities, it was conciliatory, leaving the decision to the 'wisdom of the legislature', and trusting them that nothing would be asked which was inconsistent with the Catholic religion.²⁷ By contrast, the Irish Catholics took a very strident tone. From the beginning, O'Connell cast doubts upon parliament's sincerity. On 6th July he warned against believing that concessions would soon follow. The people should not believe those who were 'hackneyed in duplicity and treachery'. He was always violent against the possibility of conceding securities, which he considered an insult to the Catholics, and to Ireland.²⁸ Catholic meetings produced resolutions supporting his stand.

The agitation came to a head on 25 February 1813, when Grattan's motion for a committee to consider the Catholic claims issued in a four day debate. Few of the arguments used on either side were really new, but reverted again to the impossibility or otherwise of Catholics taking a full part in the Constitution, because of their religious beliefs. This emphasis was probably the result of the various pamphlets produced since the success of Canning's motion, which had stirred religious controversy. It was also suggested that the aims of Canning's motion could not be fulfilled in the present climate; in the face of Protestant opposition and continuing Catholic violence a 'final and conciliatory adjustment' could not be found.²⁹

In his opening speech, Grattan stressed the importance of maintaining the Protestant succession and Protestant Church, explaining that the inviolability of these institutions would be reaffirmed in the preamble of the bill he hoped to bring in. The security issue was important in the debate. Grattan and friends were criticised for not declaring specific security plans, especially to protect against Papal encroachment. It was true that few had anything specific to offer on the issue. Plunket, who was very critical of Catholic claims for unlimited concessions, advocated state payment of the Catholic clergy, and some safeguard against foreign interference. However, on the latter point, he had nothing specific to offer. Only Hippisley had a clearly arranged plan, yet he maintained that a Select Committee was necessary before this could be put into practice.³⁰

Despite all the criticisms, however, Grattan's motion was still successful. It may be presumed that members of parliament felt that the time had come to attempt to find a solution for a problem which took up so much parliamentary time every year, and risked the development of serious religious controversy in the country. A study of the petitions presented may also give an indication as to why Grattan was successful. Two hundred and nineteen petitions were presented on both sides during this period. The majority of these were opposed to any alteration in the laws. However, forty-two petitions were presented which, although counted in the House of Commons journal as petitions against the Catholic claims, in fact agreed to concessions, providing that proper securities accompanied the measure. Many in this

category came from meetings of Irish Protestants, who were keen to refute the idea that they agreed to unqualified concessions, yet accepted alterations with securities. Parliament may have seen this as an indication that a settlement could indeed be made to satisfy the Irish Protestants. Moreover, of those petitions rejecting all concessions, forty-six represented solely the views of the clergy.⁵¹ It might have been thought that the opposition to the measure had been stirred simply as a religious controversy, which would die away if parliament actually decided to set the matter to rest.

With one successful motion behind him, Grattan next introduced a motion in committee to form the basis of a future bill. This in effect advocated the removal of civil and military disabilities from the Catholics, with such exceptions as were found necessary for the security of the Protestant establishment. This too was condemned as vague, even by supporters such as Castlereagh. It was however explained that the time had not yet come to reveal specific plans, and Grattan expressed himself willing to include any suggestions for securities which were not incompatible with the Catholic religion.⁵² This resolution too was adopted, and plans were made for the introduction of a bill, the first chance of relief for the Catholics since the Union.

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CHAPTER SIX

FIRST CHANCE OF SUCCESS: GRATTAN'S BILL OF 1813.

The bill was brought into the House of Commons on 30 April 1813. Grattan had been working on it since December, aided by several Irish friends, and by Butler, but without assistance from any Irish Catholics. This was to lead to much criticism from O'Connell.¹ The Whigs had been discussing the bill since December. Grey and Grenville had by this stage decided that securities were unnecessary, presumably after noting the Irish Catholics' unremitting opposition to them. They were, however, prepared to admit their usefulness for easing Protestant fears. They had agreed, therefore, that it would be best to introduce a simple bill, in line with their principles, but to allow others to add the securities they felt necessary; repeal coupled with 'nonsensical conditions' was of more use than continued exclusion. Grenville feared, however, that the Catholics had become too furious on the subject to accept conditions from anyone.² He probably hoped that no conditions would be imposed, so that the Catholics would have no occasion for further controversy.

As introduced at this stage, however, the bill seemed designed to satisfy their demands for simple repeal.³ The only major securities were a statement in the preamble that the Protestant Succession and Church were to be established 'permanently and inviolably', and a long oath to be taken by Catholic

office holders. This oath was designed to counteract Protestant suspicions in relation to the Catholics' allegiance to the Pope and the State, and to reassure them about the nature of certain tenets of the Catholic religion. On taking this oath many positions were to be opened to the Catholics, including seats in parliament. The only exceptions were the offices of Lord High Chancellor, and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, for which they were to be ineligible. They were also prohibited from presenting to livings in the Established Church. It was further stated that the bill was not to be seen as altering the existing laws relating to the holding of offices in the Established Church, ecclesiastical courts, or collegiate and ecclesiastical foundations.

The bill did contain clauses affecting the Catholic clergy. These, however, did not include the veto, or any other interference with the appointment of bishops. The hierarchy were simply to take an oath swearing not to agree to the appointment as bishop of anyone not of 'unimpeachable loyalty and peaceable conduct'. They were also to swear not to have any correspondence with Rome 'tending directly or indirectly to overthrow or disturb the Protestant government or the Protestant Church.' or on any subject 'not purely ecclesiastical'. Clauses also provided that no one be appointed a bishop in the United Kingdom who was not a national, or who had not resided in the country for a certain number of years.

Grattan moved for the bill to be read for a first time and printed, and the House agreed. It was not, however, destined to proceed in this simple form, for Canning at once announced his intention to introduce additional clauses, which he considered as 'carrying

its [the bill's] spirit and principle still further'. The possibility of his intervention had been previously discussed by the Whig leaders. Both Holland and Grenville had a deep mistrust of Canning, and also of Castlereagh, whom they feared would try to defeat the bill by clogging it with restrictions.⁴ Grattan, however, was not unduly alarmed, for he had already been informed of Canning's plans and intentions for a security scheme, when they had both met with Wilberforce, Elliot, Newport, Romilly and Pigott, on 20 April 1813.⁵ As originally outlined, Canning's scheme involved the setting up of two Commissions of Catholic lay noblemen, in England and Ireland, to certify the loyalty of men appointed to the episcopate, and to examine Bulls and Rescripts received from Rome. In the latter case, certain members of the government were also included on the Commission. Canning presumably hoped that such a scheme would ease Protestant fears concerning Papal interference in the country, and obviate Catholic objections by not giving total authority on the issue to the Protestant government.

Canning was well aware that his scheme would be unpopular in Ireland. Donoughmore informed him on 24th April, for example, that the Irish Catholics were opposed to any censorship of their bishops' correspondence with Rome. Canning, however, insisted that it was parliament's right to legislate for the Catholics, and refused to accept Donoughmore's implication that all plans should receive Catholic approval before being proposed to parliament.⁶ Canning was prepared to make some concessions to Catholic scruples; before the clauses came before parliament, members of the Catholic hierarchy were added to the Commissions for the inspection of

correspondence with Rome. This modification was an attempt to satisfy Archbishop Troy, who had objected to laymen holding such positions, which were unrecognised in the Catholic Church.⁷ However, Canning's willingness to compromise definitely had its limits. When Troy made strong criticisms of the whole scheme after he received a copy of the printed clauses on 3 May, he was given short shrift. Canning insisted that the Archbishop had been sent the clauses out of courtesy, not for the purpose of consultation. Although he wished his scheme to be acceptable to the Catholics, he was determined to act upon the principle 'that parliament should decide - not that the Roman Catholics should dictate - [the] terms of any Act to be passed for their benefit'. The bill would not have any chance of passing without such measures as he had planned.⁸

As was to be expected, the Irish Catholic Board were not satisfied with the bill. O'Connell, as a lawyer, was critical of its imprecise language, and its vagueness. He insisted that it still accepted the principle of exclusion, by prohibiting Catholics from certain offices, and complained that they were still proscribed from the judiciary, from voting for representative peers, and from universities.⁹ On first reading the bill, it is hard to avoid the impression that the Catholics were correct in their criticisms. For example, the judiciary is not specifically mentioned as being opened to them. Grattan tried to answer these criticisms; thus he claimed that the judiciary was included in 'all civil and military offices of trust'.¹⁰ However, despite such explanations, the seed of distrust had been sown, and Catholic objections to the bill rather increased than decreased in violence and frequency.

Nevertheless, the bill passed its second reading on 13 May. Duigenan had tried to persuade the House to abandon the bill, insisting that it aimed at 'the restoration of the Roman Catholic Religion, and the supremacy of the Pope in these realms', and that the Catholics 'would be satisfied with nothing short of placing the Pope on one side of the throne, and giving him a share in the government of the country'.¹¹ His violence was not echoed by the other opponents, who preferred the more civilized opportunity for attack provided by the security plans. Ryder, for example, was very critical of Canning's clauses, because they set up a tribunal as an imperium in imperio, unknown in the British Constitution. More important to the promoters of the bill was the fact that a similar line was taken by Castlereagh, who made several criticisms of Canning's scheme along these lines although he clearly favoured the principle of concessions.¹²

Canning appeared eager to avail himself of Castlereagh's help and suggestions, and accordingly a meeting was held between Castlereagh and the formulators of the bill, at which his intentions were discussed.¹³ The amendments which were then agreed did not alter the basic principles of the securities but made significant, if slight, changes to their mode of operation, in order to involve the Crown more obviously in their provisions. The Protestant officers of State who, in Canning's Commissions were to serve only to inspect correspondence with Rome, were now to be members at all times. Certification of the loyalty of a new Catholic bishop was to be by the Lord Lieutenant, on the advice of the Commission, rather than by the Commission itself. All correspondence from Rome was now to be submitted at

least to an Ecclesiastical Commissioner, and must be endorsed by the Secretary of State or Chief Secretary that it had been so inspected, whereas in Canning's clauses, documents could be exempted from examination provided that the recipient swore that they related exclusively to spiritual concerns.¹⁴

These amendments pleased Castlereagh, but it rapidly became clear that many Catholics, especially the Irish, were not satisfied. Bishop Poynter of the London District was still hoping that the clauses might be ameliorated, and made less objectionable to Catholics.¹⁵ Bishop Milner had arrived in London on 19 May, and had immediately begun to attempt to rouse the other English Vicars Apostolic to oppose the bill. However, because of their distrust of his actions and motives, he had little success. Therefore he acted alone, and on 22 May he issued the Brief Memorial, which declared that the security clauses were inconsistent with Catholic discipline, and that any Catholic who took a seat on the Commissions would be committing an act of schism.¹⁶ This pamphlet was circulated among members of parliament, and was almost certainly a great influence in the eventual collapse of the bill. Although the English Catholic Board produced an answer to Milner's arguments, this was not in itself sufficient to counter the fact that a very influential Catholic was working for the downfall of the bill..

Moreover, although the body was split on the issue, the majority of Irish Catholics continued their vociferous opposition. The language used at a meeting held on 22 May was typical: although some were keen to avoid giving the impression that they

were rejecting the bill, O'Connell's party were loud in their denunciations. Despite Grattan's explanations, the lawyers continued to criticise the wording. By this stage, their opposition took the shape of a dislike to the bill as a whole; although O'Connell had always declined to comment upon the bill's ecclesiastical clauses, his language at this meeting implied his disapprobation of them, and also hinted at his future willingness to criticise even the Pope if Irish freedom were at stake. 'Should they [the bishops] decide against the proposed Commission, they shall have my most hearty support; should they decide in its favour, I shall still reserve to myself, on every fit occasion, the right to protest against any measure that may tarnish this last relic of national independence - this last fragment of the ancient pride and greatness of imperial Ireland - the independence of her Church and of her People.' He reserved the right to criticise such plans not as a Catholic, but as an Irishman.¹⁷

In the wake of this evidence of Catholic dissatisfaction, the Commons went into committee on the bill on 24 May 1813. The debate was immediately focussed upon a single issue, after an amendment by Abbott, the Speaker, who proposed to delete the clause admitting Catholics to seats in parliament. To admit them to the legislature, he contended, was to grant them political power, which could never be done with safety to the Constitution. He was, however, prepared to make other alterations in the law which did not involve the granting of this power.¹⁸ His argument was immediately taken up by others. Few now insisted that nothing should be granted to the Catholics, but concessions must stop short of allowing any political power! As for the provided

securities, Abbott's opinion was echoed here also, in the general opinion that no securities would be adequate if Catholics were allowed political power - 'there was but one security for the Protestant constitution, and that they were about to give up, for the only real security against the Catholics was keeping them out'.¹⁹

The pro-Catholics laid as much stress upon allowing political power to the Catholics as did their opponents. The majority of speakers claimed this to be the most essential aspect of the bill, and several implied that they would no longer proceed with the measure if the amendment succeeded.²⁰ How far their opponents had known that they would take this line is a matter for conjecture. Abbott at least had been consistent since the beginning of the debate. He may have been strengthened in his views after a conversation with Liverpool, on 7 March, in which the premier had expressed a willingness to allow Catholics to the highest ranks in the army, but would not consider their admittance to parliament.²¹ A bill modified along these lines, therefore, would not only be in line with Abbott's personal principles, but might also gain government support in the House of Lords. He probably did not anticipate the abandonment of the whole bill. Pro-Catholic statements in the debate, however, may have encouraged others to vote for the amendment as a way of getting rid of the bill, without voting against the Catholic claims as a whole.

Pro-Catholics tried to ridicule the fears of their opponents, who saw the whole establishment and Constitution threatened by the admission of a few Catholic members of parliament. The greatest danger

to the Constitution came not from concessions, but from the continuance of the principle of exclusion, which would be the result of giving up the bill.²³ Anxious to counteract the opinions of Milner and the Irish Catholics, they insisted that they had never expected the bill to give universal satisfaction. Some Catholics were more concerned with their own influence and reputation than with their cause, and hence were bound to oppose the bill, to perpetuate their own importance. It was enough if 'reasonable men' were satisfied with the bill's provisions.²⁴

Their arguments were not enough however, for when a vote was taken, the amendment was carried by four votes. Consequently the bill was abandoned by its promoters, who believed that the essential point had been lost. Although its supporters were disappointed, it soon became clear that success would have created fresh controversy, as further evidence was received of the extent of Irish opposition to the measure. Copies were now received of resolutions agreed upon by the Irish Catholic bishops. Although these expressed a willingness to swear that no disloyal person would be appointed to the episcopate, and that they would have no correspondence with Rome for the purpose of 'overthrowing or disturbing' the Protestant Church or government, they were strongly opposed to the proposed securities. They insisted that some of the clauses' provisions were 'utterly incompatible with the discipline of the Roman Catholic church, and with the free exercise of [their] religion,' and could not be agreed to 'without incurring the heavy guilt of schism'.²⁴ The bishops also issued a Pastoral Address to this effect, so that their opinions could not be misrepresented.

The Irish Catholic Board passed a vote of thanks to the prelates for this decision, on 29 May. O'Connell praised their 'ever vigilant and zealous attention to the interests of the Catholic Church in Ireland.'²⁸ Speeches made at this meeting reveal the divisions within the Board, which would have been aggravated if the bill had passed. The motion of thanks to the bishops was hotly contested by those who had either favoured the bill, or at least had no wish to antagonise the framers of it. Criticism was launched against the bishops for condemning the proposed clauses, without suggesting plans which might be substituted in their place. O'Connell, however, was full of praise for the bishops, who had aided the Catholics in getting rid of a bill which would have enslaved them further. In a violent and anti-English speech, he hurled abuse upon the English, who had always broken their promises to the Irish nation, and who hated the Irish Catholics not for their religion, but for their nationality. As Irishmen, they were to rejoice at their escape from a bill which would have brought their Church under the control of the English government: 'There remains, and will remain, in Ireland, one spot free from ministerial pollution, your bishops are not to be degraded to the subservience of gaugers and tide-waiters, nor your priesthood to the dependence of police constables.'²⁹ Other Catholic meetings expressed similar sentiments.

There were further indications of the split in the Catholic body. The English Catholic Board, furious with Milner for his part in the bill's defeat, voted to expel him from the Select Committee of the Board. By contrast, when the Irish heard of this, their criticism was all for the 'jobbing'

English Catholics, who censured Milner, yet dared to vote thanks to Castlereagh, the oppressor of the Irish. An Aggregate meeting on 15 June voted thanks to Milner, for all his efforts.²⁷

This was the situation created by a bill designed to bring the Catholic question to a final and conciliatory adjustment. Although the Irish Catholics had criticised the civil provisions in the bill, there is no doubt that the major furore had been created by the additional security clauses. The bill had been drawn up to satisfy both sides, yet no one was pleased with it. Its framers had attempted to make security arrangements acceptable to the Catholics by the inclusion of Catholics at every stage, rather than leaving things solely in the hands of the Protestant government, as was the case with the veto. However, as Troy recognised in the beginning, the scheme was really a more obvious violation of Catholic discipline than was the veto, 'putting the laity in a sense over the bishops, in a manner which the Church could not tolerate'.²⁸ Even when the bishops were included, the laity were still in prominent positions. The scheme also appeared to give the Commissioners greater power than the Pope, in that, once the Pope had appointed someone, it was for the Commissioners to say whether that person might take up his office. Moreover, all the bishops were agreed that no change should take place in the selection of bishops without the sanction of Rome, which had not been obtained.

Protestants were also dissatisfied with the security provisions, even when the Crown was given a greater authority over the Commissioners, for much power was still left in the hands of the Catholics,

both lay and ecclesiastical. The establishment of these Commissions would have brought the Catholic Church as an organisation within the Constitution, in some sense recognising the titles of its prelates, and the authority of Rome in appointing them and communicating with them. 'It implied not merely a formal recognition of the Roman Church but a direct constitutional relationship with it that involved the crown and the executive government with the Papacy and the Irish hierarchy,' which would have been a 'revolution in constitutional principle.'²²² Those keen to strive for the preservation of the Protestant constitution in all its manifestations naturally could not support such a scheme. Thus the bill failed to find favour with either side.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CATHOLIC QUESTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE, 1809 TO 1820.

The preceding chapters have shown the increasingly important position which the Catholic question occupied in British political life. Circumstances, however, conspired to give the issue an international dimension also. In the first place, this was the result of British involvement in the Peninsula, where British soldiers fought for the liberties of foreign Catholics. A further development came as a consequence of the failure of Grattan's bill, after which the English Catholics decided to seek guidance from Rome as to their future conduct. The decisions of the Holy See were then to influence the progress of the question at home. Furthermore, the first coming of peace, in 1814, opened up the possibility of semi-official negotiations between Britain and Rome.

(i). The Catholic Question and the Peninsular War.

The presence of British troops in the Catholic countries of the Peninsula encouraged those favouring concessions to look to the situation in Spain and Portugal for further arguments in support of their cause. This generally took two forms. The large numbers of Irish Catholic soldiers fighting, and dying, for their country, was stressed. This was

especially noticeable in 1811, when Grattan opened the debate in May, with a request that the Commons' recent vote of thanks to the Irish soldiers be read. Others also proclaimed their valour. If Irish Catholics could be trusted with arms, and were loyal and brave in the military service, it was argued, then surely it was impossible to claim that a Catholic could not be trusted with high military office, or with political positions at home, or that his allegiance to the king was suspect.'

Lord Wellington, as Arthur Wellesley became in September 1809, would have been very surprised had he heard the use to which his name was put in these arguments. His Irish nationality, and his rise to fame made him a perfect illustration to point out both the peculiar position of Catholics in the army, and the losses which the State itself must suffer by restricting the services which Catholics could offer: in the 1812 debate, for example, Vernon stressed that if Wellington had been a Catholic, he could not have been rewarded for his valour by further promotion. He would probably be serving in Ireland rather than in Spain, 'and instead of assisting the Spaniards, might have marched in aid of an exciseman, and taken some illicit distillery by storm, instead of Badajoz or Ciudad Rodrigo'. Furthermore, if he had been called to serve in England, he would have faced a fine, and the loss of his commission. Similarly, in 1811, Whitbread had questioned whether, if Wellington were suddenly to become a Catholic, he should be dismissed from the service, because of his new belief in Transubstantiation.*

Not only were many Catholic soldiers dying for their country, but they were dying in aid of Catholic

sovereigns, Britain's only allies against Napoleon. It was ridiculous, therefore, to say that Catholics could not be trusted, when the Country's closest alliances were with those of that religion. Pro-Catholics were quick to point out the dichotomy between Britain's exertions on behalf of Catholics abroad, and her refusal even to inquire into the claims of those at home. The most famous speech incorporating this idea was probably that made by the Duke of Sussex, in April 1812, in which he stressed the frequency with which British armies had aided the Catholic cause during the Revolutionary Wars, and urged the inconsistency of then denying civil rights to British Catholics. Britain was fighting for 'the maintenance and defence of Catholic property all over Europe,' and yet her attitude at home '{belied} the sincerity' of her actions. In the same session Lord Byron took the argument further, drawing attention to the differing policies of the Wellesley brothers, one of whom (Wellington) fought for Catholics in Spain, while the other (Wellesley-Pole) contended against the Catholic Committee in Ireland. 'It is singular, indeed,' he commented, 'to observe the difference between our foreign and domestic policy'. On a more positive note, Elliot urged the House of Commons to ally themselves with the Catholics at home as they had done with those in Spain and Portugal.*

The Catholics themselves also noted the anomalous situation and used violent language to stress the injustice of their position. For example, on 9th December 1812, a meeting of the Catholics of County Down passed a strong resolution expressing this view: 'We conceive it to be a complete political solecism, that the present ministry, who are making unexampled sacrifices, and shedding the best blood of the

country for the avowed purpose of delivering foreign subjects professing the Roman Catholic Religion, from a yoke which they consider galling and oppressive, should refuse to emancipate four millions of their own subjects from those penal and restrictive statutes of which they complain, merely because they profess the Roman Catholic Religion - the same religion professed by their allies.'⁴

O'Connell seized upon the situation to reiterate his belief that their cause was not opposed because it was Catholic, but because it was Irish. Britain's involvement with the Catholics of the Peninsula made this very clear, as did the fact that the Hanoverian Catholics were allowed to rise to all ranks of the army: 'The English do not dislike us as Catholics - they simply hate us as Irish; they exhaust their blood and treasure for the papists of Spain; they have long observed and cherished a close and affectionate alliance with the ignorant and bigotted papists of Portugal; and now they exert every sinew to preserve those papists from the horror of a foreign yoke....we fight their battles; we beat their enemies; we pay our taxes, and we are degraded, oppressed, and insulted.'⁵ He and the Irish Catholic Board determined to take advantage of Britain's apparent predilection for the Iberian Catholics, by planning an address to the Spanish Cortes, requesting the Spanish government's intercession with the regent on their behalf.⁶ Although this idea seemed sensible to the Catholics in their situation, to their opponents it seemed only the perfect illustration of Catholic disloyalty.

The Catholics' opponents might have pointed out that the war in the Peninsula was also against forces

which were at least nominally Catholic. The war was not being fought to protect the Catholic religion, or to restore Catholic monarchy, although this would be one of its effects - rather it was to aid weaker nations struggling against France. The religion of those nations was immaterial. Moreover, the civil position of Catholics in countries where that religion was established was not questioned by the opponents of emancipation at home. The Catholic question concerned the proper place for Catholics in a country in which the king, parliament, and religion were designated as Protestant. It was not the duty of the legislature to interfere with the religion of other countries, but to protect the British Protestant establishments, which might necessitate excluding Catholics from positions of power. Fighting to restore legitimate Catholic government in a solely Catholic country was an entirely different issue. Logically, the truth of these arguments is clear, yet it is hard to penetrate the surface impression that the government's policy was inconsistent. Perhaps others at the time found it hard to separate the political issues of the war from its religious setting; it is interesting to note that in 1811 and 1812, only one speech, by Owens, in April 1812, attempted to put this case.⁷

While those safe in parliament battled over the Catholic question with sideways glances at the Peninsula, those Protestants actually serving there were given first hand experience of living in a Catholic country. For many this opportunity served simply to confirm old prejudices, and to create new antipathies. Soldiers took abroad with them the traditional British Protestant scorn for the practices of the Catholic religion, and hatred for

its priests. Published diaries of the Peninsular War are filled with criticism of Spanish and Portuguese religion, and at the time, similar reports were doubtless sent back by soldiers to fuel the prejudices of those at home.

Men were struck, above all, by the sheer number of priests and monks to be found in the towns, the epithet 'priest-ridden' being applied to many different places.¹⁷ Although some men were able to see good in the priests when they met them as individuals, the majority condemned them as lazy, dirty, uncaring, and immoral. Bell, for example, wrote that 'they [the priests] were the most immoral and irreligious part of the community.' He also described them as 'lazy, indolent, [and] useless'.¹⁸ They were seen as restricting freedom of learning and freedom of association, keeping the people in superstitious subjugation, while forcing them to pay for their upkeep. The existence of so many clerics was seen by the soldiers as a great waste of resources, because they did not serve in the army, but rather lived in idleness.¹⁹

British soldiers were apparently unable to comprehend the monastic life. They could not believe that anyone would join a monastery or convent willingly. Priests, parents, and the religious system in general were therefore seen as condemning people, especially women, to such a life. Simmons, for example, pitied the 'unfortunate' women, who might have lived in the world, and brought pleasure to society, but who were 'doomed' by their parents from 'superstitious bigotry....to live in a vile prison, like common felons.' Sherer viewed the entrance of a young girl to a convent as worse than

death, as it involved not the burial of a dead body in the ground, but of a 'living and joyful heart' in the 'cheerless cloister.'¹³ The latter writer was slightly more sympathetic to Catholicism in general, and yet was clearly unable to understand the ideals of monasticism. Soldiers were nevertheless fascinated by convents, and the women they believed to be imprisoned inside. They delighted in talking to the nuns, and often seemed to form close relationships with them. Various means were used to gain entrance to convents. Believing the inhabitants all to be cloistered against their will, attempts were sometimes made to raid convents, to release the women inside, and the soldiers seem to have been pleased when the approach of the French enabled them to liberate nuns from their supposed imprisonment.¹⁴

The apparent piety of the Catholics was noted; their frequent prayers, services, and the constant signing of the cross. However, this was generally regarded not as being a sign of true devotion, but simply as a mindless ritual. Schauman claimed that 'there [was] no genuine piety in all this, but only habit and indolence.'¹⁵ In his view, religion was used as an excuse to evade work. Others contrasted this apparent devotion with the peoples' licentious behaviour. This led Boutflower to conclude that 'they have the form of religion, [but] they possess not the spirit.' He therefore dismissed Catholicism as 'not a religion of the heart.'¹⁶ The practices of Catholic worship were also condemned as superstitious and degrading. Some were however able to see good in the religion. Sherer believed that many Catholics were honest in their devotions. He was struck by the magnificence of their Christmas services, and contended that the special attributes of Catholic

devotions were peculiarly suited to the temperament of the people of Southern Europe.¹⁵ However, such comments were exceptional, and the majority of soldiers were simply confirmed in their prejudices against Catholicism.

Viewing the people as superstitious and stupid, many soldiers played upon Catholic susceptibilities for their own amusement. Sergeant Lawrence, took delight in secretly placing meat in the stew of his billet host during lent, and then informing the unfortunate householder of his actions. On another occasion he and his fellows hid a pig, stolen from a farmer, in a chapel, under a statue of the Virgin Mary. To their great amusement, the pig's owner came in and made obeisance to the statue, thus also honouring his own pig!¹⁶

With this picture of, and attitude to, Iberian religion, it is perhaps not surprising that several diarists cast more censure upon the Catholics than upon Bonaparte and his armies. Private Wheeler, for example, was convinced that the Catholic priests wished to re-establish the Inquisition. In his view, Bonaparte's abolition of that Office did much to counterbalance all the mischief he had done in Spain.¹⁷ Others were almost thankful for French intervention in Spain, believing that this would end the control and extortions of the priests and monks, and would free the people from superstition. On this the anti-Catholic Boutflower and the more tolerant Sherer were in agreement. The latter thanked Bonaparte's armies for shrinking 'the withering tyranny of the priesthood' and for tendering a blow to the authority of the Catholic Church in Spain and Portugal, 'from which it [could] never recover.'

Boutflower went further, and with the same sentiments in mind, hoped for the complete subjugation of Spain by Bonaparte.'¹⁸

Wellington appeared to be more tolerant, and even protective of the religious conditions he found in Spain and Portugal. On first arriving in the Peninsula, he laid down strict guidelines for the behaviour of soldiers in Catholic countries, to ensure that, at least in public, the national religion was respected. Later he wrote to the Bishop of Cortall Branco that he was 'determined...not to allow the soldiers to insult the religion of the country.'¹⁹ It is highly likely, however, that such decisions were motivated not by an abstract concern for religious tolerance, but by strictly political considerations. They were a gesture of good will to the Iberians, designed to secure their entire co-operation with his measures, bolster his own authority in the country, and convince the people that the British Army were to be preferred to the brutal French.

Wellington's attitude to his own Catholic soldiers reflected this approach. He so worded his orders as to allow them to attend Mass if they chose to do so. Guedalla commented that this 'showed a little more than judicious tenderness for local prejudices', and concealed 'an ingenious measure of toleration for the Catholics in his command.'²⁰ However, Wellington explained that this decision had been taken not because he felt a particular concern that they should be allowed to attend to their religious duties, but as an attempt to prevent the priests from exerting pressure upon the soldiers to attend. He commented to Villiers: 'however

indifferent I should have been at seeing the soldiers flock to the churches under my orders, I should not be very well satisfied to see them filled by the influence of the priests, taking advantage of the mildness and toleration which is the spirit of [my] order.'²²¹ Wellington's dislike of priestly interference was probably primarily a reaction against any alternative authority being exerted upon the soldiers under his command. He was equally opposed to the spread of Methodism within the army, seeing a potential danger in their meetings: 'The meeting of soldiers in their cantonments to sing psalms or to hear a sermon ... is in the abstract perfectly innocent.....but it may become otherwise: and yet till the abuse has made some progress the commanding officer would have no knowledge of it, nor could he interfere.'²²² Wellington was always anxious to obtain good Anglican chaplains for the army, for he believed that religious instruction from them would help to counter such meetings, and was 'the greatest support and aid to military discipline and order.'²²³ It may be presumed that he expected this also to weaken the priestly influence.

While in Ireland, Wellington had had to deal with complaints from Irish soldiers that they were not allowed to attend Mass. These orders may also, therefore, have been an attempt to deprive the soldiers of a ground of protest which might have distracted them from their service; in addition such a measure would prevent criticism from pro-Catholics at home, without altering the fundamentally Protestant structure of the British Army abroad.

Wellington was impressed with some aspects of the Catholic Church of the Peninsula. He apparently

viewed the Portuguese clergy as a stabilising influence. He especially commended the Spanish and Portuguese clerical landlords for their concern for their land and tenants - a concern, he noted, which was sadly lacking elsewhere. For this reason he opposed the projected sale of church lands in Portugal, advocating instead that areas belonging to the Crown be disposed of first. Furthermore, he praised the clergy for their wholehearted support of the allies.²⁴ He must also have been impressed by the help he received from many Catholic priests, who provided him with information and acted as messengers. In both Spain and Portugal the war-effort was greatly aided by the work of several Irish students training for the priesthood in these countries.²⁵ At this time, Wellington also began a friendship with Dr. Curtis, president of the Irish College at Salamanca.

The conduct of the young priests might have done much to counterbalance the opinion which Wellington had formed of the Irish while serving as Chief Secretary. However, other observations were not so favourable. For example, he noted that when given the opportunity to go to Mass, none of his Irish soldiers did so. Nor did they make any other religious observations, 'excepting making the sign of the cross to induce the people of the country to give them wine.'²⁶ This may well have confirmed his previous impression that the Irish Catholics were interested in their religion only for political purposes; deprived of the opportunity to protest that they were not allowed to attend Mass, they lost interest in their religion. Wellington was not impressed either with the conduct of some of the Irish soldiers. Although many were very brave, he

noted that, in certain regiments, many Irishmen were deserting - a crime previously almost unknown in the British army on active service. This he contended was due to the 'bad description' of men recruited to the line from the Irish Militia.²⁷ Contemplating this type of man, Wellington may have been led again to question the likelihood of Ireland remaining loyal in the event of invasion or rebellion.

As he had resigned his political office, Wellington was no longer obliged to be the neutral administrator, and therefore felt more free to express his own opinions. On those few occasions when he wrote about the subject, he continued to stress, above all, the importance of maintaining Britain's connection with Ireland. Writing to Wellesley-Pole in 1810, he explained that the English ministers were ignorant of the 'great and general detestation of the Union, and the indifference even of their friends respecting the British connection'.²⁸ Hence they did not understand, as he did, that the granting of concessions to the Catholics was not just a political question, but a matter of life and death to the Union. In his view, the Union was only upheld by the distinctions between Catholic and Protestant: 'Ireland has been kept connected with Great Britain by the distinctions between Protestants and Catholics since the Act of Settlement. Abolish the distinctions and all will be Irishmen alike, with similar Irish feelings. Show me an Irishman, and I will show you a man whose anxious wish it is to see his country independent of Great Britain. This is human nature, and the feelings in Ireland have at all times been the same.'²⁹ In his view it was absurd to speak of the Church and State being endangered by concessions; what was threatened

was the British connection. If there had to be emancipation, it must only be done with political safeguards, such as the appointment of the Catholic bishops by the State, to ensure the continuing interest of Britain in Ireland.⁸⁰

It is clear that Wellington was more wary of the Irish Catholics because of their nationality than their religion. As a consequence, he even considered the possibility of using force to ensure the complete subjugation of Ireland, and remove the danger of separation. In 1810, he believed that the situation in Ireland was more difficult and dangerous than that which he faced in Spain. He could, however, feel reassured that he was making a contribution to the security of Ireland, as Richmond was convinced that good news from the Peninsula always helped to tranquillise that country.⁸¹

Considering the circumstances it is not surprising that Wellington maintained his suspicions of the Irish Catholics during this period, for he had neither the time nor the inclination to reflect on this subject in any depth. He was naturally concerned above all with the war - a subject far more appealing to his mind than the intricacies of politics. He was, moreover, kept in touch with the Irish situation by Richmond and Wellesley-Pole, whose correspondence was coloured by anti-Catholic sentiments. This probably helped to keep in his mind the impressions he had formed as Chief Secretary. Wellington's relationship with his eldest brother may also have inclined him away from the latter's political views. After 1809, Wellington had little time for Richard, whom he believed to be ruining himself by womanising!⁸² He also disapproved of

Wellesley's political manoeuvres, having a hatred of party politics and machinations of any kind, and was particularly concerned that Wellesley's breach with the Liverpool government, and Wellesley-Pole's refusal to accept office, would lead to the weakening of the government's commitment to the Peninsular War.²⁸ It is however clear that Wellington's time in the Peninsula did not remove his interest in Irish affairs. Later developments were to show that he always retained both the pragmatic approach to religious issues shown at this time, and his rather suspicious view of Irish nationalism.

(2) The Roman Dimension.

As the Peninsular War drew to a close, removing one international aspect of the Catholic question, so the field of battle over which that issue was fought extended in another direction, as Rome became involved in the security question. This was to create dilemmas in the coming years, both for the Papacy, and for the British Catholics, and probably delayed the granting of full concessions. However, at the coming of the first peace of Paris, things looked hopeful for emancipation. In May 1814, when several of the allied sovereigns came to London, prior to the Congress of Vienna, the country also witnessed another unique occurrence; Consalvi, the Papal Secretary of State, also arrived in the capital. He was the first Cardinal to set foot in England for nearly two centuries. This visit, and particularly Consalvi's friendly reception by the regent, hinted at the likelihood of a more open relationship between Britain and the Papacy, and

perhaps even at the possibility of concluding formal arrangements with regard to the British Catholics.

Cardinal Consalvi remained in England until early July. During this time, he had several conversations with Castlereagh. These discussions were also to continue at the Congress of Vienna, which Consalvi attended as the representative of the Holy See. Although his mission was primarily concerned with international affairs, Consalvi was also anxious to use this time to assist the cause of the British Catholics. This course was recommended to him by the Pope, who advised him to 'take advantage, with moderation and prudence, of the exceptional situation in which [he was] placed,' and to 'implant in [the regent's] heart the desire to show himself just towards subjects who have never failed in their duties as citizens.'

When Consalvi arrived, however, the prospects for such a mission looked remote, for at that moment, the ferment over the security question had reached an even greater pitch. The new unrest was the result of Rome's first sally into the question, in the form of a letter sent from Quarantotti, Vice-Prefect of Propaganda in reply to a request from Poynter for advice on the security issue. Anticipating the introduction into parliament of another relief bill including Canning's clauses, the English Catholics had asked Poynter for advice, wishing to be guided by their bishops as to their future conduct on the issue. In accordance both with their wishes, and his own inclinations, Poynter had asked Macpherson, the English and Scottish agent in Rome, to obtain guidance for him from the Holy See. In the absence of the Pope and Cardinals, the matter had come before

Quarantotti, who had called a special Congregation on the issue, and the reply had been sent to Poynter in April 1814.

The content of the Quarantotti rescript, as it became known, must have been a surprise to Poynter. He had previously questioned whether it might be possible for Catholics to submit to Canning's clauses, as acts of the legislature, although they could not, as Catholics, consent to them, and had wondered whether, in the absence of Papal sanction, it would be possible for Catholics to take seats on the Commissions, without incurring the guilt of schism.² Quarantotti's letter went far beyond Poynter's expectations. There was no talk of schism, or even of mere submission. Rather, he declared that 'Catholics may, with satisfaction and gratitude accept and embrace the bill which was last year presented for their emancipation,' and insisted that if a similar act were passed, they should 'express the strongest sentiments of gratitude to his Majesty..... for so great a benefit.' Excepting a single phrase in the clerical oath, no disapproval was shown of any part of the security measures, or of Canning's commissions. Quarantotti stressed his confidence that the government, while concerned to do all it could for the public security, would not exact anything from the Catholics which might be viewed as a departure from their religion.³ Copies of this paper were circulated to all the bishops in the United Kingdom, and also printed in the newspapers.

The English Vicars Apostolic, with the exception of Milner, accepted the letter as an authoritative document from Rome, and prepared to accept the decision. The English Catholic Board was delighted

with the result. In Ireland, however, although Archbishop Troy was willing to accept the rescript, most of the people and clergy naturally opposed it. The other Irish bishops, furious to find their previous stand indirectly condemned, and also being more aware of the prevailing sentiment in the country, were not willing to let the subject rest. Doctors Coppinger, Derry and O'Shaughnessy all strongly condemned the Rescript. Similar views were expressed in the Irish newspapers. A letter from 'an Irish Priest', published in the Dublin Evening Post, insisted that the document was issued not on Papal authority, but only upon that of an 'understrapper of Propaganda', and called in fiercely nationalistic tones for Irishmen to resist.⁴ Protests from meetings throughout the country rapidly followed. On 12 May, priests and clergy of the Archdiocese of Dublin voted the rescript 'non obligatory', and insisted that the interference of an anti-Catholic government in the appointment of bishops was not only 'inexpedient', but also 'highly detrimental to the best and dearest interests of religion, and pregnant with incalculable mischief to the cause of Catholicity in Ireland.' The Catholic Board also denounced the letter. On 26 and 27 May, the bishops met, and declared the Rescript 'not mandatory'.⁵ They commissioned Dr. Murray to go to Rome to explain their case to the Pope, now released from captivity. Such was the situation when Consalvi's visit commenced.

Consalvi had long admired England, and now hoped for closer links between that country and Rome. He was therefore inclined to support schemes acceptable to the government, in order to facilitate an understanding between the two powers, and took little notice of Irish objections to securities, except to

see them as a hindrance to these plans. In 1813, Poynter had noted the Irish Catholics' resentment of everything English, insisting that many there who were 'loud for Emancipation', did not really want to succeed, as this would defeat their plans to separate Ireland from England. He questioned whether the Irish concern for the church was not in fact to be attributed simply to nationalistic feelings. Consalvi shared this view of the Irish situation. In a despatch to Rome, he explained that the Irish used the 'pretext of religion to favour their political designs and purposes against the government they hate,' and warned the Papacy always to remember that much Irish opposition to securities was probably stimulated by political rather than religious feelings. Hence much of their opposition to such proposals could be dismissed.*

This rejection of Irish opposition to securities potentially cleared the way for Consalvi to reach an understanding with Castlereagh, whom he met on 4 July. Castlereagh was, personally, an ardent vetoist. He informed Consalvi that, although he had no wish to ask for anything incompatible with the Catholic religion, parliament would grant nothing without some guarantee of the loyalty of the bishops, and a right to inspect correspondence with Rome. The Crown should be given some kind of veto, using the precedents set by other countries. Consalvi was clearly eager to do what he could to satisfy the security men. He was convinced that a suitable oath of loyalty might be devised. He also implied that some arrangements could be made concerning the veto, and agreed that precedents might be followed in this case. However, despite his desire to please Castlereagh, he stopped short of admitting even the

possibility of government's inspecting correspondence with Rome. He explained that, while this did occur in some states, the principle had never been sanctioned by the Papacy, which had simply been forced to tolerate the practice.⁷ It is clear, therefore, that there were limits beyond which even Consalvi, the Cardinal most sympathetic to the British government, was not prepared to go.

Discussions continued at the Congress of Vienna, and Consalvi did all he could to satisfy Castlereagh's wishes. He was prepared to agree not only to a limited veto by the Crown, but also to the Commissions proposed in Canning's clauses. Three different oaths of loyalty were also proposed. However, he would not alter his opinions concerning the exequatur; this he saw as an interference with the Pope's legitimate authority over the Universal Church.⁸ Consalvi soon however received instructions from Rome which showed him that others were not prepared to go so far to please Britain. The Quarantotti rescript had been withdrawn, and the only security measure which Rome was now prepared to sanction was a special oath for the Irish bishops, binding them to select no one for a bishopric whom they suspected of disloyalty. It was also made clear that there could be no Concordat with Britain, as the Holy See had no plans to make such official arrangements with non-Catholic sovereigns.⁹

Although these terms were later expanded by Rome, it remained clear that Consalvi's hopes of satisfying the British government could not be entirely fulfilled. Naturally he was disappointed. Although he continued meetings with Castlereagh on the general issue, no specific or final measures were now

proposed. This was probably to a large degree due to the multitude of other important business which occupied the minds of the delegates at Vienna. However, it may also be assumed, given Castlereagh's great concern with securities, that Rome's apparent unwillingness to give ground on this subject lessened his confidence in such negotiations, and made him less inclined to discuss the issue. He always, however, maintained close links with Consalvi.

At the same time as Consalvi was doing all he could to give Castlereagh a good impression of Rome's attitude to securities, other factors were at work in the Holy See to a contrary effect. As soon as Milner had seen the Quarantotti rescript, he had hastened on a planned trip to Rome, determined to protest to the Pope in person. While in Rome, he made a great impression upon many of the Cardinals, particularly Cardinal Litta, the Prefect of Propaganda, whose opinion would be vital in any discussion of the subject. He made many different accusations against the other English bishops, rooted in the past controversies between them, and succeeded in convincing Litta that the security question needed further consideration. The rescript was therefore withdrawn. Letters were sent to Troy and Poynter on 25 June 1814, announcing that the issue would be discussed in a Special Congregation, 'that by the advice of the Cardinals whatever shall deem just and most expedient for the Catholic cause shall be decreed by the supreme judgement of his Holiness.'¹⁰

Milner had argued so persuasively that Litta became as prejudiced against the English Catholics as Consalvi was in their favour. When Macpherson returned to Rome in August 1814, he found Litta very

violent against all the English Catholics who had opposed Milner, especially the bishops. For example, he declared that the English bishops had 'the audacity to make a concordatum with [the] government, and sacrifice Religion to content the unlimited ambition of the Catholic laity.' Although Macpherson tried hard to counter Milner's influence, and defend the English Catholics, he had little success, for Litta continually repeated the same arguments against them.¹¹ Macpherson was also occupied in defending the rescript, and in trying to persuade the Cardinals against any alteration of its text. He insisted that the Catholic question was important to all nations. Rome would lose face in the eyes of all the world if, after an inquiry, the rescript was cancelled: 'All the enemies to the temporal power of the Holy See, would rejoice at a decision, in the present momentary crisis, that would offend a nation, by denying to it what is granted to every other state, Turkey not excepted,- a nation...the most friendly of all others to, and the most able to protect the temporalities of Rome.'¹² Finding, however, that his words had little effect, Macpherson wrote to persuade Poynter to come to Rome, in order to put his side of the issue, before any decision was made.

The Bishop and his Vicar-General, Mr Bramston, arrived in the city on 14th January 1815. They met with the same prejudice that Macpherson had faced, not only from Litta, but also other Cardinals. At their first meeting with Litta, on 20th January, the Cardinal made many complaints against the English Catholics, with the exception of Milner, and stressed the necessity of attending to the wishes of the Irish in the matter of emancipation. Poynter noted in his diary this 'manifest disposition' to

'sacrifice' the English bishops to the wishes of Milner and the Irish. Bramston believed that this was due to Rome's reluctance to offend the Irish, under a conviction that the Papacy had a greater authority over the Church there than in any other country.¹³ The Pope himself however, was apparently able to see the English point of view, and 'expressed a wish to satisfy the ... Government as far as religion would permit,' and to have the clergy well thought of by the government. Other Cardinals also felt that some type of arrangement would be possible.¹⁴ Bramston and Poynter also spoke with several English people in Rome at that time, who hoped for an arrangement between the Courts. They spent time with Cooke, a friend of Castlereagh, who was in Italy for his health, and discussed the objections to the veto, and possible security schemes.¹⁵

Throughout this time, both Milner and Poynter were drawing up papers for circulation, in anticipation of the Special Congregation. Although proceedings were interrupted by Murat's invasion of the Papal States, and the flight of the Papal Court to Genoa, business was transferred to that city, and finally, on 20 April, the Special Congregation was held. By that date, Milner had set off for England, being convinced that nothing would be done until the court returned to Rome. Consequently, when the Congregation had finished their deliberations, the paper embodying the results was placed solely into Poynter's hands. This paper, (the 'Genoese Letter'), addressed to Poynter, signed by Litta, and corrected by the Pope himself, was given to Bishop Poynter on 26 April, together with copies for Troy and Milner. He and Bramston then set out for England.

The letter contained a clear statement of Papal opinion concerning all those points in which the government had shown interest. The document began with a statement that it was not intended to be a final pronouncement upon the issues involved; Ward refers to it as 'an interim injunction'.¹⁶ However, it used very firm language - declaring that the letter contained 'the only terms which, rejecting all those that have hitherto been proposed,' the British Catholics might 'admit with a safe conscience' if an emancipation bill were to pass. Such a statement really held out little hope of future adjustments or negotiations. The letter quoted three oaths which Catholics might safely take. These were substantially the same as those proposed by Consalvi to Castlereagh, which suggests that Rome had always been decided upon that point. The exequatur was firmly refused, and it was emphasised that this was not a matter for negotiation. The Genoese letter did, however, allow a type of limited veto in the appointment of bishops. The list of candidates might be shown to ministers, in order that anyone 'obnoxious or suspected' might be removed. The final selection, however, was to be left to the Pope, to whom must be sent a sufficient number of names so as to allow him to make a choice.¹⁷

Upon the advice of influential laymen to whom he showed the paper, and of Macpherson, who was concerned that the section concerning oaths might give the wrong impression to the government, Poynter decided not to publish the letter. It was feared that the publication of the letter would be seen as a request for conditions to be imposed upon the Catholics. Poynter must also have known that the letter would create a furore amongst the Catholics of

Ireland; this latter reason prevented its publication in that country. The Irish bishops, however, went further than simply keeping the document a secret. Aware of the effect the Papal sanction of the veto would have, they even questioned the Pope's authority to make such decisions for Ireland!

Milner, although strongly disapproving of the Genoese letter, advised the Irish bishops to submit to Rome's decision. They, however, declined to listen and rather, on 23 and 24 August 1815, chose to pass resolutions expressing a total rejection both of the letter, and of the veto in any form. They insisted that any interference by the Crown in the appointment of bishops 'must essentially injure and may eventually subvert the Roman Catholic religion [in Ireland],' and announced their determination to 'at all times and under all circumstances deprecate and oppose in every canonical way... every such interference.' In their strongest resolution, they claimed that their fears for the safety of their Church could not be removed by communications from the Holy See adopted without their concurrence.¹²

This clearly belied the conviction that the Pope had greater power in Ireland than elsewhere. Although Milner had claimed in Rome that the other English bishops were too much in the hands of the wealthy laity, the Irish bishops' actions in this instance suggest that it was in fact they who were being controlled, in this case by the vociferous opponents of the veto. There would seem to be no other reason why the bishops should now take this stand, given their previous claims that they opposed the veto primarily because it had not received Papal sanction! They must have known of the ferment which would be

created if they accepted even the limited veto proposed in the letter. Nor did they have any reason to believe that the people would be more inclined to accept such a scheme if sanctioned by the Papacy. O'Connell had already announced his determination to resist even the Pope, in order to protect the Irish Church from the veto.¹⁹ Subsequent proceedings made it clear that the bishops had made the only decision which would ensure their continued standing with the people. At the next Aggregate meeting, on 29 August, O'Connell criticised all the 'foreigners', including the Pope, who were trying to impose the veto on the Irish Catholics; strong resolutions were passed, supporting the bishops' stand, and resisting the veto.²⁰

The bishops and laity sent delegations of protest to the Pope, which arrived at the end of October. The language used by the lay Catholics in their written Remonstrance to the Pope shows their utter determination to resist the veto in any form. It firmly stated their reasons for opposing the measure, and insisted that the granting of a veto would lead ultimately to the destruction of the Catholic religion in Ireland. It stressed that the Pope could not know all the circumstances of the case, as well as did the Catholics of Ireland, and implied that he had been deceived by those who had encouraged him to sanction the measure. Furthermore, it 'firmly' protested against his interference in the arrangements of their political concerns. The Irish Catholics would rather 'prefer the perpetuation of [their] present degraded state' than receive concessions in exchange for the veto.²¹

Rome, however, continued to stand by the letter. Litta told the Irish delegates that their conduct in coming to Rome to protest was not respectful to the Holy See. The letter was the result of mature consideration by a Special Congregation, and therefore could not be altered. He pointed out that the letter was not intended to be mandatory, but simply laid down the only conditions to which Rome could agree in return for emancipation. At that moment, however, parliament seemed determined not to grant concessions on any terms, and so the letter was not really an issue.²² The Pope sent a reply to the Irish bishops insisting that the terms of the letter could be accepted without injury to religion, and a similar document was sent to the laity in February 1818. For Rome, at least temporarily, this closed the issue, particularly when the defeat of the motion in favour of Catholic relief in 1819 showed that parliament was determined to resist concessions.

The involvement of Rome in the security question appeared, therefore, to have resulted only in a stalemate. The limited concessions which the Papacy was prepared to offer on this issue would clearly not be sufficient to satisfy those such as Castlereagh who saw particular security measures as an essential accompaniment to Catholic relief. On the other hand the Irish Catholics, determined to preserve their national Church from encroachments by the English government, saw the Papal pronouncements as a betrayal, an imposition which they were determined to resist at all costs. The likelihood of finding a solution to the security question now seemed even more remote, and this looked certain to delay any resolution of the Catholic question for several years

to come. Clearly a fresh approach would be needed to find a way round these difficulties.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

REPERCUSSIONS IN IRELAND AND IN BRITISH POLITICS, 1813 TO 1818.

While answers were being sought in Rome concerning the security question, the Irish Catholics were determined to continue to press their claims upon parliament. O'Connell believed that the only way to overcome the prejudice which required securities against the Catholics was by continual rational argument. Hence he wished to agitate the question whenever possible. He was also determined to petition only for unqualified concessions - a determination which had grown stronger since Canning's bill, and which had led to the secession of many important people from the Catholic Board. These two convictions formed the basis for Catholic action during these years.

The Catholics soon however found their aims thwarted, primarily as a result of their own attitudes. At the end of 1813 the Catholics tried to ensure that their views on the security question were consulted, by asking their leading parliamentary advocates, Donoughmore and Grattan, to bind themselves to accept advice from the Board in the event of any future bill reaching parliament. Both men, however, refused as they saw in this an attempt to dictate terms to parliament. Naturally this did not make them popular with the Catholics. Grattan came under the greatest obloquy, because of his previous support for securities, which Donoughmore

had always opposed, and he was attacked in violent language.' The Board's attitude, coupled with his dislike of their strong language, and his conviction that parliament would not grant concessions without securities, led Grattan to decline to move any motion upon their question that session. It may be presumed that this was an attempt to persuade the Irish Catholics to co-operate with their parliamentary advocates. However, he succeeded simply in annoying the Board's leaders further.

A further blow to Catholic agitation came in June 1814, when Donoughmore was persuaded also to do no more than present the Catholics' petition. He explained that he would not bring on the question because the Catholics' reaction to the Quarantotti Rescript showed the lack of a conciliatory spirit. He looked to the visit of Dr. Murray to Rome as likely to produce beneficial results, and restore harmony, and so did not want the question discussed before the results of that visit were known.²

O'Connell's party was thus deprived of its chance for argument that year. Their resentment of this situation can only have been increased by actions taken by the Irish government at that time. Four days before Donoughmore's speech, a Proclamation of the Lord Lieutenant dissolved the Catholic Board, as an illegal assembly. Since its inception, a close watch had been kept upon the Board's activities. As early as August 1813, Richmond had authorised investigations into the possibility of suppressing it, although it was decided at that time that its illegality could not be proved.³ In August, Richmond was succeeded by Whitworth, who shared fully his predecessor's opinions as to the Catholic question,

and its leading Irish agitators. He was convinced that the leaders' aim was above all to separate Ireland from England. Naturally, therefore, he and Peel continued to watch the Board closely. By the end of 1813, however, he had concluded that there was little danger from the Board, which had grown 'too dull to be worthy of attention or remark.' At a meeting with the Law Officers of the Irish government in December, it was agreed that no move should be made against the Board as it was believed that the indiscretion of some of its members and the criticism of the Board by influential pro-Catholics, such as Grattan, would in the long-term be sufficient to bring about its downfall.⁴ When the Board continued to meet, however, an inquiry was made, and, after discussion with the English government it was decided, on 10 May 1814, to move against the Board.

The Proclamation was not issued until 4th June, because the government decided to wait upon the Catholics' reaction to the Quarantotti rescript. At one stage, the Board suspended its meetings until the bishops passed comment upon the rescript, and it was rumoured that the Board would dissolve itself, or quietly accept the rescript.⁵ Such hopes, however, proved illusory, and the government took their action. Whitworth was pleased that the Board had not been put down before the rescript arrived, as the Board's intemperate declarations concerning it had further separated them from the higher orders of the laity, and would produce a great schism in the Catholic body.⁶ This certainly proved to be the case as, over the following months, despite O'Connell's efforts, the split within the body became far more pronounced. In January 1815 Fingall and his friends left an Aggregate meeting, when O'Connell denounced

vetoism in all its forms, and they declined to join the Catholic Association, formed in February. After this, O'Connell's language against the seceders, as they were known, and against securities, became even more violent. He came to rejoice at the secession, as it left those committed to unqualified emancipation to work together unhampered: 'Whatever shall be the fate of our emancipation,' he announced on 2nd February, 'thank God we are divided for ever from those who would wish that our Church should crouch to the partizans of the Orange system... Secession has displayed its cloven foot, and avowed itself synonymous with vetoism.'

The Irish Catholics must have been heartened by the recall of the Quarantotti rescript, in June 1814. However, it seemed that they were again to be deprived of an opportunity to face parliament, as Grattan still declined to move any motion upon their petition. This time, however, they refused to be put off. In Henry Parnell they found an advocate willing to be advised by them, and to bring on the question at the time and in the manner of their choosing. This action, however, although it gained a hearing for the Catholics in parliament, was not a popular move with the members of the legislature. The majority of those who spoke in the debate in May 1815, lamented the removal of the petition from Grattan's care, and deplored the Catholics' attitude towards him.

Under Parnell, the question was brought on in a novel form, as he presented to parliament a list of resolutions drawn up after consultation with O'Connell's party. These ranged from the innocuous to the all-encompassing; number five asked for a

fine to be levied against those who disturbed Catholic worship, while number eight asked for the repeal of all restrictions against Catholics in public life! Parnell's first attempt to read these resolutions to the House rapidly turned into a debate over parliamentary form, which was clearly not an auspicious beginning for his proceedings. He therefore changed his tactics and, on 30 May 1815, moved for a committee to consider the laws affecting the Catholics. He explained that if he succeeded in gaining a committee upon the Catholic claims, he would then bring on a bill based upon these resolutions. There was no longer any need to argue about the principle of concessions, this having been carried in 1813 and only the veto question stood in the way of success; the necessity for securities could not be proved, and therefore the demands for them should be abandoned.²

It soon became clear, however, that Parnell's approach was not popular even with the advocates of the question. Most of the traditional speakers in favour of the Catholics, including those who saw no need for securities, were willing to go into a committee, but denied that they would be bound to support Parnell's resolutions. This was presumably due to the unwillingness to be dictated to by the Catholics. They further shared with those opposing concessions in this debate a critical attitude to the conduct and language of the Irish Catholics, although they insisted that this should not influence parliament in legislating on the question. Grattan made a very uncompromising speech probably directed towards the Catholics, in which he announced that 'the annexation of no conditions' to the Catholics' request must 'render the grant in this House

impossible.' He announced that he would continue to vote for concessions, but saw no prospect of success, as the Catholics lacked a spirit of conciliation.¹⁰ The security issue remained the prime focus for both sides in this debate. Despite the Catholics' reaction to the Quarantotti rescript, several still demanded security against foreign influence. Castlereagh, for example, spoke out clearly in favour of the measures included in the 1813 bill, in very firm language.¹¹ The rescript itself was mentioned little, however, presumably because of its recall by the Pope.

Despite the fact that Britain was about to engage in another war, and presumably would need the support of the Irish, Parnell did not succeed in getting a committee, the motion being defeated by eighty-one votes. Donoughmore had no more success in the Lords. The decline in support since 1813 was probably largely attributable to the conduct of the Catholics over that bill, and to their language and attitude since that time. Few who supported concessions would consent to alterations without securities, whereas the Catholics had made it clear that these formed no part of their plan. Their attitude of 'no compromise' made it impossible to come to any arrangement which could satisfy both parties. Hence, there was no reason to go into a committee to discuss a solution, as no solution was possible at that time.

Nevertheless, despite such a substantial defeat, the Catholics decided to petition again in 1816. O'Connell's party's attitudes remained unchanged, despite the opinions expressed in the Genoese letter, and they continued to ask firmly for unqualified emancipation. The letter may, however, have made the

seceders bolder, for, early in 1816, they took a very significant step. They began to meet separately at Lord Trimleston's house, and planned a petition, to be presented by Grattan, which would make clear their willingness to accept securities not incompatible with their religion. Their action, often previously called for by the opponents of concessions in parliament, was seen as holding out great possibilities of success. For example, Whitworth noted to Peel, 'I am I confess more afraid of them, professing as they do great moderation, and admitting the principle of securities, than of the whole Catholic population put together under the guidance of O'Connell.'¹⁸

O'Connell denounced the seceders strongly, and by his own declarations against the veto, expressed his contempt for those apparently prepared to agree to it. Aggregate meetings also passed resolutions condemning small meetings held in private houses as 'inadequate to the collection of public sentiment', and insisting that 'any meeting on Catholic affairs...brought about by private invitation and partial selection may be injurious to the interests of the Roman Catholics of Ireland.'¹⁹ Doubtless he feared the effect the seceders' petition would have upon events in parliament. It might, for example, be used to convince members that all reasonable Catholics would accept securities, and thus be the prelude to the introduction of a bill based upon this principle. When this petition was coupled with the Genoese letter, the dangers to the campaign for unqualified emancipation appeared even greater.

Grattan presented his petition on 15 May 1816, and on 21 May moved an identical motion to that of

Canning in 1813. He claimed that the declaration which it embodied must satisfy all who refused to consider the Catholic claims due to the temper of that body's approach. He took his stand clearly upon the Genoese letter, insisting that, by its terms, emancipation might now be obtained upon those conditions which parliament had previously demanded. Matthews also spoke in these terms, quoting resolutions to show that many Catholics were no longer adverse to securities. He also gave an account of his own interview with the Pope, in which the Holy Father had expressed himself ready to do all that was necessary, in terms of securities.¹⁴

Parnell had presented the 'unqualified' petition on 24 April. On that occasion he had tried to minimise the distinctions between the two groups of Catholics, and he continued this conciliatory policy by seconding Grattan's motion. His speech carefully avoided the subject of securities. Rather he echoed that part of Grattan's opening speech which stressed that many of Ireland's problems were the result of religious distinctions. The lack of petitions presented against the Catholics was also noted, as a sign that the public were not inimical to their claims. Their former point was met by Peel, who recalled that previous concessions had resulted rather in the increase, than the decrease of disturbances.¹⁵ According to Hansard, this was the only substantial speech made against the Catholics. Nevertheless, despite their silence, the anti-Catholics still successfully retained the majority; Grattan's motion was defeated by 172 votes to 141.

There was, however, a successful motion concerning the Catholic question that session, when

on 28 May Hippisley finally succeeded in obtaining his Select Committee. The Catholics looked upon this committee with some alarm, as further encouraging speculations about securities. Their fears however, proved groundless, for although the Report was brought to the House on 25 June, no mention was ever made of it again, and it had little, if any, influence upon parliamentary proceedings. This was probably because most members of parliament were proud of the distinctions which could be made between Britain and foreign states. Only the most cosmopolitan, like Castlereagh and Hippisley would wish British policy to be based upon procedures in other countries. Moreover, all parties among the Catholic body united to oppose the possible use of such precedents.¹⁶

Another issue was also re-introduced into the security debate in 1816. On 30 May, Parnell presented to the House of Commons a petition from the Irish bishops and clergy. Ward refers to this petition as 'protesting against any change in the method of episcopal elections.'¹⁷ This, however, implies a resistance to all alterations which is not to be found in the petition. Although it made a clear objection to any interference by the Crown, the petition was in fact conciliatory. It declared that, in an attempt to satisfy Protestant prejudices, the bishops would willingly attempt to persuade the Pope to sanction the principle of domestic nomination. Such an arrangement, they held to be 'a test of loyal principles and peaceable conduct quite above the reach of the most jealous suspicion,' and one which was furthermore 'the only new security which could be enacted without spreading unutterable terror and discontent through the Roman Catholic

population of Ireland.'¹⁸ This petition was to be very important for the development of the Catholic cause during 1817.

The introduction of this petition must have been surprising to many, as the Irish bishops had, in 1810, rejected any alteration in the method of episcopal appointment. However, they had always opposed such changes on the grounds that Papal sanction had not been obtained for them. Now that the Pope had accepted a limited veto, this objection could no longer be sustained. Under these circumstances the bishops' advocacy of domestic nomination was probably an attempt to appear reasonable, and to offer an alternative to the hated veto. Domestic nomination would not involve any control over appointments by the British government, which the bishops were so determined to avoid, but would exclude that foreign interference of which parliament was so critical.

In the House of Lords, Donoughmore placed much stress upon this petition, as showing a new, conciliatory spirit amongst the Catholics. While maintaining his own opposition to securities, he insisted that domestic nomination was a most effectual way of 'removing that bugbear - foreign influence.'¹⁹ The very respectable nature of the Trimleston group was also emphasised. The debate in this House was also very short, although opponents to concessions were more forthcoming in expressing their opinions, and, despite the conciliatory nature of the petitions, and the reasonableness of the debate, the motion was still lost. The Catholics had, however, clearly made an impact, for this year they were defeated by only four votes. Such small majorities

clearly seemed to hold out renewed hope for the future.

The reduced majorities in both Houses led the Catholics to look forward with confidence. O'Connell was determined not to appear entirely unreasonable, and in 1817 the Catholic Association decided to base their actions upon the bishops' 1816 petition, and accept domestic nomination. This could be taken as a weakening of the Catholics' decision to accept only unqualified emancipation. However, they had always stressed that ecclesiastical securities were mainly the province of the prelates. Moreover, domestic nomination would be a measure in which the Catholic bishops, rather than the government, would be in control, and they had already proved themselves to be loyal Irishmen by their resistance to the veto. O'Connell also saw in this scheme a possible foundation for restored harmony within the Catholic body. It would show the seceders his willingness to compromise, providing that the veto was excluded. He was, however, unable to persuade them to unite with him.²⁰

Despite this setback, the Association continued to support the scheme, and their petition, presented to the Commons by Parnell on 28 April 1817, took its stand upon the measure. Parnell explained that the bishops were willing to seek a Concordat from Rome, binding the Pope always to appoint to a vacant See the person they had selected.²¹ During the debate initiated by Grattan on 9 May, however, the Catholics' opponents claimed that the system was not really new, but merely confirmed that already in operation. The Pope had so seldom failed to appoint the bishops' nominee, that his official promise to do

this would provide no further security. As Foster commented, 'the Protestants are to cede everything that remains, and the Catholics are to make the single concession of remaining exactly as they are.'²³

Securities naturally remained the central focus of the debate, with Yorke and Foster proposing their own schemes, Hippisley continuing to insist upon the veto, to conform with the practices of other states, and Castlereagh referring to the Genoese letter to show that the Pope was willing to sanction both this, and the *exequatur*. Peel's speech on this occasion won him much acclaim from all sides of the House. He criticised all the security proposals which had been put forward, insisting that he had heard of no such measures which could allay his apprehensions, and explained the many difficulties he saw in admitting Catholics to political power. While he regretted the necessity for any exclusions, he believed that the present form of government was most likely to preserve the Union intact.²⁴

In the House of Lords, although both the veto and domestic nomination were mentioned, the debate centred around the propriety of allowing Catholics to high political stations. This was mainly the result of a moderate speech opposing concessions, from the Bishop of Llandaff. The most surprising comment came from Liverpool, who announced his belief that, if concessions were granted, they should be 'liberally bestowed...without any jealous interference in the internal ecclesiastical concerns of the Irish Catholic church.'²⁴ However, he made it clear that, in his view, it would never be proper to allow political power to the Catholics.

The Catholics again experienced defeat in both Houses. Subsequent events, however, made it clear that this was, in fact, fortuitous. For several months, Macpherson had been working in Rome to persuade the Pope to accept the plan of domestic nomination. However, on 16 May 1817, Rome decided against the scheme.²⁵ This decision should not have surprised the Catholics, for in the Genoese letter the Papacy had rejected all previously suggested security schemes, which included domestic nomination. It is clear that had parliament passed an emancipation bill based upon the bishops' acceptance of this scheme, the arrangements, which depended upon a Concordat with Rome, could not have been completed. The Catholics would doubtless have been accused of acting under false pretences, and further criticism might have been stirred.

The Catholics did, however, obtain some success in 1817. At the end of the session, a bill passed through both Houses almost unnoticed, and supported by both Peel and Liverpool, which indirectly allowed Catholics to the higher ranks of both the army and the navy. This bill was provoked by the case of a single man, whose personal appeal to the Duke of York resulted in a benefit for many Catholics.²⁶ However, no legislation was repealed by this Act; Catholics were simply brought within the Annual Act of Indemnity, by stipulations that the oaths which prevented Catholics from holding office were to be taken after, rather than before, they received their commissions. Hence, although it had a practical effect, its passing actually did little for the principle of emancipation.

Despite this one success, the Catholic cause had certainly lost ground since 1813. This is generally attributed to the cessation of the war, which ended the need for large numbers of Irish soldiers. It was therefore no longer felt necessary to pay attention to the Catholics' claims. The early post-war years also commenced a period of social and political upheaval, and in such an atmosphere, resistance to change of any kind became much stronger. Very few petitions were presented to parliament on the subject during these years, either for or against concessions, which perhaps implies that men were occupied too much with problems at home to be interested in the eternal Catholic question. However, it is interesting to note that in 1816 and 1817, majorities against the Catholics fell, while the great defeat in 1815 came as the country was about to be plunged again into war. This suggests that, while the factors previously mentioned did lessen interest in the question, other influences were also at work in deciding the issue. It is most likely that the result in 1815 was a reaction against the Catholics' attitude to the bill of 1813, whereas the more conciliatory attitude of the Irish Catholics in 1816 and 1817 probably helped to reduce the majorities against them.

While these falling majorities held out the prospect of eventual success, the proceedings discouraged the Catholics. Parliament's refusal to consider their claims even when they approached in a conciliatory manner was a great blow. Consequently the year 1818 began a period of general stagnation among the Catholics of Ireland. The Pope's reply to the laity's Remonstrance, in February 1818, was a further discouragement. Hence, although O'Connell

tried to stimulate further action, he was temporarily unsuccessful. It is unlikely, however, that those who had seen the previous ferment within the Catholic body saw this cessation of agitation as anything but a temporary respite, and rather anticipated renewed, and perhaps stronger attacks. Such was the situation when the Duke of Wellington accepted the office of Master-General of the Ordnance in the Liverpool government, and brought his views upon the claims and conduct of the Irish Catholics back into the arena of British politics.

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CHAPTER NINE

JOINING THE FRAY: WELLINGTON AND LIVERPOOL'S CABINET TO 1824.

Wellington's decision to take up the position of Master General of the Ordnance was not reached lightly. He was determined not to enter 'party' politics, but rather to retain his special status as servant of Crown and country. He therefore made it clear to Liverpool that, in the event of the demise of the government, he would not feel bound to resign or to follow them into opposition. In his view, 'factional opposition to the government [was] highly injurious to the interests of the country' and he could not therefore 'become a party to such opposition'.¹ Liverpool was, however, quite prepared to accept any conditions which Wellington might put forward, for he saw in the war hero a figure of strength, adding considerable weight to the government; 'to be a prop, strength and solidarity is needed, and Wellington possessed both in the eyes not only of his countrymen, but of Europe'.²

Wellington's admission to the cabinet was almost certainly one of the highlights for Liverpool in an otherwise difficult few years. Economic difficulties created unrest among the populace and led to political agitation, particularly for repeal of the corn laws, and for parliamentary reform. The events of 'Peterloo', in August 1819, and the further political unrest which followed, culminating in the passing of the 'six acts', created yet more

difficulties for the government. In the following year the death of George III further unsettled the political atmosphere. The new king's major priority was to rid himself of his unwanted wife, and his determination to do so embroiled the cabinet in a sordid political battle, which damaged the reputation of both monarch and government, and provoked further public unrest. The 'Queen's Trial', and subsequent events also soured the relationship between the new king and his cabinet. From 1820 to 1822, the king frequently hinted at the possibility of changing his government, consortied with the opposition, and indulged in petty spites against cabinet members, particularly Liverpool. These tactics naturally left the cabinet anxious and uncertain. Against this background of unrest, advocates of the Catholic claims continued to press their cause in parliament, which created still further difficulties for the already-harassed government.

Although Wellington had never addressed parliament on the Catholic claims since the Union, it was immediately assumed that he would take a stand against concessions; in February 1819 Sir Edward Stanley invited him to present a petition against the Catholic claims, drawn up by the Protestant Noblemen, Clergymen and Gentlemen of Dublin. 'We have anticipated your Grace's kind compliance with our request,' he wrote, 'being firmly convinced that the Hero who saved the Empire in the field will not fail to protect his country in the Senate.'³ This presumption that Wellington would immediately join the throngs of the anti-Catholics might seem rather strange, given the facts that both his eldest brother, and his fellow-countryman and closest political associate, Viscount Castlereagh, were

leading campaigners for concessions. It may be assumed, however, that Wellington had acquired by association the same reputation as the other members of Richmond's Irish administration, and that, owing to his absence from English politics, this opinion had never been dispelled.

His first public involvement in the question appeared to confirm these expectations, for in the 1819 debate on the Catholic claims Wellington not only presented the Dubliners' petition but also made a forceful speech firmly opposing further concessions. He addressed the question purely in terms of Ireland, reminding the House that the Reformation in Ireland had been introduced 'at the point of the sword', so that Protestantism was forever associated in the Catholic mind with confiscations, suffering and oppression. The priesthood continually worked upon the minds of the people, keeping alive past hatreds, and fostering resentment of the English and their religion. Given these circumstances therefore, it was only natural that, if the Irish Catholics were permitted political power, they would use it to attempt to restore their religion to supremacy in Ireland, and to regain the land which had been taken from them. The Catholics' unwillingness to consent to securities for the Protestant Church was another indication of their determination to re-establish Catholicism. Against this determination, none of the securities which had been proposed could in fact be effective!⁴

Forceful as this speech was, its arguments were clearly distinctive from those of the Tories of the Eldon type, who based their resistance to concessions on religious and political principles. Wellington

looked not to principles, but to his own experiences of Irish society, probably tinged with the memories of Peninsular Catholicism. It is also to be noted that he prefaced his speech with the comment that the whole Catholic question hinged upon 'the expediency of removing disabilities from the Irish Catholics'; the mention of expediency was sufficient to separate Wellington from those of his colleagues who would resist concessions at all costs. There may even have been a very veiled hint in his speech that, should adequate securities be found, and the Irish Catholic temper be changed, then he would be willing to take a different view of the question.

In addition, there were other indications that Wellington was not as opposed to all concessions as his public speech might indicate. Prior to hearing any of the debates on the subject, he had written dismissively of the 'new lights' on the subject of the Catholics which, owing to his absence from British politics, had not been communicated to him. However, in the event he was surprisingly impressed by the arguments he heard; following the debate on Grey's bill to repeal the oath against transubstantiation, for example, 'he acknowledged that Grey's speech had done much to shake his opinion.'⁵ Privately, he took a stand against discrimination by refusing to join the anti-Catholic Orange Order. In a long and powerful letter, which was apparently never sent, he indicated his opposition to a movement which, while professing to promote attachment to the throne and constitution, excluded by its very nature 'a large proportion of His Majesty's subjects...many of them as loyal men as exist, and as much attached to the constitution.' This decision, he contended, was to be expected from

one who was born in Ireland, and had spent much time in contact with people of the Catholic religion.⁶

Wellington always thought deeply about the nature of Ireland's problems, and spent many hours discussing this subject with close friends, such as the Arbuthnots. He always maintained as his starting point that the tense situation in Ireland had its origins in the redistribution of lands at the Act of Settlement, as a result of which the peasantry regarded the landowners as their enemies. A breakdown of the natural relationship between landowner and tenant had followed, leading to poverty and lawlessness. Problems were increased by the fact that so many landlords were absentees, who left their estates in the hands of middlemen, and spent all their money outside the country. In addition, the Irish tradition of paying labourers not in cash, but by giving them a small patch of land to grow potatoes, led to poverty among the peasantry. He was convinced that the government could not bring peace and stability to Ireland. They could deal with lawbreakers, and restore order at times of unrest, but only the landowners could bring genuine tranquility, by residing on their estates, and gaining the good will of the peasantry by 'kindness and conciliation.'⁷ By May 1824, therefore, at least in private discussions with his friends, he was advocating a radical solution for Ireland's difficulties - compulsory residence for Irish landlords, with heavy fines to be levied on those who refused to comply.

Wellington's views on these subjects may add something to our understanding of his approach to the Catholic question. Clearly he saw the

landlord/tenant relationship as the primary issue to be settled. Indirectly this involved the Catholic question, but solving the religious issue would not itself bring prosperity to Ireland, or affect the condition of the poor Irishmen who were fed by British charity whenever the potato crop failed. The religious question was not, therefore near the top of Wellington's agenda. In addition his awareness of the distant historical roots of Ireland's problems, and his conviction that the greatest desire of all Irishmen was to separate their country from Britain made him aware that simple solutions did not exist for the complex political situation in Ireland.

By the time the Catholic question was raised again, in 1821, Wellington had settled into the British political system, and was closely associated with the more conservative members of the cabinet. The events after 'Peterloo', together with the behaviour of the crowd during the 'Queen's Trial', had strengthened his inherent dislike of popular movements and he had come to view the Liverpool government as the bulwark against unruly forces, which were apparently fostered by the Whigs. Despite his original intention to remain aloof from party politics he therefore committed himself to strengthening and upholding the administration.

In this context he was closely involved in negotiations for a coalition with the pro-Catholic Grenvillite group, who had given the government uncompromising support during the crisis of 1819. Wellington's concern for law and order was probably the most influential factor in his manoeuvres on behalf of this group. However, his willingness to secure pro-Catholic support does confirm that,

despite his speech in 1819, he was not a hard-line opponent of the Catholic claims of the Eldon type, but was prepared to be guided by political expediency. Eldon, in contrast, disliked all coalitions, and frequently denounced Liverpool's adherence to the open system, in favour of a firmly Protestant government.⁸

While Wellington's discussions with Buckingham over the position of the Grenville group were still in their initial stages Plunket's Catholic relief measures made their way successfully through the Commons. The possibility of success for the Catholics brought Wellington's pragmatic approach clearly into play. Although personally opposed to the bill, he anticipated that, owing to the rumours that the king favoured the measure, it was likely to pass.⁹ In that event, Wellington was determined to see the reversal put to the best advantage, and to use it to strengthen the government. Instead of organising a last attempt to fight concessions, he began to look to the future. In the success of the measure he saw a chance to promote the interests of the Buckingham group, and thus facilitate their joining the government. As part of the negotiations, Buckingham had proposed to Wellington that, if the relief bill passed, he should be sent to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant, to oversee its implementation there. Wellington now accepted this proposition gladly, and personally suggested to the cabinet the 'propriety and expediency' of the appointment. The arguments he used were clearly convincing, for he reported back to Buckingham that the suggestion had been 'well received'.¹⁰

At this stage, on 16 April 1821, Plunket's bill came before the House of Lords. Despite his activities behind the scenes, Wellington publicly maintained his opposition to the bill. He did not, however, on this occasion, declare his convictions in a speech. Given his personal character this is not in itself surprising. Wellington was a very reluctant speaker, and although he recognised the importance of speaking in parliament, he never did so unless he considered it to be absolutely essential, and part of the duties of his office. Moreover, he did not rate his oratorical skills very highly. It may be assumed that, having heard the 1819 debate, he recognised that, whether or not it was likely to succeed, the Protestant cause had adequate defenders, and did not require his 'feeble' assistance. He was therefore free to cast a silent vote against the bill, and to assist in this manner in its defeat by a majority of thirty-nine votes.

The defeat of Plunket's measure put an end to Wellington's plan for Buckingham's office in Ireland. It appeared at first that a halt might be called to all plans to connect the Grenvillites with the government, for the attitude which several prominent cabinet members had taken during the debate in the House of Lords on the motion temporarily lessened Buckingham's enthusiasm for a junction. He informed Wellington that 'the unbending tone held and unqualified objection to the principle of conciliation expressed by Lord Liverpool in his last speech must tend necessarily to appear a bar to the consolidation of ... interests and to the strengthening [of] the Government of the Country.' It must be presumed, however, that Wellington reassured him as to the overall attitude of the

government, as after a brief interval, negotiations for the junction resumed, with the Duke continuing to play an important role.

Liverpool was also investigating several other possibilities for strengthening the government. One of his primary aims was to reintroduce Canning into the cabinet, and various proposals were considered to achieve this object.¹² In Liverpool's discussions with Canning no mention seems to have been made of the Catholic question, although on 6 April 1821, Canning had informed his wife that it would be 'impossible' for him to enter the government without an understanding that the question would be settled.¹³ His apparent willingness to set aside the issue when the chance of office came probably stemmed from feelings of discouragement after the defeat of Plunket's motion; On 20 April he stated his conviction that the Catholic question would continue to be defeated for 'many years to come', probably for as many years as had elapsed since the initial success in 1813.¹⁴ He must therefore have decided that, under these circumstances, it would serve no purpose to decline office for the sake of a temporarily lost cause.

Liverpool's plans for Canning were, however, thwarted by the king's opposition, as George IV had conceived an intense personal dislike of Canning. This was the result of Canning's reluctance to participate in the proceedings against Queen Caroline, coupled with the king's firm belief that Canning and Caroline had once been lovers. George IV obstinately refused to allow Canning to join the cabinet. The king's rejection of Canning further strained his relationship with his first minister,

and rumours circulated that Liverpool was about to resign over the issue. Canning, however, repeatedly emphasised his concern that the attempt to bring him into office should not damage the government's standing.¹⁵ Under these circumstances, and as it became clear that the king would not change his mind, arrangements were made for Canning to replace Lord Hastings as Governor General of India. Until this plan could be put into effect he continued to use his talents to support the government in the Commons.

It was not until November 1821, after the king had spent the summer in Hanover, that Liverpool was permitted to recommence plans for the reorganisation of the cabinet, excluding the offer of an office at home for Canning. The arrangements now proposed incorporated the junction with the Grenvillites, with a Dukedom being offered to Buckingham, and a seat in the cabinet to C.W.W. Wynn. The latter was not entirely enthusiastic about the arrangements, being uncertain about his position in a cabinet in which many of the leading members were opposed to the Catholic claims. Determined to clarify the situation, he wrote to Liverpool, emphasising his determination, and that of his friends, to continue to support concessions, and reserving to himself the right to support, advocate or originate measures for relief of the Catholics, both in the Commons, and in the cabinet. In his reply, Liverpool was very tactful, and showed his genuine commitment to the open system.¹⁶ Wynn's stipulation and Liverpool's agreement, however, actually went no further than to reiterate the principles upon which the government had been based since 1812.

While these changes were being implemented at home, the cabinet was also facing problems with the Irish administration, which had long been criticised for inefficiency. Following a series of disturbances in November 1821, it was finally agreed that there must be a wide-ranging change of personnel in Ireland. Members of the cabinet were convinced that, in order to lessen the difficulties in Ireland, it was essential to have an efficient and distinguished Lord Lieutenant. It was initially suggested that Wellington should be given the appointment, because of his family connections, his distinguished career in difficult circumstances, and the authority of his name. After careful consideration it was however agreed that this would be inappropriate, for such an appointment could produce the impression 'that the condition of Ireland required the military services of the most distinguished military character which the country [possessed].' Wellington himself was also reluctant to go to Ireland to continue a divided system of government, believing that the state of the country necessitated firm leading.¹⁷ Instead his brother, Marquis Wellesley, who possessed the same qualifications without the overwhelming military connections, was offered the position, which he accepted in December 1821.

Wellesley was known for his advocacy of the Catholic cause, and may perhaps have been expected to accept the position only in order to work towards Catholic relief. He did not, however, make any stipulations concerning the Catholic question. On the contrary, on taking up his office, he expressed his determination to act impartially. It is interesting to note that his sentiments at this time were very similar to those of his brother during his

period as Chief Secretary: he insisted that although it was not the role of the Lord Lieutenant to change the law, he would ensure that the law was administered in a conciliatory and impartial manner.¹⁹ As part of the same reorganisation in Ireland, and as an important part of the arrangement with the Grenvillites, Plunket accepted the position of Attorney General in that country. He was eager to stress that his acceptance of office with the Liverpool administration was not a desertion of the Catholic cause. Rather he argued that 'great advantages may be derived to that cause from the introduction of its known and steady friends to some share in his Majesty's counsels'.²⁰

These arrangements may have held out hope to the Catholics that their cause was finally to be considered sympathetically by the government. Certainly they appeared to give an indication that the cabinet was now 'open' on the Catholic question in practice as well as theory. These impressions were, however counterbalanced by the appointments of Henry Goulburn as the new Chief Secretary, and Robert Peel as Secretary of State for the Home Department. Each of these men was well known for his strong support of the Protestant cause and his determination to resist concessions. Deplored by the pro-Catholics, these two appointments were seen by the Protestants as the only two of value in the new arrangements. Bankes, for example, was exceedingly critical of the selection of Wellesley, contending that 'vanity, dissipation, ... unsteadiness of public character... and a strong predilection for the Roman Catholic cause are not the component parts which ought to constitute the Chief Governor for such a country in such times as these'.²¹ This gave some

indications of the difficulties which could be created by the more clearly 'mixed' nature of the cabinet and Irish administration.

Despite this, there were few initial problems with the arrangements, and it appeared that the path of Liverpool's government was finally to run more smoothly. However, in August 1822, Castlereagh's tragic suicide created new problems, and raised again the question of Canning's future in British politics. It was at first rumoured that Wellington would take over as Foreign Secretary. Wellington himself expressed no desire for the task, as he had no wish to give up his opinions in order to follow the party line. True to his role as the Crown's servant he did, however, emphasise that he would take the position if the king asked it, as he would take any office where he could be useful.²¹ Wellington's appointment was never really likely, for Liverpool wished Canning to have Castlereagh's position as both Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons. The Buckingham group were also determined to support Canning, primarily because of his views on the Catholic question. Using Wellington once more as a go-between, Buckingham pointed out that his friends had viewed Castlereagh's predominant position in the cabinet as a safeguard for their attitude to the Catholic question, and for the fair government of Ireland. Without another pro-Catholic in that position, it would be very difficult for his friends to remain connected with the government.²²

Wellington himself became a forceful advocate of Canning, recognising that his appointment was vital to the government. Too ill to attend an audience with the king to discuss the subject, he wrote a

powerful letter, which made his views on the matter very clear. He emphasised that Canning's views on the majority of subjects were identical to those of the government; although Canning supported the Catholic question, so too did several other cabinet members. Playing to the king's feelings and vanity, he contended that the honour of a monarch '[consisted] in acts of mercy and grace,' and advised that, for the good of the country, the royal 'grace and favour' should be shown to Canning, despite the offence which he may have given to the king in the past.²³ This letter had a great effect on the king, and played a crucial role in finally persuading him to accept Canning in office. Wellington's role in this affair showed that he was genuinely committed to the Open System, seeing Canning's views on the Catholic question as no bar to an important office, or to the leadership of the House of Commons. He was quite prepared to work with the pro-Catholics in order to maintain Liverpool's government at full strength.

As in 1821, when Canning entered the cabinet, he made no stipulations concerning the government's approach to the Catholics. Although Lord Holland tried to persuade him to insist that the government take up the question, Canning recognised that any such demand would split the cabinet, and, under the current circumstances, would probably also lead to his being excluded permanently from office. He was therefore prepared to accept that the issue should be left as an open question. He explained to his wife that he was aware of many difficulties in discussing the issues involved, and therefore had no wish to raise the question unnecessarily.²⁴ It is possible that he had in mind the difficulties faced by Grey

and Grenville in 1812, when Grenville had taken such a stand on the question as to preclude the possibility of any compromise which would have enabled the Whigs to take office.

Having got him into the cabinet, Wellington very rapidly came to regret his championship of Canning's admission, for he found that they could not agree about many aspects of foreign policy. He was angered and alarmed by Canning and Liverpool's plans to draw away from the historical close alliance with the continental powers. His differences with Canning were 'more ones of emphasis and style than substance', but these led to very real clashes of interest and personality.²⁵ By January 1823, shortly after he returned from the Congress of Verona, Wellington was already complaining that Canning was 'upsetting all our Foreign policy ... he settles things without half understanding his subject and unsettles them in an equally hasty manner.' 'Mr Canning ...[knows] no more of foreign politics than a child,' he contended on a later occasion.²⁶ The conflict came to a head over Canning's plans in late 1824 for the recognition of the independence of the South American colonies, over which Wellington even threatened to resign.

Wellington's dislike of Canning was shared by the king, who made clear his attachment to, and preference for, the Duke. Wellington was placed in a very awkward position, as he became known as the king's favourite in the cabinet, and this isolated him from his fellows, and made him feel very awkward. He informed the Arbuthnots, 'with excessive vehemence' that in making known his feelings for him the king had done him a great injury; 'it had made

everybody avoid him from fear of any appearance of an intrigue, and ... those who thought with him still constantly sided against him from this feeling.' So keenly did he feel this position that he threatened to resign if the king were to mention the possibility of his succeeding Liverpool!²⁷ Made thus aware of the strength of Wellington's feelings, Charles Arbuthnot wrote to Bathurst, urging him to give more support to the Duke in cabinet.²⁸

Despite the many clashes between Canning and Wellington on other subjects, the Catholic question was not a source of friction between them. Indeed Canning faced greater problems from the attitude of his fellow pro-Catholics than from those on the opposite side. Not only he, but also the Grenvillites, particularly Plunket and Wynn, came under attack from the Whigs for their apparent abandonment of the question in favour of office. The Catholic debate in April 1823 provided the catalyst for the emotions roused by the changes in government to come to the fore. The balance of argument shifted, as the Whigs attacked not anti-Catholics such as Peel, whom they praised for his consistency and high principles, but their fellow pro-Catholics. They insisted that, by accepting office without stipulating that the Catholic question must be taken up, Canning and his fellows had strengthened and thus confirmed in office a government opposed to concessions; there was therefore now no chance of success for Catholic relief. Tierney, for example, contended that the Catholic question 'had been lost through some gentlemen who had shown too much eagerness for power,' and insisted that, under these circumstances, it was 'a mockery' to hold each year a discussion on a question 'of which the success,

whatever it might once have been, was now, in substance, acknowledged to be hopeless.'²⁹

Several of those who shared Tierney's opinion proceeded to demonstrate the strength of their feelings by walking out of the Commons when Plunket introduced the Catholic question.³⁰ A clamorous discussion followed, which was concluded by a series of motions for adjournment. In this atmosphere, and with many of those on his own side of the question clearly determined to oppose him, Plunket sensibly refused to bring on a motion again that session. It appeared that, unwittingly, by joining the government and thus indicating their willingness to adhere to the open system, Plunket, Canning and their associates had rather hindered than helped the cause of Catholic relief.

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CHAPTER TEN

PLUNKET'S RELIEF BILL: ACTION AND REACTION, 1821.

The veto controversy, with all its accompanying disagreements among the Catholics was clearly still rumbling in 1820, when the death of Grattan forced the Irish Catholics to seek another advocate for their cause in the House of Commons. The obvious choice for this position was Plunket, an Irishman well respected in the House, and admired for his oratorical talents. Plunket had however in the past refused to support the demand for unconditional emancipation, and had advocated securities. For this reason he was not popular with O'Connell's party, who insisted that his appointment as Grattan's successor should be conditional upon his committing himself to unconditional emancipation. Plunket refused to be dictated to by the Catholic party, and declined to make such a declaration. Nevertheless, in spite of this, the more moderate members of the Catholic Committee succeeded in confirming his position as their primary parliamentary advocate. O'Connell's party was naturally furious, and seceded from the meeting which had agreed the appointment, stressing again their determination to resist any legislative interference with the Catholic religion.¹ This clear difference of opinion between many of the leading Irish Catholics and their main parliamentary advocate did not bode well for the success of any measure which the latter was likely to put forward.

Plunket first took the stage in his new role on 28 February 1821, when, after presenting the Irish Catholics' petition, he made a long speech commanding the Catholic question to the House. Although the substance of the speech was not new it was very closely argued, and easy to follow. He stressed the problems currently existing in Ireland, and contrasted these with the chance for tranquility and stability offered by concessions. Left outside the Constitution and unconnected with the government the Catholics might indeed try to subvert the Establishment; the Protestants would naturally feel it their duty to resist this at all costs, and the urgings of religion on both sides would be 'forever struggling and never in security'. Concessions, by contrast, would end the conflict by incorporating the Catholics within the State. After this passionate appeal to the House, Plunket ended with a motion that the House should go into committee to consider the oaths currently required to be taken as a qualification for office, and whether any of those affecting the Catholics might be repealed.²

Plunket's approach in concentrating on the oaths was a novel one, and was probably based upon ideas which were current in certain circles of the English Catholics. The possibility of somehow inducing the Catholics to take the Oath of Supremacy had been raised in an informal manner at an interview between Charles Butler and Liverpool in February 1819. On this occasion the premier had insisted that the oath was intended to deny the Pope's temporal, and not his spiritual, power in Britain. Butler had however emphasised that 'it was considered by the public that a Catholic who took [the Oath] renounced his Religion'. He had nevertheless suggested that if a

'solemn legislative interpretation' were given of the sense which Liverpool assigned to the oath, then Catholics would perhaps change their views.³ This was echoed in Lord Nugent's speech on presenting the petition of the British Catholics on 28 February 1821. In this petition, the British Catholics swore 'full and undivided allegiance' to the king, acknowledging in him alone the 'power of the civil sword' in England, and Nugent announced that he had their full authority to declare that they would be willing to take the Oath of Supremacy, were it to be modified in accordance with the sense of their petition. Plunket may therefore have chosen to tackle the question of the oaths because he believed that this approach would have the support of the Catholics.

The novelty of the motion was not, however, addressed by the arguments of the opposition, who continued to reiterate traditional anti-Catholic sentiments. Dawson, for example, referred to the 'bigotted and servile tenets of the Roman Catholic religion, which were hostile to the general principles of liberty.' By contrast, Peel made no firm declarations of opposition to concessions on principle. He stressed that he did not see the current restrictions as an ideal situation, but rather as the lesser of two evils; in his view, concessions would only increase religious divisions in Ireland, as each side struggled for supremacy. Peel's speech was impressive as a personal testimony, but was not of a type to rouse opposition to concessions in the Commons.⁴ The lack of powerful speeches against relief, together with Nugent's declaration, Plunket's novel approach, and all the uncertainty surrounding the king's attitude to the

question all added together to produce an unexpected result; when the vote was taken, Plunket's motion was found to have passed by 227 votes to 221.

Success came as a surprise even to Plunket himself, and he therefore had little time to put together any plans to lay before the House. Nevertheless, on 2 March, he brought forward a series of resolutions, on which a relief bill was to be based. In essence these resolutions provided for a legislative interpretation of the sense of the Oath of Supremacy, so that Catholics would be conscientiously free to take it, and for the repeal of the Declaration against Transubstantiation. However, in addition to these relief resolutions which, in the light of Nugent's declaration, should have been highly acceptable to the Catholics, Plunket also proposed that appropriate 'exceptions and regulations' as securities should accompany any measure of concession.⁶

Once these regulations passed the House of Commons a committee was established to bring in a bill based upon them. In order to satisfy Protestant consciences, the committee agreed with Plunket that the Catholics should also be required to make concessions, and that the provision of suitable security measures must form a vital part of any proposals. The committee's approach was slightly different to that taken in 1813, as not one but two bills were put forward - one a 'political' bill, devoted to Catholic relief, and one concerned with certain aspects of the practice of the Catholic religion in Britain.

The central element of the first bill was the legislative interpretation of the Oath of Supremacy, similar to that mentioned by Butler in 1819. This declared that the oath was intended to disclaim only that foreign spiritual authority which was incompatible with a subject's civil duty and allegiance to the king. The Declaration against Transubstantiation was also to be repealed, thus freeing Catholics to accept civil offices and seats in parliament. The offices of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and Lord Chancellor of England were however reserved to Protestants. Catholics were also prohibited from advising the Crown in the appointment of offices in the Established Church.

The second bill, conceived as a security measure, was designed to satisfy Protestant consciences as to the effects of the Pope's influence over British Catholics. This was seen to be particularly important as the legislative declaration in the first bill did imply that the Pope possessed some legitimate spiritual authority in the country. The bill took its precedent from Canning's 1813 measure, providing for the establishment of two Commissions, one in England and one in Ireland, to inquire into the loyalty of those nominated as Catholic bishops, and to inspect documents received from Rome. The composition of these Commissions was however to be different from that proposed in 1813, as they were now to be made up primarily of Catholic bishops. This was clearly designed to counter the scruples of those who had objected loudly to the authority in spiritual matters which had been given to lay Catholics in Canning's bill. Nevertheless, the oaths required from the Commissioners, and those to be taken to exempt documents covering personal matters

from inspection, were identical to those proposed in 1813.

Two other additional security measures were also included, neither of which were likely to be acceptable to the Catholics. The first imposed an oath upon all Catholic clergy, including those already in Holy Orders; this required them to swear that they would not correspond with Rome on matters affecting subjects' allegiance to the king, or seek in any way the overthrow of the Protestant Church, and that they would nominate as bishops only those known to be of loyal and peaceable conduct. The second reintroduced a form of veto, which required a newly-nominated Catholic bishop to obtain the Home Secretary's, or Chief Secretary's approval of his appointment, prior to consecration.

With the second bill, Plunket threatened to stir again all the forces of Irish Catholic agitation against any State interference in the government of their Church. This, however, was a problem to be faced in the future. Of more immediate concern was the adverse reaction of Bishop Poynter to the measures. This was particularly alarming as the bishop's criticisms initially centred not on the securities, but on the 'relief' measures of the first bill. As soon as he heard of the bill's contents, Poynter firmly declared that Catholics could not take the Oath of Supremacy, denying the Pope's power, without giving up their faith.⁶ He contended that all the Pope's powers in Britain were 'ecclesiastical and spiritual', related solely to matters of religion and church government. While Catholics naturally acknowledged the king's civil authority, they were bound by the laws of their religion to believe in the

Pope's spiritual authority over his Church. If any Catholic were to take an oath that the Pope did not have this authority, he would be separating himself from the Catholic community, and 'ipso facto he would cease to be a Roman Catholic'.⁷

Poynter was invited to discuss his views with the committee on 5 March 1821. It may be assumed that at this meeting Plunket tried to satisfy the bishop by explaining the principle of the legislative interpretation of the oath, which would indirectly acknowledge the Pope's spiritual authority. Poynter was not, however, reassured. Rather he recommended alterations to the first bill in order to make the position of the Catholic oath-taker clearer. The primary change he proposed was the addition of a phrase in the Oath of Supremacy itself, to change the oath from a blanket denial that the Pope possessed any ecclesiastical or spiritual jurisdiction in the realm, to a qualified statement that he had no such jurisdiction which interfered with a subject's allegiance to the king, or obedience to the laws. He also recommended that the explanatory clause be read out before the oath was taken, to avoid 'mental reservation'. Plunket, however, refused to adopt the Bishop's suggestions, insisting that the bill would stand no chance of success if the form of words which had been recommended were to be used.⁸

It is likely that Plunket's primary reason for rejecting the alterations was his reluctance to overemphasise the changes required to enable Catholics to take the oath. To make an alteration to the wording of the oath, or even to require the explanatory clause to be read at each oath-taking would be an indication that the oath was being

reinterpreted to enable the Catholic to take it. This was likely to exacerbate criticism from those who saw the Oath of Supremacy as one of the bulwarks of the British Constitution, and objected to Catholic relief as a matter of principle. Merely to state the interpretation in the bill, however, while having the same effects for the Catholics, would perhaps not provoke such conflict, as the oath would appear to remain the same for all who took it. In addition, he may also have wished to secure himself against criticisms that he was pandering to the Catholics, or negotiating with them in any way.

Parliamentary opposition to the bill was reserved for the second reading, on 16 March. By that time, however, English Catholic opposition to the measures had emerged publicly with the production on 13 March of Bishop Milner's address, 'the Theological Judgement of the Divines of the Midland District on the two Bills pending in Parliament'. In this document, Milner unequivocally rejected both bills, and reminded his readers that, in the past, Catholics had died rather than take the Oath of Supremacy. Considering the second bill, he criticised the new oath to be taken by all clergy, insisting that all the teaching and preaching of Catholicism tended to a certain extent to 'disturb' the Protestant Church. He also restated his opposition to the veto in any form, and to the inspection of correspondence with Rome.

In addition to this pamphlet, a petition was drawn up by the Catholics of Staffordshire and Warwickshire, praying that parliament should not permit the two bills to pass. This was presented immediately prior to the second reading of the bills,

and provoked a violent response from Plunket, who launched into vehement criticism of Milner's attitude, and denounced his 'Catholic bigotry'.²⁹ It is probable that Plunket chose to attack Milner, and to point out his isolation from the other Vicars Apostolic in order to draw attention from the petition itself, and to lessen the impact of Milner's opposition. It may also have been an attempt to distract the House away from a long discussion of Catholic attitudes to the measures, which would have been prejudicial to the success of the two bills.

Plunket was anxious to stress the reasonableness and moderation of all his measures, and his long speech to introduce the second reading of the bills concentrated upon this approach. He pointed out that the interpretation of the Oath of Supremacy now put forward had been accepted by Queen Elizabeth I, and was reflected in the thirty-seventh Article of the Church of England; thus the framers of the bill could not be seen as 'at war with the principles of the Reformation', as some of their opponents had claimed. With respect to the second bill, he emphasised that the measures proposed were not required as genuine securities against the likely bad conduct of the Catholics, but were designed primarily to satisfy Protestant consciences. 'Although there was no practical evil to be guarded against', he explained, 'there was yet that sort of apprehension upon which the Protestant mind had a right to be satisfied.'³⁰ He also claimed that the measures would appear reasonable to the majority of the Catholic clergy and laity.

The speech ended with a justification of the decision to submit two bills for parliament's

consideration, and again Plunket showed his determination to make his measures palatable to all parties. He explained that, should the relief bill pass in part only, he would not feel it proper to require from the Catholics the securities proposed in the second measure. Were the first bill to pass in toto, however, he would then make no opposition to the consolidation of the two bills. Thus he made it clear that concessions were to be required from both sides. The Catholics would not be expected to give the securities without receiving full relief, but nor would the bills be passed in such a state as to grant concessions without securities. In the brief debate which followed the usual arguments were reiterated on both sides, and the second reading passed by 254 votes to 243.

Prior to the committee however, on 19 March, a major amendment was announced to the first bill: Catholics taking the Oath of Supremacy were now also to be required to read the explanatory clause, which was incorporated into the oath itself. In addition, a further minor change deleted the word 'heretical' from the part of the oath abjuring the 'deposing doctrine', replacing it with 'unchristian'.¹² These changes were clearly in line with those recommended earlier by Poynter, and it may be presumed that they were introduced in order to please the Bishop. To satisfy Poynter would be to further isolate Milner, and perhaps lessen the impact of his criticism. Ward suggests that Plunket introduced these changes at this stage 'due to the smallness of the majority by which the second reading was carried'.¹³ This, however, would seem unlikely; Plunket had previously claimed that the bill would have no chance of success were such amendments to be introduced, and a very

narrow victory would surely have inclined him rather to caution than to major modifications of his plans. It is more likely that, having tested the atmosphere of the Commons, and seen the lack of vehement opposition to relief, Plunket concluded that changes could be made to please Bishop Poynter and thus increase Catholic support for the measures without damaging the chances of success.

It is also possible that Plunket was looking to the situation in Ireland, and attempting to forestall opposition to his measures in that country. In this respect, however, his changes were to have little effect. Several of the important Catholic prelates were already willing to accept the proposals of the first bill without any modifications. At a meeting of the Catholic prelates and clergy of the Archdiocese of Dublin, a resolution was passed that 'the Oath of Supremacy as therein modified, may be taken by any Roman Catholic without violating in the slightest degree the principle of his religion.'¹⁸ Similar resolutions were also passed elsewhere.

Opposition in Ireland centred more clearly on the second 'security' bill, and threatened to raise again all the bitterness of the previous veto controversy. Even those willing to accept the Oath of Supremacy would not lend their support to the security measures. The Dublin resolutions mentioned above, although conciliatory in tone, firmly condemned the clauses relating to the inspection of correspondence with Rome, the oath to be imposed on all Catholic clergy, and the veto on the appointment of bishops. Resolutions from other parts of Ireland stated their opposition in a much blunter fashion: the clergy of the Archdiocese of Tuam, for example, contended that

parts of the second bill were 'a manifest violation of the religious liberties of the subject, wholly incompatible with the safety and integrity of [Catholic] faith and discipline.' The clergy of the Archdiocese of Limerick went further, claiming that the bill contained clauses 'to which no Catholic clergyman [could] conscientiously agree,' and which were 'unnecessary, vexatious, dangerous, and ultimately subversive of the Roman Catholic religion.'¹⁴ O'Connell also attacked the second bill, describing it as 'more strictly, literally and emphatically penal and persecuting than any or all of the statutes passed in the darkest and most bigoted periods'.¹⁵ Clearly Plunket's minor changes could not hope to satisfy such virulent opponents.

Despite the growth of opposition in Ireland, the bill continued to make its way through all its stages in the Commons. Opposition was not, however, entirely muted, and at the Committee stage, various amendments designed to reduce the scope of the bill were introduced. The most important of these amendments was put forward by Bankes, who, perhaps remembering that a similar proposition had eventually caused the defeat of Canning's bill, introduced an amendment to exclude Catholics from sitting or voting in parliament. On this occasion, however, the amendment was defeated by a majority of twelve votes. The outcome may well have been influenced by Canning's powerful concluding speech, in which he expressed the hope that, whatever the outcome of Bankes' motion, the progress of the bill would not be stopped, and trusted that 'in whatever shape the bill might come from the committee, unless ... it were very materially altered, it would pass the House.'¹⁶

Other amendments were also defeated by small majorities.

The framers of the bill faced additional difficulties when the security clauses were debated, for they were criticised not only by those opposing concessions, but also by those pro-Catholics who believed that relief for the Catholic laity should not be connected with measures to control the clergy. Hutchinson objected so strongly to the introduction of an oath for the Catholic clergy and particularly to one which was to be imposed on those already ordained, that on the third reading of the bill, he declined to vote in its favour.¹⁷ Nevertheless, despite this uncomfortable situation, the clauses were accepted, and finally, on 2 April 1821, the bill passed its third reading by a majority of nineteen votes. For the first time the House of Commons passed a bill to grant complete relief to the Catholics.

This move in the House of Commons in favour of relief appeared on the surface to mirror a relaxation in opposition to the measure among the general public. Anti-Catholics at the time commented that most people were 'extremely indifferent' about the subject, and expressed concern about the 'great apathy in the public mind' on such an important question.¹⁸ Fifty-five petitions were presented against the Catholic claims (excluding those from Catholics), of which just under half came from the clergy. The vast majority of the remainder came from small towns, or were organised in parishes. This did not, however, mean that the general population was moving to favour actively Catholic relief. Only one petition was presented from non-Catholics in support

of relief, and one requesting that no further concessions be made without adequate securities. It is more likely that most of the population were apathetic towards the issue, either because they were bored with the frequent discussions, or because they recognised that relief measures were unlikely to pass given the past history of the question in parliament. The general impression given, however, was that there would be no general outcry if the relief measures were to pass.

In Rome, the developments relating to the bill were watched with interest. Gradwell acted as the main apologist for the position taken by the English Catholics, arguing that the amended Oath of Supremacy was harmless, and could safely be taken, but that the security measures of the second bill were 'needless [and] troublesome' to the Catholics, and 'disrespectful to the Holy See'. Under his influence, many of the Cardinals who favoured the English Catholics expressed great satisfaction with the approach which Poynter had taken; Fontana in particular praised him for his courage in speaking out to the committee, and doing all he could to see that the bill was amended.¹⁹ These Cardinals were generally agreed, unofficially, that with Plunket's explanatory clause attached, it would be lawful for Catholics to take the oath. There were also several Irishmen in Rome at that time who, following Milner and despite the opinions of their own bishops, insisted that the oath was schismatical. They too were trying to influence the Congregation, pressing for a formal decision to this effect.²⁰

No official decision was, however, made at this time concerning the lawfulness or otherwise of the

modified Oath of Supremacy; it was general policy that, unless there were exceptional circumstances, such as the great confusion which had arisen over the Quarantotti Rescript, pronouncements were not made on such subjects unless called forth by a decision taken elsewhere. Cardinal Fontana later informed Milner that an official decision would be taken if and when an oath were imposed upon the Catholics by the legislature. It was always however made clear that the oath proposed in Plunket's bill had not been condemned by Rome. When in the following year Milner tried to claim that the modified oath had been officially ruled by Rome to be scismatical, this was firmly contradicted.²¹

While attempts were being made to influence opinion in Rome, the framers of the Catholic bill were delighting in the success of their measure in the Commons. They knew, however, that they would face an even greater battle in the House of Lords. Even before this, however, they had to cope with an embarrassing disagreement with one of their friends. Lord Donoughmore who, like his brother Hutchinson, was strongly opposed to some of the bill's security measures, was determined to do all he could to see that the offending clauses were removed. He was particularly critical of the establishment of a Board of Commissioners in Dublin, and the clerical oath, and tried hard to persuade Grey and Grenville to agree to modifications to the bill. They, however, were both convinced that the bill would not pass without the security measures, and were prepared to accept these for this reason. Both, therefore, declined to make any alterations to the bill. Donoughmore, however, opposed the securities as a matter of principle, and refused to compromise.

Having failed to obtain the desired modifications, he decided to take a personal stand. At a meeting of the principal pro-Catholics in the Lords held on 3 April, he therefore announced that he felt unable to introduce the measure in its present state into the House of Lords. Instead, he would speak out against the security clauses, and do all he could to ensure that the bill was amended.²²

For the leading advocate of the Catholics in the Lords to speak in opposition to the bill would clearly have spelled its immediate downfall. Donoughmore's criticisms would have reopened the security controversy in its bitterest form, and would also have provided the perfect grounds for anti-Catholic opposition to the bill as a whole. For the sake of unanimity, therefore, and to retain Donoughmore's advocacy of the measure, Grey and Grenville agreed that amendments should be proposed in committee that the oath should not be tendered to Catholic clergy already in holy orders, and that a single Board of Commissioners, sitting in London, should be established under the bill. In return, Donoughmore agreed to introduce the bill into the House, and also to try to persuade the Catholic bishops to support fully the bill in its new form.²³ Plunket later agreed that these alterations would in fact be advantageous. He too was very keen to retain Donoughmore's support for the bill, as he believed that this would have 'very salutary consequences' in Ireland.²⁴ No doubt he hoped that the Irish Catholics would be more willing to accept a measure supported by Donoughmore, trusting that he would not vote for a bill which would be detrimental to the freedom of their religion.

Expectations among the bill's supporters concerning the likely outcome of the measure in the Lords were mixed. Gossip abounded, and it was rumoured that the king favoured the measure.²⁶ This led many pro-Catholics to anticipate certain victory. Others, however, were only too aware of the strength of the opposition which awaited them. Lord Grenville, for example was convinced that the bill would be defeated on the second reading. Wynn wrote to Buckingham that the list of likely opponents of the measure in the Lords '[displayed] such an array of bigotry and stupidity that one could scarcely hope to make any material impression upon it.'²⁷

Some impression was, however, being made on the opposition, for Liverpool was beginning to have doubts whether it would be possible to defeat the measure. Although he maintained his opposition to the bill, he questioned whether it would not in fact be more effective to concentrate upon trying to amend the measure, rather than attempting to defeat it. He also asked Charles Arbuthnot to write to George IV, to express his concern that the monarch should avoid making any pronouncements concerning the bill which could cause embarrassment in the event of its successful progress through the Lords.²⁸

After consultation with the more determined opponents of the measure, however, Liverpool finally opted to take a firm stand against the bill. Having once taken this decision, he immediately made his position clear when the bill was brought into the Lords, by making a forceful speech which promptly quashed both the rumours, and any additional support which the pro-Catholics had gained by means of them. During the debate on the second reading, he

reinforced his determined opposition, by declaring that he could not in all conscience agree with even three lines in the bill.²⁸ Liverpool's decision probably played an important part in strengthening George IV's resolve, as did the influence of the Duke of York. The latter also made his mark in the Lords with a passionate declaration against relief, in which he declared that he opposed the bill 'from principles which he had embraced ever since he had been able to judge for himself, and which he hoped he should cherish to the last day of his life.'²⁹

In the face of such determined opposition from influential members the pro-Catholics could not muster sufficient strength to steer their measure through the House of Lords. Many other opponents of the bill continued to resist all concessions as a matter of principle, and as such were unlikely to be persuaded to change their views through the force of argument alone. In addition, despite the negotiations which had taken place prior to the introduction of the bill into the Lords, the bill's supporters did not present an entirely united front. Most of Lord Donoughmore's powerful speech was not a plea for his opponents to support the measure but a criticism of the securities, in which he announced that, if he were a Catholic, he would tell the House to take back both their securities and their boon, as the bill was insulting to those who were about to be admitted to parliamentary privileges.³⁰ He also stressed the amendments which would be made to the bill in its later stages. Such an approach would hardly inspire confidence in the bill as laid before the House. It may also have led some members to question again whether the bill would be acceptable to the Catholics in Ireland, or whether even greater

problems would be created there by passing the measure. Almost certainly votes were lost by this apparent pro-Catholic dissatisfaction with the bill, which was eventually defeated by thirty-nine votes.

This defeat plunged the Catholics and their supporters into despair. No longer expecting that they could hope in the near future to steer the whole Catholic question through parliament, some of the Catholics' supporters put forward a spate of little measures, each designed to remove some of the barriers which affected particular groups of Catholics. The first of these was the Roman Catholic Peers bill, introduced by Canning in April 1822, which proposed that Catholic Peers be readmitted to the House of Lords. This was followed in May 1823 by Lord Nugent's British Roman Catholic Tests Regulation bill, designed to open the franchise, and certain public offices, to the English Catholics. (At Peel's suggestion, this was later divided into two bills, one covering offices, and the other the franchise.) It is interesting to note that none of these measures were brought in at the request of the English Catholics, although Canning collaborated closely with Charles Butler in preparing his bill.

The framers of these bills no doubt hoped that, once separated from the demands of the more violent and outspoken Irish Catholics, a plea for some political power for the English Catholics would stand a greater chance of success. This appeared to be true to a certain extent, for although Peel opposed Canning's bill, and could not accept the opening up of offices to the English Catholics, both he and Liverpool were prepared to support a bill to give them the elective franchise. Many, however,

were not so accommodating, particularly in the House of Lords, where a large number of peers continued to resist any concessions as a matter of religious and political principle. Even with these more moderate demands, the pro-Catholics were unable to prevail. Like Plunket's bill, each of these measures successfully passed through the Commons, but was defeated upon reaching the House of Lords. Clearly a significant change of attitude in the Upper House was required, before any measure of complete relief for the Catholics could stand any chance of success.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

MOBILISATION: THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF THE CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION, 1823-4.

The religious divisions affecting Ireland widened considerably during the early 1820's. Religious revival and the spirit of evangelicism within the Protestant Church led to serious attempts to convert the Irish Catholics to the 'true' religion. The Catholic Church, however, did not give up its members lightly, and a corresponding increase in religious zeal led to greater animosities between the two groups. The country was also once again caught in the grip of a serious outbreak of agrarian disorders, rooted in economic grievances. Lord Wellesley, who insisted that he had gone to Ireland not to change the laws but to administer them, rapidly found that law and order in Ireland could not be obtained easily, and was forced to begin his term of office by advocating the introduction of an Insurrection Act. The atmosphere of tension was increased by the wide circulation of 'Pastorini's Prophecy', an interpretation of the Book of Revelation which predicted that all Protestants in Ireland would be destroyed in the year 1825! 'The widespread conviction that a major social and political upheaval was shortly to take place gave greater confidence to all those tempted to take direct action to remedy economic or other grievances.'

As Wellesley battled to restore law and order, he tried hard to balance the attention he paid to the

leading members of both religious groups. It soon however became clear to the Catholics that he would not be making any major changes to the system of government. Following in the wake of the defeat of Plunket's bill this was naturally discouraging for them, and the Catholic political body fell into despondency. Many of their leaders became convinced that relief could never be obtained from Parliament in the current climate. 'The Catholic question was nearly forgotten....a general stagnation diffused itself over the national feeling. The public pulse had stopped, the circulation of all generous feeling had been arrested, and the country was palsied to the heart.'²

When the situation looked darkest, however, a new campaign sprang into life, as the result of a chance meeting between O'Connell and Sheil. The two men had been divided over the veto, but now decided to set aside their quarrel and work together to take some action to alter the course of the Catholics' campaign. A meeting of the chief Catholics then followed, at which O'Connell emphasised forcibly that, in his view, the only way forward was for the Catholics to 'take management of their own affairs, and to proceed in that management with firmness and unanimity.'³ With these opinions as a basis it was agreed that an Aggregate meeting would be held on 10 May 1823, to consider the way forward.

This meeting was the foundation for the Irish Catholic Association, which was to become the driving force towards Catholic emancipation. The Association had an open membership, upon a subscription of one guinea. All Catholic priests, however, were accepted into membership without

subscription. To avoid contravening the Convention Act, it was emphasised that the Association '[would] not exercise nor accept of any delegated authority or quality whatsoever'.⁴ This was a wise decision, for the government were watching the Association's meetings from the day of its inception, to see whether it could in any way be classified as illegal. Studying its constitution, however, the Irish Solicitor-General was reluctantly forced to admit that the Association was not overstepping the bounds of the law. Peel and Plunket concurred with this decision, and agreed that at present no action could be taken. Marquis Wellesley should, however, keep a strict watch on its proceedings.⁵

The declared purpose of the new Association was to procure Catholic emancipation 'by every legal means'. O'Connell insisted that the Association was not just another talking and petitioning society. Its aim was not 'to force on parliament the annual farce, or ... a triennial interlude of a debate on the catholic claims'. Rather 'its purpose was with practical and not abstract questions'.⁶ Despite these far-reaching aims, the first meetings of the Association were very poorly attended, and on occasions, were adjourned because a quorum could not be reached. Nevertheless their proceedings were sufficient to alarm the Lord Lieutenant, who informed Peel in June that, in his view, the Association was 'an evil, rapidly growing [in] magnitude and danger'.⁷ The English government were less impressed, and although after Wellesley's letter further investigations were made into the possibility of proceedings against the Association, this was not followed up with any great enthusiasm or sense of urgency. It probably appeared likely that the

Catholic meetings would cease of their own volition, owing to the lack of attendance.

O'Connell was also trying to stimulate the English Catholics to more dynamic action, and encouraged the publication in English newspapers of reports and articles expressing pro-Catholic opinions. In June 1823 the English Catholics formed their own Association in London, and this was soon followed by the establishment of several provincial branches.² The aims of the English Catholic Association were very similar to those of the Irish, although, because of the small number of people involved, there was no Catholic rent. Those English Catholics who joined the Association were anxious to unite with the Irish, and to win unqualified emancipation. The formation of this Association improved greatly relations with the Irish Catholics. It has also been noted that from this time dated improvements in the relations between the English lay Catholics and the hierarchy, as the Association always sought the approval of the bishops before producing petitions or making statements having a direct bearing on the tenets of their religion.³

O'Connell kept an eye on the developments among the English Catholics, but above all devoted his energies to building up the Irish membership. At a meeting on 11 November 1823, a committee was appointed to devise measures to extend the Catholic Association throughout Ireland, with the intention of stimulating simultaneous petitioning of parliament by every county in the country. O'Connell was also anxious for the Association to be seen to act in the interests of the Irish peasantry, and to convince them that they too would gain from emancipation. In

February 1824, he took this concern to its logical conclusion, and it was agreed, after considerable debate, that for a nominal subscription of one penny a month, all Irish Catholics should be invited to become associate members of the Association. This idea was not new: a similar system had first been proposed by Lord Kenmare in 1795. It took someone with the personal influence of O'Connell, however, to get such an ambitious scheme functioning in practice.

The establishment of the Catholic Rent, as it became known, was O'Connell's great step forward, for it transformed the Catholic Association into a national movement involving the majority of the population. Local committees were formed in order to collect the subscriptions and forward them to Dublin. In many districts these committees also arranged political meetings, thus spreading the Catholic Association's influence. 'From being a caucus of Dublin-based members of the professional, commercial and landed elites, the Catholic Association now became the focus of a popular political agitation extending across the greater part of Ireland.'¹⁰

The introduction of the Rent also brought the Church openly into political action. By negotiations with the Catholic bishops, the Rent was collected in the parishes, often outside the church, after Mass on Sunday. Priests assisted with the establishment of committees, sometimes even collecting the Rent themselves, and gradually became more involved in the work of the Association. This helped to link the politics of emancipation very clearly with the practice of religion. The priests were not, however, in general, the leaders of the political agitation, but tended rather to act in an influential secondary

role. Although much was said in anti-Catholic circles of the power of the priests forcing people to accept the dictates of the Association, it is more true to say that most of the people were simply stimulated to move forward in the way they wished to go. The priests were also to a large extent influenced by the wishes of their parishioners, who could enforce their views by the non-payment of dues, and non-attendance at Mass.¹¹

It was often claimed at the time that the involvement of the clergy in politics was the result of educating men for the Priesthood at Maynooth; the college attracted more Irish candidates from the lower classes, who could not afford to travel to Europe, and then educated them within the context of their home country. The Maynooth-educated priests were therefore more truly 'Irish' than their European-educated predecessors, and thus more aware of their fellow Catholics' grievances. Recent studies have however shown that the Maynooth trainees were generally from middle or upper middle-class backgrounds.¹² In addition, many of the priests who became involved in agitation had not trained at Maynooth. It is now generally agreed that the main distinction between the priests who became involved and those who did not 'related not to training but to age'. The differences were between the older clergy who had been trained to face a situation in which the Catholic Church was still in a rather uncertain position, and the younger generation who were assured of toleration, and therefore were secure enough to stand out and let their voices be heard in criticism of the existing order.¹³

The money raised from the Catholic Rent was all put to very practical purposes, including legal assistance to enable Catholics to obtain fair treatment in the courts, prosecuting Protestants responsible for violence against Catholics, supporting Catholic education, and purchasing press support. As the influence of the Association grew, O'Connell also used his power to end disturbances, bringing areas of Ireland renowned for their lawlessness into obedience to the law. Action in all these areas raised the profile of Catholics, and brought the Association into the limelight. This made it clear that the Catholics were determined to take the initiative; they were no longer willing to sit and wait for relief to be granted, but would be taking all possible action, within the law, to push their case.

Coupled with the general lawlessness, and the alarm created by the circulation of 'Pastorini's Prophecy', the growth of the Catholic Association and the more militant attitude adopted by the Catholics naturally caused concern among the Irish Protestants. Those more easily alarmed began to speak of possible insurrections and massacres by the Catholics, and tensions began to build up rapidly. The introduction of the Catholic Rent focussed the attention of the Irish government on the Association in a new way, and created real alarm. Gregory informed Peel that O'Connell's scheme was 'the most efficient mode that could be devised for opening a direct communication between the Popish Parliament [the Dublin Committee] and the whole mass of the popish population'. In Goulburn's view the willingness of the Catholic bishops to co-operate with the rent gave the Association a power which he

had never thought it would obtain, and which '[rendered] it more formidable than [he had] hitherto considered it'; the bishops' involvement would ensure that the rent would be collected, thus enabling a fund to be raised, which would 'doubtless be applied to mischievous objects'.¹⁴

Towards the end of 1824, politicians in England took serious note of these developments, and there were further investigations into the possibility of prosecuting the Catholic Association under the Convention Act. Even the pro-Catholic Wellesley was anxious that the threat from the Association should be removed. In a long letter to Peel on 10 December 1824, he pointed out all the problems created by the growth in the Association's power, not least the alarm that was engendered in the Protestants and the potential for violence which existed in the tense atmosphere in the country. The Association was 'an institution utterly useless for any good or lawful purpose, (especially for improving the condition of the R. C. population), but adapted exclusively and powerfully to the ruinous work of public disturbance.'¹⁵ For once, Wellington's views were in accord with those of his brother. He informed Peel on 3 November 1824 that there must eventually be civil war in Ireland unless the Catholic Association were abolished, and insisted that the disaffected were much better organised than they had been in 1798. He was later to use this situation in Ireland as an argument to justify the augmentation of the infantry. He did however see that abolishing the Catholic Association would not in itself solve the major problem, for the mischief and the means for the Catholics to re-combine would continue. In the long term, another solution would need to be sought.¹⁶

The king, as well as members of his cabinet, was seriously alarmed by developments in Ireland. On 19 November, he wrote a strongly-worded letter to Peel, in which he contended that the proceedings of the Association were 'little short of ... intended rebellion'; if this situation continued, he would no longer permit the cabinet to treat Catholic emancipation as an open question.¹⁷ As soon as Wellington saw this letter, he set out to dissuade the king from any hasty decisions. Such action, he insisted, was unnecessary; there was really little to be feared from the Catholics, as parliament was very unlikely to grant their claims at the present time. Furthermore, to remove the open system would be to destroy the very basis upon which the Liverpool government had been founded. He also emphasised that many opponents of concessions considered that measures in favour of the Catholics were more likely to be defeated under an open government than by one formed on exclusively Protestant principles.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Wellington did not say that he personally adhered to this view. Clearly in this letter he was attempting to meet the king's sensibilities and preserve the government on its existing basis, rather than stating his personal convictions. His approach certainly proved to be successful, as the king spoke no more of introducing a Protestant government.

Faced with these feelings of alarm from all sides it was clear that the government would need to be seen to be doing something to combat the growing power of the Association. With this in mind, the Irish government seized upon the opportunity to prosecute O'Connell for seditious language following a speech in which he expressed the hope that, if parliament

failed to grant the Catholics' claims, 'another Bolivar' would arise to vindicate their rights. This decision was supported wholeheartedly by the Cabinet, with the notable exception of Wellington, who strongly opposed the prosecution. This was not, however, an indication that he had changed his views concerning the proceedings of the Catholic Association, but was rather a comment upon the strength of his opposition to the recognition of the independence of the South American colonies, which was at that time under discussion in the cabinet.

Wellington insisted that it was totally incongruous to prosecute O'Connell for using the example of Bolivar to excite the Irish to rebel, if under other circumstances Bolivar was to be seen as his country's liberator. If Bolivar were a hero, then O'Connell could not be prosecuted; however, if he were a rebel, as the plans for prosecution implied, then Britain should not recognise his country's independence which had been won in rebellion.¹⁹ The king took up this view also, no doubt pleased for another opportunity to register his displeasure at the proposed recognition of the colonies. Peel however, who favoured both recognition of the colonies and the prosecution for seditious language, contended that it was actually irrelevant that O'Connell had called upon the name of Bolivar in the speech. The fact was that he had called for someone to arise to vindicate the rights of the Catholics; this was clearly a remark of a seditious tendency, whether the name used in connection with that call was that of Bolivar, Washington, or even Wellington!²⁰

The government proceeded with the prosecution, determined to bring at least a temporary halt to O'Connell's growing power. The attempt was, however, unsuccessful, as the Grand Jury threw out the indictment at the preliminary stage, owing to lack of evidence. With this failure behind them, the government came to the conclusion that more forceful measures must be taken to curtail the Catholic Association's activities. If the Association did not strictly fall within the terms of the Convention Act then a new law must be passed which would enable the government to act against it. This became one of the government's major priorities as the 1825 session of parliament approached, and Henry Goulburn was asked to take charge of drawing up a bill which would fulfil the government's objectives. The body which many perceived to be usurping the powers of parliament must be taught that there was only one supreme legislative authority within Ireland.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CATHOLIC QUESTION IN 1825.

1. Burdett's Relief Bill.

Once the government had made up its mind to act against the Association, little time was wasted. The king's speech on 3 February 1825 drew attention to the existence of illegal Associations in Ireland, and asked parliament to deal with this evil, which was causing serious disturbances in that country. While the wording of this speech, and of the motion for a bill to suppress unlawful societies in Ireland which followed, were deliberately designed to refer also to Orange Lodges, everyone was aware that the government's major concern was with the Catholic Association. Discussion naturally, therefore, focussed upon the Association, in the wider context of the general Catholic question.

Those opposed to the Association contended that it was assuming parliamentary powers, particularly the power of taxation (the Catholic Rent), and that it was interfering with the administration of justice in Ireland. This was naturally incompatible with the constitution, and posed a threat to orderly government. The government pro-Catholics accepted this stand, but also maintained, perhaps to stress that their support for suppression did not mean that they were turning against the Catholics, that the violence and questionable activities of the

Association were in fact harming the Catholic cause; they were therefore serving the Catholics by voting for the Association's suppression. Canning declared, for example, that by so doing he 'made [the Catholic cause] look better by removing all that was unsightly and unbecoming and advanced it in the estimation of every man who hated to be bullied and browbeaten.'

By contrast the Whigs accused the government pro-Catholics of betraying the cause. They believed the existence of the Catholic Association to be justified, in view of the violence of the Orange Lodges, and the indifference of parliament to the Catholics' problems. The government had therefore 'caused' the Catholic Association by its own lack of action, and had only themselves to blame for the results. They by their conduct had 'turned reasonable to unreasonable expectations and converted a dutiful request into an insolent demand.'²² The cure for Ireland's troubles was not Goulburn's bill, but Catholic emancipation, without which any attempt to try to suppress the Association would lead only to violence and even greater difficulties. Despite this powerfully-expressed opposition, however, Goulburn's motion finally passed by a majority of 155. A bill based upon the motion was then brought in, and passed through all its stages in the Commons, with majorities of over 100 being obtained on each division. The general mood of parliament was clearly against the Catholic Association, in a way that it was not opposed to the general Catholic claims.

The Catholic Association did not stand by idly and watch the government plan its destruction. As soon as they had heard of the proposals, the Association had drawn up a petition in their own

defence, and O'Connell and Sheil had been despatched to London in the hope that they would be permitted to present it, and to speak in parliament in support of the Association. Although this hope was denied, and Goulburn's bill moved forward, O'Connell's and Sheil's journey was far from wasted. They took the opportunity to meet many of the Whig pro-Catholics, and to encourage them in their support for relief. It was claimed that through these meetings, O'Connell pushed Burdett into bringing on a motion in favour of the Catholics at that time. Certainly O'Connell credited himself with this influence; he wrote to his wife on 4 March that if he had not been in London 'nothing would have been done,' but that he had 'forced sir F. Burdett to bring on his motion.'¹⁸

Burdett's motion was introduced on 28 February, 1825, just after the third reading of Goulburn's bill, and was phrased in an identical fashion to that successfully adopted by Plunket in 1821. Perhaps because the motion was handled by a member of the opposition, rather than by one of the government pro-Catholics, the debate was not hampered by the petty quarrels between the Catholics' supporters which had marred proceedings on the general question since 1822, and it proceeded smoothly. As in 1821, the arguments used were not new, although some attention was paid to the wisdom or otherwise of granting concessions immediately after the suppression of the Catholic Association. The temper of the House which had come to the fore in 1821 now, however, reasserted itself, and Burdett's motion passed by thirteen votes; if O'Connell had influenced Burdett, he must therefore have been very pleased with the results of his actions.

Although the Whigs later denied strongly that O'Connell had had any share in the preparation of the bill which followed from this motion, the Irishman certainly took part in the preliminary stages of the discussions. He was naturally particularly keen to influence decisions concerning the veto, and had long discussions with Plunket on this subject. By 4 March he was pleased to be able to inform his wife that Plunket had now agreed that there should be no veto, or any other arrangement which was not desired by the Catholic prelates.⁴ O'Connell's involvement did not mean, however, that radical new proposals for Catholic emancipation were put forward. On the contrary, Burdett's bill was in principle identical to that which had been successful in 1828. Some minor modifications were made to the security provisions, presumably under O'Connell's influence, in an attempt to remove some of the Catholics' disquiet about these measures. For example, the bill still provided for a Commission to be set up in Ireland to certify the peaceable conduct of those selected as bishops, and to examine correspondence with Rome, but this was now to be composed solely of Catholic bishops.⁵ The Catholics need no longer be concerned, therefore, that the government or its representatives would be directly interfering in the government of their Church in the United Kingdom.

It was also planned that in addition to these measures relating to the operation of the Catholic religion in Ireland, two further measures should be considered in relation to the relief bill. These were to provide for the payment of the Catholic clergy by the State, and for the disenfranchisement of the Irish forty-shilling freeholders. These measures were founded upon evidence given before the

committee on the state of Ireland, set up in 1824,⁶ and were intended to remedy what were perceived as two of the major evils facing Ireland - the multiplication of freeholds, which led to poverty and degradation for the poorest voters, and the power of the priests over the peasantry. They would, however, also ensure that if Catholics were to be admitted to parliament, they would not be under the influence of a lower class mob, directed by the priests. Thus they could be seen as security measures by Protestants who feared an increase in the Catholics' political power in Ireland.

There were initial suggestions that these measures should be introduced as clauses in the relief bill.⁷ It was however recognised that this could cause serious difficulties. The inclusion of clauses relating to the payment of the clergy by the State could provoke opposition from those who believed that a Protestant State should not support the clergy of an 'enemy' religion, while the Catholics themselves would be alarmed by the proposal. Those opposed to parliamentary reform would object to any measure of disenfranchisement, as it set the precedent of altering the franchise, and many of the Catholics' most fervent supporters among the Whigs were likely to oppose disenfranchisement as a matter of principle. The inclusion of the wings, as they became known, in the bill itself clearly ran the risk of opening all these side issues, and thus distracting attention away from the main measure. It was therefore agreed that they should be introduced in separate bills. Burdett always tried to distance the wings from the main question, insisting that they were not part of the relief measure; while he was prepared to accept them in order to obtain relief for

the Catholics, he was not committed to their introduction as part of the relief bill.¹⁹

O'Connell, perhaps surprisingly, was prepared to accept these measures as the price for emancipation. He was now determined to appear conciliatory towards the Protestants, and to be seen to be offering the securities which they desired: 'As the leader of the Association he had assumed a threatening attitude, and this had succeeded in riveting the attention of parliament on the Catholic claims. The time had now come for conciliation to replace threats. O'Connell hoped that a conciliatory policy might induce the government to grant emancipation.'²⁰ He therefore tried to reassure the Irish Catholics about the impact of these securities, to avoid the internal quarrels which had marred the proceedings on Plunket's bill. He was convinced, once Burdett's motion had passed the Commons, that emancipation would occur that session, and was therefore determined to do everything possible to ensure that this conviction was not misplaced.

O'Connell did however face opposition from the most extreme of the Irish Catholics. Lawless, for example, who was also in London at that time, was furious with the apparent selling out to the English pro-Catholics. He accused O'Connell of flattering the parliamentarians and abandoning the Irish primarily to obtain a silk gown for himself. Lawless later presented a petition against both the relief bill and the wings. O'Connell generously informed his friends that he forgave Lawless for his attacks upon his personal character. He recognised, however, that any such criticisms could be harmful to the

cause, and were calculated to do 'extreme mischief' in England, and to 'raise a flame' in Ireland.¹⁰

The English Catholics, even Milner, do not on this occasion appear to have been roused to any action in response to the bill. This was presumably because they had in general been happy with the provisions of Plunket's bill, and would not be affected in any way by the 'wings'. It is interesting to note that Burdett's bill was drawn up with reference almost entirely to Ireland, perhaps as another legacy of O'Connell's influence, and this may also have lessened the English Catholics' concern with the detailed provisions of the bill.

The debate on the second reading of the bill lasted two days, during which considerable attention was paid to the need, or otherwise, for the wings. In a moment of triumph for the pro-Catholics, the debate opened with a surprise 'conversion' to the Catholic cause. Brownlow, the member for Armagh had been considered by his colleagues to be a firm anti-Catholic. Now he insisted that the evidence given by Catholics before the committee on the state of Ireland had convinced him that their religion did not prevent them from acting as loyal and responsible citizens. He was therefore prepared to vote for the second reading. He emphasised, however, the need to introduce the wings as accompaniments to relief.¹¹ His conversion may well have convinced other wavering members of parliament that the time had come to settle the question, for the second reading finally passed by twenty-seven votes.

The pro-Catholics were naturally delighted by the result, particularly as it was believed that a

greater number had voted for concessions than on any previous occasion.¹² Events in the House of Lords, however, quickly cast doubts on the possibility of ultimate success. On 25 April the Duke of York, on presenting a petition in opposition to the Catholic claims, made a passionate speech against further concessions. He emphasised the distinction between religious toleration and political power, and insisted that he would continue to resist the granting of the latter 'to the utmost of [his] power'. He also commented upon the importance of the Coronation Oath in this context, and swore vehemently that he would never be brought to agree to concessions.¹³ This speech appears to have immediately roused public feelings upon the subject, and the number of petitions against concessions increased. Copies of the speech were rapidly circulated, and proved to be exceedingly popular. Members of the House of Lords who were wavering were almost certainly renewed in their opposition by this strength of feeling. The speech also had the effect of alarming the pro-Catholics, who were made aware that if emancipation were not passed in the current reign, there was now no chance that it would be successful in the next!

Despite this setback, proceedings with the 'wings' continued. Littleton introduced a bill for the regulation of the elective franchise in Ireland, which was debated on 26 April. He argued for the measure primarily upon its own merits, as a means to prevent the subdivision of land and the multiplication of freeholds, to raise the respectability of voters, and also to strengthen the Protestant interest, rather than as an important accompaniment for Catholic emancipation. It was left

to Plunket to make the latter case, and to emphasise the value of the bill as a security measure and a lever for obtaining emancipation. As expected, the debate was fierce. Opposition to the bill crossed the usual party allegiances, with Brougham and Bankes for once united in resistance to a measure. Nevertheless, a majority of forty-eight ensured that the bill passed on to the committee stage. A House of Commons resolution in favour of the payment by the State of the Catholic clergy was also introduced successfully.

The main relief bill continued to move successfully through the Commons, finally passing by twenty-one votes on 10 May 1825. As it moved on to the House of Lords, however, the Duke of York's speech was a clear indication of the reception it could expect from its opponents. There was a continued emphasis on the Catholics' divided loyalty between the monarch and the Pope, and concern was again expressed about the dangers to the established Church in Ireland of admitting Catholics to parliament. 'To prevent the dangers ... from letting them in, the best of all securities is to keep them out', declared Lord Colchester.¹⁴ Liverpool made a particularly powerful speech emphasising that his opposition to Catholic relief was grounded in matters of principle.¹⁵ Despite powerful speeches against these opinions from Lord Harrowby and the Bishop of Norwich, the relief bill was defeated by forty-eight votes, a larger majority than was expected, on 17 May 1825.

2. Crises and Concordats.

As in 1821, the success of a motion in favour of the Catholics led to rumours that important figures in the government were vacillating on the question. It was suggested that Liverpool himself had been converted to the Catholic cause, and that the government was about to bring in a relief bill. Liverpool denied such rumours strenuously, even resorting to making his opinions known through the daily newspapers.¹ Nevertheless, in private the first minister was fast becoming concerned about the situation, and was thinking deeply about the position he should take. In a letter to Wellington on 1 April 1825 he questioned whether, given the opinion of the Commons, it would in fact be expedient for the Lords to throw out the relief bill, and first raised the possibility of resignation. He also expressed concern about the line which Peel was likely to take if the bill were successful in the Commons.² Wellington persuaded him to delay any action until after the discussion in the House of Lords, but it was clear that difficulties were building up for the cabinet which could only increase as the bill progressed. Peel's resignation on 29 April brought the crisis to a head.

It was against this background that Wellington came to the fore in the cabinet as a conciliator, and an innovator in the question of Catholic relief. He had not played any part in the Catholic debates since 1821, and indeed appears to have had little correspondence with anyone upon the subject. However, in the intervening period he had clearly

been thinking deeply about the issues involved. He had come to the conclusion that the question must be settled - but in the right way, and with full and effective securities for the Protestants. His approach was coloured by his conviction, expressed in his 1819 speech, that the Irish Catholics had an inbuilt hostility to the British government, and the Church of England.³ Holding these views, it is not surprising that Wellington appears to have spent more of his time thinking about securities than about relief itself, for he was convinced that in any arrangement it would be essential to protect the Protestant Church from the attack which would almost certainly follow the granting of political power to the Catholics.

In his approach to securities Wellington focussed on the position of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy. His attitude almost certainly stemmed from his experiences as Chief Secretary for Ireland, when he had seen, first hand, the influence of this powerful body over the Irish people, and had been made fully aware of their position as independent from the State. Their increased activities under the auspices of the Catholic Association only made it more important to establish a way to control them. Wellington considered that this could be done in only two ways: salaries from the government must be established for the Catholic clergy, and the appointment of Catholic bishops must be placed under the control of the Crown.

Salaries for the clergy would, he believed, bring them under the control of the government, to whom they would of necessity look for their support. It would then 'become their interest to preach peace to

the misguided peasantry,' and 'make peace and good order as great an object to them as to the rest of the community'.⁴ The lower clergy were also likely to be more peaceful if the hierarchy were loyal to, and under the control of, the government. In the past, Wellington had privately done what he could to see that men loyal to the government were appointed as Irish bishops. For example, in 1819 he had advised the government to encourage Dr. Curtis to accept appointment as Bishop of Armagh, because of his known loyalty, and in April 1821, he asked Dr Curtis to ensure that a loyal and peaceable man was appointed as successor to Dr Everard.⁵ Wellington wished, however, to ensure the selection of such men, and to lessen Papal influence in Ireland, by seeing the right of appointment to Irish bishoprics placed in the hands of the Crown. In his own words, he aimed to see the king established as 'head of [the Catholic] Church.'⁶

There might seem little difference between the securities which Wellington wished to see, and all those which had been proposed since the beginning of the veto controversy in 1808. Indeed, the very first argument concerning the veto had commenced over the use of the exact phrase 'the king as head of the Catholic Church.' However, for Wellington there was a vital prerequisite to these measures, without which there could be no satisfactory solution to the question. As was perhaps to be expected from one whose background had brought him frequently into contact with foreign governments, and given him a rather 'international' outlook, Wellington believed that any arrangements to control the clergy must begin with Rome. Unless a Concordat were negotiated, to define and limit the Pope's influence in Ireland

and his role in the electoral process, none of the basic questions concerned in the relationship between the government and the Catholic Church could be truly solved, and no satisfactory solution to the Catholic question could be introduced.⁷

There are indications in Wellington's correspondence that he had been convinced for some time that a Concordat would be essential to any solution to the Irish problem. Major Macauley, in a letter to Wellington in 1828, recalled the Duke saying at Verona that, if a Concordat were established, he would personally move the question of emancipation in the House of Lords. Given the fact that as far back as 1808, Wellington had insisted that any discussions concerning changes to the method of appointing the Catholic hierarchy must begin with Rome, there is no reason to assume that Macauley's comment was simply 'a trick which the memory plays on wishful thinkers.'⁸ In any case, Wellington had clearly formulated his views by the end of 1823: In December of that year, in reply to a letter from Lord Clancarty, in which the latter commented that England should seize on the precedent set by the Concordat planned for the Netherlands to settle the Irish question, Wellington wrote, 'I don't believe that you and I differ much about Ireland. The question is, how to bring people's minds to anything on that subject.'⁹ By February 1825, when Wellington first discussed his proposals in detail with Mrs Arbuthnot, he had clearly planned out his ideal scheme in his mind. Only in the face of the political crisis, however, did he formalise his ideas in writing, and put forward a plan to selected members of the cabinet.

Designed to appeal to those members of the cabinet opposing concessions, Wellington's memorandum outlining his proposals began by setting out the political background against which the issue must be considered.¹⁹ He emphasised that, although the House of Lords remained strongly opposed to concessions, the House of Commons had repeatedly voted in favour of Catholic relief; in addition the general public appeared to be apathetic about the issue. It was therefore to be questioned how far it was desirable or proper, to continue to bolster up the majority in the Lords, in opposition to the will of the Commons. In his view it would be more appropriate for the current government to take the lead and introduce a relief bill. This would be particularly beneficial as the introduction of a relief bill by a government operating under the open system would prevent the success of the measure being seen as a party triumph. He contended also that if ever a settlement were to be introduced the fittest time to do so would be at a period of 'external peace and internal tranquility, when the government [was] strong, and universally respected.' These conditions were currently fulfilled perfectly; the Liverpool government stood high in the public confidence, and had recently shown its strength by acting against the Catholic Association. In addition the Catholics' submission to the new law suppressing unlawful societies added to the atmosphere of tranquility, making this a suitable time to consider a settlement.

Having looked into the political situation, Wellington then examined the historical progress of the Penal Laws, and noted the fact that they had, in general, failed in their purpose. He discussed the necessity for strict controls in Ireland in order to

protect the Protestants - a principle in which he firmly believed, but which he no doubt also emphasised to appeal to his anti-Catholic audience. In preparation for introducing his idea of the Concordat, he forcibly stressed the Irish connection with the Papacy, and their independence from the State: 'As long as the Catholic religion exists in this or any other country outside the control of the Crown it remains a system of secrecy, and therefore of danger. Our view must be then to bring the Roman Catholic religion in that country under the control of the Crown, and in proportion by which we shall be successful in attaining this object will the arrangement be good, and the security of the Church of England in Ireland be confirmed.' Only by means of a Concordat to 'define and regulate' the power of the Pope could the Catholics truly be brought under the control of the Crown.

Wellington recognised that there would be many technical difficulties in reaching such an arrangement with Rome, not least that the law currently forbade any correspondence with the Papal See! There would also be problems in any recognition of the Catholic Church in Ireland, because of the episcopal nature of the Church of Ireland. It would never be possible for the law to recognise two bishops, one Catholic, one Protestant, in each diocese. He therefore proposed that Rome should be brought to agree that the Catholic Church in Ireland be changed from a National to a Missionary organisation. This would mean that there would no longer be Irish Catholic bishops responsible for particular dioceses in the country; rather there would be 'Vicars Apostolic', who would nominally be

bishops of Asiatic or African Sees, and who would technically be seen as on a mission in Ireland.

It was central to Wellington's scheme that the appointment of these Vicars Apostolic was to be under the control of the Crown. Echoing the concept of the veto, Wellington proposed that lists of suitable candidates would be scrutinised by the government, who would have the right to reduce the list to two names. The final choice would then rest with the Pope. With this as its basis, the Concordat would also stipulate the number of Vicars Apostolic to be permitted to operate in Ireland, their salaries, and the salaries for the clergy. Agreement would also be reached concerning controls over communications between the Catholic Church in Ireland, and the Papal See. With all these questions settled, and the Catholic Church properly brought under the control of the Crown, political power could safely be granted to the Irish Catholics.

Wellington presented his memorandum to Liverpool, Bathurst and Peel at an emergency meeting held on 1 May 1825, to discuss possible ways forward for the government. It has been suggested that in bringing forward his plan at this particular time, Wellington's aim was simply to save the government at all costs; he was not primarily interested in setting the question to rest.¹¹ It is true that when he committed his plan to writing, he commented that he would maintain the penal laws if that were possible. He was not motivated by any feelings of great liberality towards the Catholics, whom he regarded as politically hostile to the Protestants. Nor did he believe that Catholic relief would bring an end to all Ireland's problems. Wellington was, however,

above all, a pragmatist. He recognised that the existing situation was untenable, and required action to be taken. He first aired his views on a settlement in detail with his friend Mrs Arbuthnot some time before the progress of Burdett's motion brought about the cabinet crisis.¹³ His plan was not, therefore, solely a rapidly thought out reaction to the political situation. The fact that he had clearly been thinking for some time about a solution shows that he was genuinely anxious for a settlement.

It cannot be doubted that Wellington did aim to use his plan to keep the Liverpool government together if at all possible. This may also, however, have been a means to his own end, for he was convinced that only the existing government could introduce a measure containing real securities for the Protestants, which could safely settle the question once and for all. He explained to Mrs Arbuthnot on 5 March 1825 that, 'the arrangement must be made much better by those who were against than for the Catholics, because by them the interests of the Protestant establishment would be best protected, that the king himself would be more easily brought to yield the question by those who were in favour of Protestant ascendancy than by those who were for granting every thing, careless of the consequences.'¹⁴ He was also convinced that any settlement must be a government measure, which ought 'on no account to be left in the hands of the Opposition, who care only for the momentary popularity, and would not mind if the two parties [Catholics and Protestants] came to bloodshed so [long] as they carried their measure.'¹⁴

Wellington was convinced that adequate safeguards could be arranged only by those who were aware of all the dangers inherent in concessions. Men such as Burdett, who consulted with O'Connell, and appeared to pander to the wishes of the Irish Catholics could never make an acceptable settlement. Wellington made it clear in his memorandum that in his view the Irish Catholics were determined never to accept anything which would truly protect the position of the Protestants of that country. Hence anything to which they willingly agreed would provide no real safeguard. The composition of the Liverpool Administration would ensure that the Protestant interest had a major share in the making of the settlement; if the Protestants could be brought to see the need for a settlement, and were then involved in its formulation, the best possible securities could be obtained.

Wellington's friends the Arbuthnots, to whom he first revealed his plans in detail, were exceedingly pleased both with the scheme, and with the possibility of a settlement based upon Protestant principles. They anticipated that Liverpool would resign over the Catholic question, and looked forward to Wellington's appointment as prime minister, when he would lay his proposals before parliament. For this reason, they were anxious for Wellington to make his views on the subject known in the House of Lords: 'As it is possible he [Wellington] may be called upon to pass a Bill of Relief for the Catholics upon his own view of the case,' wrote Mrs Arbuthnot in her diary on 12 March, 'I am very anxious he should state his opinion publicly that it may be impossible hereafter to say that he changed his opinions in preference to quitting office.'¹⁵

Despite this advice, Wellington entered into no public declarations of his views, either in or out of parliament. It might seem strange that, if he genuinely wished to see the question settled, he did not voice his opinions openly. His silence was probably due primarily to the reaction of his colleagues to his settlement plan. In contrast to Wellington's personal friends, Liverpool appears to have shown little interest in the scheme, while Peel declared it to be 'full of difficulty'.¹⁶ There does not appear to be any record of the precise objections which Peel raised. However, in the Commons debate, he had explained that, 'if the great measure were once conceded he would infinitely rather place all its details upon a principle of generous confidence, than fetter them with a jealous and ineffectual system of restriction'.¹⁷ Wellington's complex scheme would clearly not fall into this category. Wellington was perhaps forced to see that Peel and Liverpool's reactions were likely to be shared by other colleagues, and thus felt it necessary to set aside his scheme, at least for the present. He had no wish to make any public declarations unless he had a plan which would be acceptable to those colleagues with whom he hoped to come forward to make the settlement.

Having decided not to force his plan upon his colleagues, Wellington instead turned to other methods to avert the collapse of the government over the Catholic question. In the days immediately following the rejection of Wellington's plan, Lord Bathurst had done all he could to persuade Liverpool not to resign. Liverpool had, however, insisted that he could not remain in the government without Peel.¹⁸ Bathurst then turned to Wellington for help;

on 6 May, he wrote to the Duke explaining the position which Liverpool had taken, and asking him to do all he could to persuade Peel to reconsider his position. 'You are the only person, I am sure,' he wrote, 'who could have that influence over him, and I think it would be well to make an attempt in good earnest.'²⁹ Wellington immediately responded wholeheartedly to the request. On 8 May he had a long meeting with Peel, and 'pointed out to him as strongly as he could how desirable it was [that] he should remain in office.' He emphasised that Peel's resignation would in fact break up the government, and that it was 'completely throwing up the Protestant cause.'³⁰ Bathurst echoed these sentiments in a letter to Peel, and he and Charles Arbuthnot also continued to press Liverpool to remain in office. Both Peel and Liverpool, however, remained obdurate, although they did agree to postpone making their decisions public until after the Catholic debate in the House of Lords.

By this stage, Wellington also had another reason for wishing to preserve the Liverpool government. Liverpool had been giving some thought to his successor, whom he expected to be a pro-Catholic, and had indicated that he should advise the king to send for Canning.³¹ This naturally did not please Wellington, whose distrust of Canning and his politics was by this time firmly entrenched. In addition, Wellington must have been concerned that if Canning were head of the government, he would attempt to settle the Catholic question immediately. Although Canning had always insisted that parliament should legislate for the Catholics, and not negotiate with them, in planning concessions, he was nevertheless associated with the Catholic party, and

distrusted by the Protestants. In Wellington's eyes, this would make him ineligible to bring in a proper settlement to the question.

References in a letter from Charles Arbuthnot to Liverpool at this time show a clear foreshadowing of the events of 1827, when the government was forced into a change of leadership. The letter reveals that Wellington did not keep his views about Canning to himself, although naturally he expressed them only to close colleagues and friends. He saw the very suggestion of the appointment of Canning as 'offensive to himself and ... unsafe for the public service,' and made it very clear that he would not be willing to serve under Canning.²² It also shows that Arbuthnot was aware of the dangers inherent in Wellington's attitude: if several influential members of the current government refused to serve under Canning, then the latter would have no choice but to apply to the Opposition. It was clear that Liverpool's resignation could not but lead to real political upheaval.

Such was the position when the Catholic question was debated in the House of Lords on 17 May 1825. Liverpool's powerful speech in opposition to relief made it clear that he was not prepared to compromise, and thus strengthened those who might be wavering in their opposition. The defeat of the question has been widely attributed to the effects of this speech. This clear victory for the first minister's Protestant views should have ended the political crisis. This was not, however, the case in practice. Neither Peel nor Liverpool initially appear to have been much reassured by events, and both persisted with talk of resignation. In addition, some of the

cabinet pro-Catholics also began to cause difficulties. Charles Wynn, and his mentor the Duke of Buckingham, were loud in protest against Liverpool's speech, which they considered to have broken the agreement under which they had joined the government.²²³ Much more serious was the threat to the government which came from Canning, who now insisted that the Catholic question could no longer be kept in abeyance, and called a cabinet to discuss the issue. Stapleton suggests that Canning took this decision because his surprise at the tenor of Liverpool's speech made him particularly conscious of the difficulties created by the lack of communication in cabinet on the question.²²⁴

In the days immediately following Canning's announcement, Wellington did all he could to preserve the particular nature of Liverpool's open system. As he had previously bolstered Peel and Liverpool, so he tried hard to persuade Canning to moderate his demands and avoid breaking up the government.²²⁵ While Wellington dealt with Canning, Bathurst tried to strengthen Liverpool, whose confidence had been further shaken by Canning's action. Bathurst insisted that Liverpool should continue in office, presiding over a cabinet run on the open system. It was to this course of action, rather than to resignation, which he was bound by his political principles. Little would be lost if Canning decided to resign over the issue, as few would follow him, but if Liverpool gave in, or resigned, then he would appear to be deserting the king, and 'those who [were] in the midst of their triumphs,' following the defeat of the question in the Lords would be 'delivered over to their adversaries.'²²⁶

In the event, however, there were no resignations on either side. Wellington's exhortations may have had some effect, for when the cabinet met, Canning insisted that he had no wish to break up the government; he would take the issue no further, having confirmed that he had a right to bring up the subject in cabinet whenever he chose.²⁷ With this question settled, neither Liverpool nor Peel wished to be seen as the minister responsible for the break-up of the government. Both now consented to drop their resignations, although they clearly stated that they would have felt it necessary to resign had the majority in the House of Lords been smaller. Peel also insisted that he was prepared to enter into no compromise on the question, 'and was always ready to resign when it should become necessary to do so.'²⁸ This declaration naturally caused Liverpool some anxiety, and helped to convince him that the difficulties which he had so recently experienced were almost certain to recur.²⁹ Nevertheless, at least temporarily, the crisis had been resolved: 'with no resignations and still agreeing to disagree, the Liverpool ministry had survived once more.'³⁰

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ELECTIONS AND RUCTIONS, 1825 TO 1827.

As the dust settled after the crisis Wellington was very aware that, although the cabinet had survived this time, there was a definite possibility that a similar situation could occur again in the not too distant future, perhaps with a less satisfactory conclusion. He therefore immediately began to look for a way to strengthen Liverpool and build his flagging confidence. He saw his ideal tool in the fact that parliament was nearly at the end of its sixth session, and a dissolution was anticipated shortly. Believing that an election as soon as possible would be of the greatest benefit, he wrote to Liverpool recommending that, unusually, parliament should be dissolved in July, to take account of the anti-Catholic feelings which had recently been roused in the country.

Wellington emphasised that he was not advocating an appeal to the Country on the Catholic question. However he pointed out that, as a dissolution would be necessary some time during the year, it would be to Liverpool's advantage to call an election 'in reference only to the effect which that decision might produce eventually upon the Roman Catholic question in the House of Commons.' Currently the general opinion in the Country was opposed to the Catholic question, but this might change even if the dissolution were delayed only two months, 'and in the

autumn we may have a Parliament very different from that which we shall probably have if you should determine to dissolve as soon as the session is concluded.'' Liverpool, however, had no wish to depart from precedent by dissolving parliament in July, and insisted that discussion on the matter should be postponed until September.

It may be questioned why, if Wellington genuinely wanted a settlement, he now proposed what was in effect an appeal to anti-Catholicism. There are comments in his correspondence which make it clear that he had not abandoned his wish for a solution: in a letter to Clancarty in November 1825 he lamented that 'we are further from the accomplishment of anything like an arrangement such as you and I would look to than we have ever been yet,' and in February 1827 he informed the Duke of Buckingham that his views on the question had not changed, although he believed it would be more difficult to act upon them.² The most likely assumption is that Wellington anticipated that an increase in the number of anti-Catholics in the Commons would encourage Peel, and strengthen Liverpool's resolve. Machin suggests that Wellington hoped that the creation of a balance of power on the question in the Commons would give an opportunity for the situation to cool down, so that the way could again be prepared for a compromise settlement.³ There were also other political considerations to be noted: the Opposition knew that the Catholic question had brought the government to the edge of collapse. Without a dissolution, which at least offered the chance of a better temper in the Commons, they were bound to bring on the question again, in

the form most likely to embarrass the government, in order to produce the same result.⁴

Early in September, politicians of all persuasions turned their attention to the timing of the dissolution. Attitudes to the Catholic question were important in determining standpoints. The prime advocate in the cabinet for allowing parliament to run its full course was Canning. He agreed that the timing was perfect for an election; however, he felt so strongly that a dissolution at that time would be perceived as an appeal to the country on the Catholic question, and would rouse all the anti-Catholic sentiments which had been stimulated by recent events in parliament that he contended that, solely for this reason, Liverpool should give up the idea.⁵ For similar reasons, Wellington continued to advocate a dissolution that session. He urged Liverpool that, without a dissolution, the government would find itself 'in the same difficulties respecting Ireland' as it had in last session, and that these difficulties would lead to the 'destruction' of the government.⁶

In taking this attitude Wellington was out of step with the most determined anti-Catholics, who wished the dissolution to be postponed; the Duke of York, for example, argued that because the Country appeared to be quiet, and growing in prosperity, this peace should not be needlessly disturbed by a general election. The Duke of Rutland was 'angry with the government for bringing upon the country the expense and turmoil of a general election when there [appeared] to be no absolute cause for such a measure'⁷ It is assumed that they anticipated that the strength of public opinion against the Catholics

would not of itself be sufficient to lead to the election of a large number of anti-Catholics. This view of events was apparently shared by the Whigs, and some government pro-Catholics, such as Richard Wellesley, who advocated an early dissolution. Not seeing the expression of public opinion against the Catholics as a disadvantage, they saw considerable advantages in having a relief bill passed by a new House of Commons.²

Canning recognised, with Wellington, that extending the parliament for a further session would provide another opportunity for the Catholic question to be raised, with all the attendant difficulties for the government. He therefore offered, if the dissolution were delayed, to do his best to discourage agitation of the issue, and even to move the previous question if it were introduced, in order to prevent a discussion. This was because he considered it vital that, if the delay of the election were to serve any useful purpose, the period before the dissolution should be a time of restraint with respect to the Catholic question.³ Remembering the abuse he had faced from the Whigs when he joined the government, and his efforts to make it clear that he retained his support for the Catholics, this was indeed a significant step, particularly in the face of the Whigs' preference for an early dissolution, and shows just how concerned he was to see the election postponed. Wellington did not approve of Canning's plan, as he did not believe that all the pro-Catholic government supporters would agree not to support the Catholic question if it were brought on. Interestingly, however, he also informed Liverpool that he disapproved because to ask pro-Catholic members of the cabinet to take such a step would be

to alter the principles of the government on the question and to indirectly take action against the Catholics.¹⁰

Liverpool was at first inclined towards an early dissolution, but had no strong views on the issue. Faced with both Canning on one side and the extreme Protestants on the other recommending a delay, he came down on this side, and when the cabinet met on 23 September, it was agreed that parliament should be allowed to run its full course. It was however emphasised that everything possible must be done to ensure that the two contentious issues for the government, the Catholic question and the corn laws, were kept quiet for the remaining session.

While the cabinet was making its plans in the light of the Catholic question, O'Connell, in Ireland, was concerned with rebuilding the Catholics' power base, following the suppression of the Catholic Association. Initially on his return from London he had faced some adverse reactions and resistance to his leadership, primarily led by Lawless, as a result of his support for the wings. His personal popularity and charismatic leadership, however, were sufficient, over a period of time, to resecure his position. He also had the courage to admit that his support for the wings had been mistaken. He was determined once again to seize the initiative, and in July 1825, he established the New Catholic Association, set up 'for the purpose of public or private charity, and such other purposes as are not prohibited by the statute of 6 George IV, cap 4 (the banning act)'''!

With this organisation O'Connell effectively defeated Goulburn's bill. Almost every task which had been undertaken by the previous association was also carried out by the new. Even the Catholic Rent was re-established, for charitable purposes. One significant innovation undertaken by the New Association was a plan for a religious census of Ireland, which was proposed in order to prove the numerical superiority of the Catholics in Ireland. While serving this useful purpose, the organisation of the census also increased the feeling of community among the Catholics, and helped to spread the influence of the New Association throughout Ireland. The census was never completed, but the figures which were produced did serve to confirm the Catholics' claims that they were in a significant majority.¹²

The only significant function which the New Catholic Association did not undertake which had been a prominent feature of the old was the petitioning of parliament, as under the new law the Association, set up for charitable purposes, could not perform such a task. For this, special aggregate or 'provincial' meetings were organised simultaneously in each county, technically unconnected with the Association. This in itself stimulated and encouraged the Catholics, for such meetings were clearly a demonstration of Catholic unity and strength. The Dublin leaders attended these meetings, and thus became more widely known in the provinces. Priests also assisted in the organisation, which continued and strengthened the association of the campaign for political relief with the Catholic religion itself.¹³

Naturally the freshly-organised Catholics were not pleased with proposals that their claims should

be shelved to suit the convenience of some of the parliamentary pro-Catholics, and proceeded to draw up a relief petition as usual. The petition ranged over a vast number of issues: from sorrow that the establishment of committees to enquire into the state of Ireland, and the many friendly sentiments expressed towards that country by the king had not led to relief, through the depiction of the Penal Laws as a breach of the Treaty of Limerick, to a refutation of the imputation that the Irish Catholics were not properly educated. All this took a relatively conciliatory tone. The petition ended, however, with a complete rejection both of the 'wings' and of any measure 'interfering with the discipline or independence of the Catholic Church in Ireland.'¹⁴ Lansdowne and Burdett agreed to present the petition to their respective Houses, but neither was prepared to go further, for in the event there was a general consensus that the question should be kept quiet for the remainder of the session. Both however emphasised in parliament that only a final settlement could prevent the question from continuing to be raised on a regular basis.¹⁵

It might appear strange that the Whigs were prepared to acquiesce in the government pro-Catholics' decision, rather than forcing on the question in order to embarrass them. It may be assumed that it was felt that the split which would be revealed in the pro-Catholic ranks would in the long term do more harm to the cause than temporarily postponing the discussion. It was also clear that the likely end result of a motion, and any resulting bill, would be the same as in the previous session, and little purpose would be achieved by re-living these events; it would be better to wait for the new

House of Commons to express its opinions on the issue, as the House of Lords might find it more difficult to set these aside. It is possible too that, so close to an election, some of the more cautious Whigs wished to avoid a discussion because of possible effects on their election prospects. W. Bankes, an anti-Catholic, expressed this view from his side of the question, when, on the presenting of the petition he lamented the lack of a discussion; a debate would have made it easier for the public to choose representatives whose views accorded with their opposition to further concessions.¹⁶

The 1826 election proved in the event, to be rather a let-down for the English anti-Catholics who, despite the delay in the dissolution, had still been predicting significant gains. The Catholic question did appear to play an important role in a number of the election contests, and pro-Catholics often suffered some uncomfortable moments. Nevertheless, in Britain, excluding Ireland, the election was not generally fought on this issue in particular. Other factors, such as the personal popularity of the candidate, local issues, and attitudes on other topics of national significance were equally important in determining results. 'Anti-catholic sentiment was not a sufficiently burning motive to influence the results as a whole,' and, it has been calculated that, overall, the anti-Catholics obtained only a net gain of sixteen seats.¹⁷

In the Irish elections, Catholic emancipation took a more central role, as the Catholic interest was naturally most concerned with the issue. The 1818 elections had seen an increase in the extent of the exertion of clerical influence in elections,

particularly in Wexford, Cork and Sligo. This had also been seen in the by-election in County Dublin in 1823. It was therefore anticipated that many of the contests in 1826 would be fought along similar principles, with the influence of the priesthood being opposed to that of the gentry.¹⁸ However, despite the action taken in 1818, the Catholic Association did not even consider planning any systematic programme for influencing election results, perhaps because O'Connell still saw the forty-shilling freeholders rather as a hindrance than an important resource. It was left to Thomas Wyse, a member of the Waterford branch of the Association to plan and control the contest which was to be a major step forward in the Catholics' campaign.

In Waterford, it was planned that the whole weight of Catholic interest should be thrown behind Villiers Stuart, a pro-Catholic candidate, in opposition to the anti-Catholic Beresford, whose interest was firmly established in the county. The local Association, together with the priests spent much time and money in stirring Catholic enthusiasm, and encouraging those who had always voted for their landlords to stand out and cast an independent vote in favour of their own religion. Few even among the Catholics really believed that the Beresford interest could be ousted. However, as voting began, it soon became clear that under the priests' influence more and more tenants were prepared to desert their landlords. Beresford complained that the priests were threatening to excommunicate, or refusing to baptise the children of those who refused to desert.¹⁹ It is unlikely, however, in the atmosphere which had been roused, that this sort of persuasion would have been necessary. Probably more influential

were the priests' attempts to plan ahead for protection for those who might subsequently face the wrath of their landlords by proclaiming that no Catholic should purchase articles put up for sale by landlords distraining for rent.²⁰

Only when success really seemed likely was O'Connell persuaded to throw the influence of the Catholic Association behind Stuart, and the result was a startling and overwhelming victory, which, because of the strength of the Beresford interest, was a considerable shock to the Irish Protestants. Waterford was, however, 'only the most dramatic example of a wider movement among Catholic voters.'²¹ In its wake the Association belatedly became involved in other counties, notably in Louth, against Leslie Foster. Local initiatives elsewhere also bore their own fruits, and overall, pro-Catholic candidates won in nine counties. What was important, however, was not the number of victories, but the great effect which they had on Catholic pride and morale and on the future plans of the Catholic Association, for it had become clear that with organisation and exertion pro-Catholic candidates could be returned for nearly every seat in Ireland at the next election.

The new parliament was not to have an opportunity to express its opinions on the Catholic question until March 1827. By that time, however, two of the most important opponents of relief had disappeared from the political scene. The Duke of York, who died in January 1827 had been regarded as 'the rallying point for the Tories, and the bulwark of the Protestant cause.'²² There was a further loss to the anti-Catholics on 17 February, when Liverpool had a stroke, and it rapidly became clear to all who knew

him well that this would be the end of his political career; he had been talking again of the necessity of resigning over the Catholic question, and it was exceedingly unlikely that, if he were to recover, he would wish to remain in office. It was effectively the end of an era; once his stabilising influence was removed the wide differences of opinion within the cabinet on the Catholic question came to the fore, and these became critical in the negotiations for the appointment of his successor.

The events of the next few weeks relating to these negotiations have been well documented.²³ Wellington's attitude to the Catholic question was clearly one of the primary factors influencing his conduct at that time. His main desire was to see the continuance of a balanced, mixed administration, in principle identical to that maintained by Liverpool. In his view this could only be achieved by having a Protestant first minister. Canning, therefore, would be totally unsuitable.

Wellington, convinced that his own position as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, to which he had been appointed on the death of the Duke of York made it impossible for him to be first minister. Later he was to declare that he had no wish for the post, for which he considered himself to be 'less than qualified'.²⁴ He advocated the appointment of another Protestant peer, such as Lord Bathurst, to the post. His opinions did not, of course, prevent others from seeing him as a possible candidate. The Arbuthnots, for example, did all they could to influence others, including Peel, in his favour. The Duke of Buckingham tried hard to persuade him that although as Commander-in-Chief he could not be

premier, he should make sure that he was in reality the leader of the new ministry, so that he might introduce his own brand of settlement for the Catholic question. Later in the proceedings, Earl Clancarty also pinned his hopes upon Wellington, for similar reasons.²²

Wellington, Peel and Canning entered into frequent discussions, and it does appear that genuine attempts were made to find a compromise satisfactory to all concerned. There was, however, a basic disagreement which could not be solved; neither Wellington nor Peel wished to see the government headed by a pro-Catholic, while Canning, aware of his own talents and important position in the House of Commons, naturally objected to the idea that his support for the Catholics disqualified him from leading the ministry. He did at one stage suggest the appointment of a Protestant peer as nominal head, but this was rejected by Peel and Wellington, who recognised that this would still leave Canning with the effective power; in their view a Protestant should head the government in reality, as well as in name. As the deadlock intensified the king even tried to persuade the cabinet to elect its own head, as a way to solve his dilemma. When this failed, however, and all avenues of compromise seemed exhausted there was really only one logical step which George IV could take. It was clear that no Tory government could be established in which Canning did not play a major role, and so the latter was given the charge to form an administration.

Wellington's refusal to serve under Canning, and his decision to resign even the command of the army, was attributed by the king to personal pique that he

had not been appointed first minister. Wellington's reaction to, and criticism of the language of, Canning's letter of approach, seems to bear out this interpretation of events; his reaction was that of a man looking to take offence, and already feeling scorned. It is perhaps more likely, however, that Wellington was reacting against what he saw as the desertions of the principles of Liverpool's government, for he did not believe that a government headed by Canning could genuinely operate on these principles with respect to the Catholic question.

Wellington's resignation was followed by that of the majority of Protestants within the cabinet. Thus deserted, Canning had little choice but to negotiate with the Whigs, and the resulting cabinet, although pledged to continue the open system, was biased twelve to three in favour of concessions. Machin points out that 'the 'open' system now commanded a wider allegiance than ever before.' The moderate Whigs had accepted it as a principle when agreeing to the coalition with Canning, while Wellington and his colleagues were still strongly in favour of it.²⁰ How long this situation would have continued, and whether Canning's government would have brought in a relief measure had he lived can only be a matter for speculation. In the event, however, it was not the pro-Catholic Canning, or his successor Goderich who broke the deadlock, but Wellington, who finally became first minister in January 1828. He continued to believe that any settlement should be introduced by the Protestant party in order to ensure the greatest protection for the Church, and thus himself took the initiative in 1829.

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22. JA, vol. II, p. 71.

23. For example, N. Gash, Mr. Secretary Peel, pp. 429-35.

24. N. Thompson, Wellington After Waterloo, p. 62.

25. Buckingham to Wellington, 21 February 1827, WP 1/883/12. Clancarty to Wellington, 1 April 1827, WP 1/887/2.

26. Machin, Catholic Question in English Politics, p. 103.

CONCLUSION

During the period covered by this thesis the Catholic question was always a central issue in British politics. From 1809 to 1812, few negotiations for the formation of governments took place without the question being introduced into the discussion, and attitudes to Catholic relief were often vital in determining the outcome. Liverpool's decision in June 1812 to allow each member of the cabinet to hold his own opinion on the question lessened the pressure in this area. This made it possible, for example, for Canning to join the government in 1816, and for the Grenvillites to take the same step in 1821. The establishment of a mixed government did not, however, affect the determination of the Irish Catholics and their supporters outside the government to press their claims upon parliament; between 1812 and 1827, questions in some way related to full political relief for the Catholics were brought before parliament on eleven occasions, and in addition there were also motions for partial relief measures, for example, for the Catholic peers, and the English Catholics. Motions in favour of Catholic relief were successful in the House of Commons in 1812, 1813, 1821 and 1825, after protracted debates in each case. On the two latter occasions, relief bills actually passed through all their stages in the Commons, only to be defeated in the House of Lords. All this helped to maintain the Catholic question high on the political agenda.

One of the most important aspects of the discussion of the question at this time was the issue

of 'securities', primarily the proposal that the government should be given a veto over the appointment of Catholic bishops, to limit the power of the Pope in this area. The Irish Catholics' refusal to admit the principle of the veto, even when it was accepted by Rome, and the general insistence of most members of parliament that this security was an essential corollary to relief, resulted in a clash of interests which was particularly apparent while the relief bills of 1813 and 1821 were passing through the Commons.

It is against this background that Wellington's attitude to the Catholic question was formed and developed. This thesis has shown that, although for much of this period Wellington was not at the forefront of the debate over the issue, he was always deeply concerned with the affairs of Ireland, and with finding a permanent solution to this perennial question. His period as Chief Secretary for Ireland brought him face-to-face with all the political problems associated with that country, including that of the Irish Catholics' campaign for political equality. It has been made clear that although he took office under an anti-Catholic government, he steadfastly retained in public the even-handed attitude of equanimity which he felt to be appropriate to a government officer whose task was to administer the existing laws. He was, however, personally very aware that the Irish Catholics in their desire for emancipation were a political, rather than a religious group. In this connection he also formed strong views about the dangers of Irish nationalism, and the problems inherent in the independence of the Catholic Church from the State. He carried these views with him when he left Ireland,

and they convinced him of the necessity for adequate securities for the Protestant Church and against the influence of the Pope to accompany any measure of relief.

It was while based in Ireland in 1808 that Wellington first expressed the view that measures to control the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland and to bring it within the remit of the State must, to be effective, be negotiated with Rome. This conviction was to remain with him for the next twenty years. He also maintained as a matter of principle that, to ensure the adoption of adequate securities for the Protestant Church, any settlement must be the work of those who would be more sensitive to the fears of the anti-Catholics than to the demands of the Catholics themselves. It is likely that his opposition to the two relief bills put forward during his time as a member of Liverpool's cabinet was based primarily upon these convictions. This thesis has made it clear that Wellington's 1825 relief plan focussing on a Concordat with the Papacy was not merely a quickly thought out proposal produced on the spur of the moment to preserve the Liverpool government, but was rather, in its principles, the result of years of thought.

Such long-standing convictions were not to be discarded lightly, and despite the difficulties with his scheme which were apparently pointed out at that time, Wellington maintained for several years his belief in the desirability of a Concordat. He was, however, to be dissuaded against such a scheme during the early months of his premiership, as a result of correspondence with Dean Phillpotts who convinced him that such contact with Rome would be an

acknowledgement that the Pope had power in Britain.¹ This was the first step in the revolutionising of Wellington's views on the question of securities. From insisting that a Concordat, a veto, and the payment of the Catholic clergy by the State were essential accompaniments to any effective settlement, Wellington was, by 2 April 1829, brought to the position whereby he was able to declare that, in his view, there was 'no sort of arrangement capable of being carried into execution in this country which [could] add to the security of the established church.'² The Catholic relief bill introduced by his government was based on this principle, and it is a tribute to Wellington's realism and to his pragmatic approach to the issue that he was able to re-examine his approach to the Catholic question sufficiently to be able to pilot such a bill through the House of Lords, and to obtain for it Royal Assent on 13 April 1829.

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