

Peel and the Oxford University Election of 1829

By N. GASH

THE emancipation of the Catholics in 1829 was a decisive point in the history of many human affairs. For the Irish it meant the renewal with redoubled strength of the long campaign that led by way of O'Connell and Parnell to rebellion and ultimate independence; for the Tories it was the first of the great 'betrayals' which divided the party in 1830 and shattered it in 1846; to Peel it brought a permanent estrangement from his own university which a second rebuff in 1834¹ only made more bitter and decisive. All three sequels hung together on a single line of development.

The penal laws against Catholics, inherited from the 16th and 17th centuries and maintained in the 18th century by public prejudice and the corporate interest of the Anglican church, were first seriously threatened by the national revival of Catholic Ireland. In 1793 the Irish Catholics were enfranchised and by the beginning of the 19th century the policy of complete emancipation, involving admission to parliament, had entered English domestic politics. Pitt's act of 1800 created a parliamentary union of the two islands but his promised concessions to the Catholics were abandoned in the face of royal opposition. Ireland felt herself betrayed and for the next thirty years Englishmen disagreed over Catholic emancipation. Even in the Tory party, which remained faithful as a body to the old alliance of parson and squire, the brilliant Canning maintained a strain of liberalism that indicated a difference, if it did not force a breach. Consequently, in 1817, when a seat for Oxford University fell vacant, the cherished reward of high-church Toryism went not to Canning, who in all respects except one was the obvious candidate, but to the young Peel whose work in Ireland showed the promise of a great future and whose religious orthodoxy had gained for him the nick-name of 'Orange' Peel from the Irish nationalists. Canning died in 1827 and Canningite Liberal-Toryism was succeeded by the more conventional creed of Wellington and Peel. One result of the ministerial changes

¹ See my article 'Oxford Politics in the Chancellor's Election of 1834,' *Oxford Magazine*, April 28 and May 5, 1938.

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involved was a by-election in the Irish constituency of county Clare. The Irish peasantry, obeying their priests rather than their landlords, elected the great agitator, O'Connell, although as a Catholic he was legally incapable of sitting in parliament, and thus created a precedent for future Irish action that had incalculable potentialities. It was a crisis in Anglo-Irish relations and it was met with surrender on the part of the government. At the beginning of the parliamentary session of 1829, the ministry of Peel and Wellington announced its intention of introducing a bill for the removal of Catholic disabilities. To the country at large the news came as a sensation; to many Tory Anglicans it seemed infamy. Not only was the measure revolutionary in itself but it was brought forward by men who had consistently opposed its principle. Few realised how grave was the situation in Ireland which had inspired the government's resolve and few could comprehend or endorse the motives which induced Peel, in spite of twenty years uncompromising Protestantism, to take upon himself the task of conducting the bill through the House of Commons. To the charge of inconsistency from the general public Peel could affect indifference; to his constituents of Oxford University, however, he felt almost an official obligation. The predominantly clerical electorate had chosen him largely because of his steady support of the established church and he held it incumbent on him to give them an opportunity of reconsidering their choice.¹ Such deference to the prejudices of the electorate was rare among contemporary members of parliament and he encountered some criticism for his view of the representative function. It was, Croker told him, 'a democratical and unconstitutional proceeding and a precedent dangerous to the independence of the house of commons.'² But the university was not an ordinary constituency and Peel no ordinary politician.

Scrupulous as he was determined to be, nevertheless it appeared to him only prudent to discover at the outset whether there would be any need for his scruples. The fittest channel for ascertaining the feeling of the university seemed his old college, Christ Church. Dr. Lloyd,³ the bishop of Oxford and his former tutor, was a close friend who had taken an important part in securing Peel's first election for the university in 1817 and had remained in confidential communication with him ever since. As early as the middle of January 1829 he had been privately informed by Peel of the government's decision and

¹ Parker, *Peel*, II, chh. III and IV; Mahon and Cardwell, *Peel's Memoirs* I, esp. pp. 312-41. Part of the correspondence in the Peel MSS., on which this article is chiefly based, is published in the Memoirs. But many important letters were not included and from some of the printed letters passages of a personal or indiscreet nature were omitted. References will only be to sources not given in the Memoirs.

² Jennings, *Croker Papers*, II, 7.

³ Charles Lloyd 1784-1829; lecturer, tutor and censor of Christ Church; regius professor of divinity 1822; bishop of Oxford 1827. He supported the Roman Catholic emancipation bill in the House of Lords.

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although he had been greatly distressed by the news, his attachment to and belief in the younger man stayed unbroken. Peel could be confident therefore of obtaining from the college both assistance and secrecy in the delicate matter he was about to lay before them.¹ On 31 January, nearly a week before the assembly of parliament and the publication of the general intention of the ministers, he wrote to Smith, the dean of Christ Church, announcing his determination to bring in a bill for Catholic emancipation and offering, or at least suggesting, his resignation if the feeling of the university desired it. At the same time, as though anxious not to be judged unheard, he enclosed a memorandum explaining and justifying his line of conduct in some detail. The receipt of this odd communication naturally put the dean in considerable embarrassment. He was afraid to show it to many members of the university or put it officially before the board of heads of houses because either action might make the confidential information contained in it a matter of general knowledge and discussion at Oxford before the rest of the country had heard anything of it. He consulted Dr. Lloyd and the two men decided to confide in only one other person, Gaisford, the regius professor of Greek.² The triumvirate agreed immediately on one point; that it was impossible to carry out the task with which Peel apparently wished to commission them. By themselves they could not discover the feeling of the whole university and even if they consulted the heads of houses, the opinions so obtained could not be regarded as truly representative. Gaisford thought that Peel ought to resign at once; the dean, foreseeing the awkward position in which the college would then be placed, was unwilling to advise such a hasty and positive step; and Lloyd, already deeply anxious at the government's surrender to the Catholics, wavered tiredly between the two. He saw objections both to an outright and to a conditional offer of resignation. The one might seem a brusque repudiation of the university connexion; the other might cause resentment by appearing to put the onus of decision on the resident members. 'My fear is,' he confessed subsequently to Peel, 'that if your letter to the vice-chancellor (written with the same intention as that to the dean) be laid before the heads of houses, some hot men among them . . . will say, "What have we to do with this? He knows we cannot call upon him to resign" and so, they may send you an answer, not in good humour, leaving you to act as you please.' The question of the memorandum created another difficulty. To the little committee of three at Christ Church, Peel's punctilious explanations seemed unnecessary. The motives which had led to his action were part of his public policy and the only fit place for their discussion was the floor of the House of Commons. As far as the university was concerned it was quite sufficient to state that he had been

¹ Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 40343 f. 329.

² Thomas Gaisford 1779-1855, later dean of Christ Church 1831-55.

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compelled by his view of the interests of the country to the course he had taken. The only concession to university feeling which they thought he might profitably make was to state that his original opinions on the Catholic question remained unchanged although he was now obliged by circumstance to follow a different line of action. A phrase of that nature inserted in the letter would enable the memorandum to be dispensed with altogether. Finally therefore it was agreed to send all the papers back to Peel so that he could reconsider the whole matter. If he still wished to keep to his original plan, the dean would personally lay the papers before the vice-chancellor. But their advice was to write directly to the vice-chancellor and make him, as by virtue of his office he would naturally expect, the instrument for sounding the feeling of the university. In a long and troubled letter, the first of an almost daily series during the next two weeks, Lloyd made the further suggestion that Peel should delay communicating with the university until parliament had met and the government's decision was publicly known. 'I cannot disguise from you,' he added, 'that both the dean and Gaisford were thunderstruck and very sad, when the contents of the letter first burst upon them. Both immediately said, "Why not try to carry strong measures and then, if you are defeated, give way?"' And this, I fear, is the course of action which could alone have satisfied this country.¹

Peel's sensitive temperament was hurt by the return of his letters but it did at least convince him that to ask individual members of the university whether he ought to resign was useless and embarrassing. He therefore altered his letter from a conditional to a formal and positive resignation and sent it to the vice-chancellor so that it reached him on 5 February, the day of the opening of parliament. All he requested in it was to be informed when it would be most convenient to the university for his resignation to take effect. On receiving this letter the vice-chancellor, J. C. Jones, the rector of Exeter, at once summoned a meeting of the board of heads of houses and proctors. It met at noon the same day and authorised the publication of the letter at the meeting of convocation in the afternoon. An ironical and unfortunate coincidence resulted. The intention of the government to grant emancipation was known in London on 2 February.² The meeting of convocation at Oxford on the 5th had been called to discuss petitions to parliament against the concession. Peel's letter was read out immediately after the petitions had been overwhelmingly approved by 164 votes to 48; and the vice-chancellor's acknowledgment of the letter was accompanied by another communication requesting him in the absence of the other university member, T. G. Estcourt, who was kept away from the opening of the session by family trouble, to present the petitions to the House of Commons. On the following day a formal reply from the board was sent to Peel, regretting his

¹ *Ibid.*, f. 334; Add. MS. 40398 f. 116.

² Jennings, *Croker Papers*, II, 12.

decision to resign and begging him to use his own discretion as to the date. This official courtesy was given more point by a private letter from the dean of Christ Church, written with the knowledge and approval of the vice-chancellor, earnestly advising him to delay his resignation until the measure for Catholic emancipation had been introduced and discussed in parliament as until then a cool judgement on the issue could not be expected at Oxford.¹ For the moment, certainly, the university was too confused for a considered opinion to assert itself. No details were known of the proposed bill and it was not clear whether Peel intended or wished to stand for re-election. There was considerable support for his action but on the other hand Protestant feeling was undoubtedly strong and the voting in Convocation on the petitions against emancipation made some hasty people conclude that a similar majority would be found against Peel in an election. The moderate Tories could be relied on to champion their man even if his measure was not altogether palatable and it was certain that the Whigs, too few and uninfluential to put up a separate candidate, would offer no resistance. But there were two other parties in the university whose attitude was more important and less predictable. The Ultra-Tories would take no part in electing Peel again but they might not oppose him; in any case, following university precedent, they would not force a contest unless they could find a candidate with a reasonable chance of success. Finally Christ Church, Peel's own college, might decide to support him as a body. If they did so, the weight of numbers and influence they could exercise might be decisive; but if the general temper of Oxford proved to be against Peel, it was unlikely that the college would risk its unity and prestige in a contest with the rest of the university.²

It appeared at first that there would be no serious opposition to Peel's return. 'Well, Mr. Dean, I suppose you will propose him again immediately,' said Dr. Landon, the Tory head of Worcester, to Smith after the meeting of convocation; and the remark seemed typical of the common feeling. Christ Church, at least, displayed a favourable attitude. Lloyd had travelled up to London on the 5th to see Peel but he had read the letter of resignation before he left and strongly approved it. The dean, though not enthusiastic, was prepared to propose Peel for re-election. He refused personally to urge Peel to allow himself to be nominated or even to enquire from him whether he desired to be returned but he allowed the senior censor, T. V. Short,³ to write to Lloyd in order to discover what Peel's real feelings were.⁴ Short himself was a warm

¹ Add. MS. 40398 fos. 174, 205.

² Add. MS. 40343 fos. 340, 343.

³ Thomas Vowler Short 1790-1872; censor of Christ Church 1816-29; later bishop of Sodor and Man 1841-46, and of St. Asaph 1846-70.

⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 345.

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Peelite and told Lloyd that he had no doubt that it was the wish of the Common Room that Peel should be brought forward and that he would unhesitatingly advise the college to do all they could in his support. The only difficulty was the rumour current in Oxford that Peel would refuse to stand. Provided, however, that he would consent to be nominated, Short expressed his confidence that there would be no opposition to his return if the college came forward to support him. 'It is very right in him to expose himself to our votes,' he concluded, 'but I should despise Oxford if they suffered him or any other man to suffer for honestly doing what they knew that he deemed his duty.'¹ Short, however, was notorious for his ultra-liberal opinions and Lloyd privately thought that he did more harm than good by his zeal. More influence was wielded by Marsham, the warden of Merton, who came to Lloyd on his return from London to enquire whether Peel would accept re-election. Lloyd expressed a fear, which he had already discussed with Peel, as to the propriety of his standing again and the danger of aspersions on his character if he was re-elected; but Marsham dismissed these scruples as hyper-quixotism and gave his opinion that Peel's re-election was a duty which the university, if permitted, would certainly fulfil. Lloyd, who was probably the only man in Oxford with a knowledge of Peel's inmost feelings on the matter, thereupon decided to allow Peel's supporters to follow their own strong inclination. He thus added his own not inconsiderable name and influence to the growing movement for Peel's return. As far as Christ Church was concerned, his action was decisive. On 9 February the Common Room met and unanimously resolved to support Peel's candidature. A circular letter to the members of other college Common Rooms was drawn up, announcing their intention, to which was subjoined a copy of Peel's letter to the vice-chancellor; but it was decided not to issue this before Wednesday, 11 February². The delay may have been due to a desire on Lloyd's part to ensure that Peel would definitely accept nomination at the hands of the college. No positive decision had yet been reached between them and the most that Lloyd had permitted himself to say at Oxford was that he had no reason to think that Peel would decline re-election. It was not until 8 February that Lloyd himself had decided in favour of nomination and although he had immediately written to Peel, no answer could be expected to arrive before 10 February. In the interval thus created, events occurred which completely changed his attitude. Lloyd, whose death four months later was ascribed to the painful anxiety he suffered during these weeks, was still nervous and irresolute. Fears for the effect of the Emancipation Act, fears for Peel's reputation, fears for the welfare of the college and for the animosities of a bitter contest within the university, all conspired to make him shrink at the first threat of danger. The day after the

¹ *Ibid.*, f. 347.

² *Ibid.*, f. 353.

meeting of the Christ Church Common Room he received information of a meeting of heads of houses for the express purpose of opposing Peel. He was thrown into a fit of agitation and determined to forbid the censors to take any further steps in the matter of Peel's nomination. The opposition meeting took place on 11 February and in consequence of the hostility to Peel which was exhibited, Lloyd made up his mind to withdraw the college entirely from the position which they had privately, and he now felt unwisely, taken up. Peel had written to him the day before, giving him considerable latitude in deciding according to the chances of success whether his name should be put in nomination. Interpreting this commission in its widest sense, Lloyd informed the censors that Peel had requested him to put a stop to the activities of the college on his behalf. 'So there,' he wrote to Peel with something like relief, 'is an end of it.'¹

The opposition to Peel which had caused Lloyd's precipitate retreat had been formed before a candidate had been found to replace him. There had at first been some mention of the attorney-general, Sir Charles Wetherell,² a violent opponent of reform and Catholic relief, who was subsequently dismissed by Wellington for his extravagant attacks on the Emancipation Bill. Later there was talk of Lord Chandos,³ Sir Robert Inglis,⁴ and Lord Encombe.⁵ But as late as 13 February there was still no definite candidature and with the moderates proposing to put up Hobhouse⁶ or Marsham himself, in default of Peel, it seemed that the ultras would after all be deprived of a sectarian triumph.⁷ But if they lacked a candidate, they did not lack the strength in the university to support one. The list of those who on 13 February announced their intention of electing a more fitting representative than Peel, included the nine heads with other members of Magdalen, Worcester, Jesus, St. Mary's Hall, University, Trinity, Queen's, St. Edmund Hall and St. John's, together with other names from Balliol, Oriel, Lincoln, B.N.C. and Corpus.⁸ The formidable influence of this body was difficult to obscure. Dr. Lloyd could write with a renewal of partisan spirit that apart from Routh of Magdalen, there was not a name in it known outside the precincts of the university⁹; and Granville Vernon urged Peel not to submit passively to 'the doctrine that the resident members of

¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 355, 356, 357. ² He had been a demy of Magdalen, 1786-91.

³ Oriel; M.P. for Buckinghamshire, 1818-39; son of the 1st duke of Buckingham and Chandos, whom he succeeded in 1839.

⁴ 2nd bart.; Christ Church; M.P. for Dundalk, 1824-6; Ripon, 1828-9; Oxford University, 1829-54.

⁵ John Scott, grandson and heir of Lord Eldon, the famous Tory lawyer and politician.

⁶ Henry Hobhouse, 1776-1854; B.N.C.; D. C. L. Oxford, 1827; Tory lawyer and politician; keeper of State Papers, 1826-54.

⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 355, 357, 368.

⁸ Add. MS. 40398 f. 258.

⁹ Add. MS. 40343 f. 368.

the university are entitled to meet in their cells and dictate in their darkness to the collective body.¹ But it was patent that the ultra party represented a powerful body in Oxford and that they would exercise a great influence on the country voters who cared little for Peel's intellectual qualities and political connexions and much for the example and persuasion of their old colleges. All that was needed was a candidate; and a candidate was eventually found in Sir Robert Inglis. His merit had not previously been conspicuous and his claims to the university seat not immediately obvious; but he had two qualifications to recommend him to his sponsors. Like Peel he was a member of Christ Church and so could be expected to draw part at least of the big Christ Church vote from his rival. Secondly his support of the established church had been staunch and orthodox enough to satisfy even the most distrustful clerical elector. It is not unlikely that the more Tory members of Christ Church played a part in his selection. After Lloyd had prevented Peel's nomination by the college, it was soon deeply and apparently irrevocably divided. Even if he had wished to do so, Lloyd would have found it difficult to secure unity a second time on Peel's behalf. He had been criticised for his withdrawal but criticism was soon useless to reverse the development of opinions. 'Independently of the considerations which actuated me at first,' he wrote defensively to Peel on 18 February, 'considerations in which I thought and think still that your honor was involved, look at the state of our chapter; the dean neutral but rather against than for; Dr. Hay a violent antagonist; Dr. Woodcock neutral; Dr. Buckland and Pusey² for; Dr. Barnes and Pett doubtful. Under these circumstances, could I have insisted on the dean coming forward and proposing you to the chapter? It was far better to leave the expression of feeling to come from the university.'³

The idea of nominating Peel had no sooner been abandoned by Christ Church, however, than it was taken up in another quarter of the university. Although the support for him was apparent from the first, nothing had been done to give a lead to that opinion. Even the heads of houses known to be in sympathy with Peel had seemed to be 'sunk in hopeless apathy,' as Whateley⁴ later described to Peel. Ultimately the vice-principal of St. Alban Hall, Mr. Hinds, fearing that the body of Peelite support might prove ineffective through mere lack of initiative, persuaded Whateley, who was his principal, to start active measures for putting Peel in nomination.⁵ Encouraged by the example

¹ Add. MS. 40398 f. 244.

² The future leaders of the Oxford movement were divided on this issue; Keble and Newman were against Peel; Pusey, probably because of Lloyd's influence, supported him.

³ Add. MS. 40343 f. 374.

⁴ Richard Whateley 1787-1863; fellow of Oriel; appointed principal of St. Alban Hall 1825 and archbishop of Dublin 1831.

⁵ Add. MS. 40399 f. 9.

of one who in his day was perhaps the best known character in the university, Peel's supporters met at Merton on 12 February and decided to form a committee to secure his re-election. The list of adherents included the heads of seven houses (Merton, Oriel, New College, All Souls, Pembroke, Magdalen Hall and St. Alban Hall), a strong body from Christ Church, and a few members of other colleges. Marsham, the warden of Merton, was made chairman of the committee and an election room taken in High Street. From here on the following day a manifesto was issued, explaining (since some explanation seemed necessary) that Peel's 'characteristic sincerity and total absence of reservation have imposed a restraint on his own college and precluded them collectively from putting him again in nomination,' and appealing for support 'lest under the excitement of the moment, the interests of the university should be committed to some less able or less tried representative.'¹ Meanwhile Marsham wrote confidentially to Peel informing him of what had been done but begging him not to acknowledge or reply to the letter. Peel, however, unwilling to allow an issue he had thought dropped to be taken up once more, yet finding it difficult to decide in London on points that demanded a close knowledge of politics in Oxford, thought it best to express his general attitude to his new supporters. He therefore sent a letter for Marsham through Lloyd, pointing out that public business made it necessary for him to return to parliament as soon after his resignation as possible; that the date of the university election rested with the vice-chancellor who might decide to postpone it until after the Oxford assizes at the beginning of March; and that taking everything into consideration, it might prove most convenient to all if no effort was made to re-elect him as the university member. Lloyd forwarded the letter to Marsham who proposed to his committee to lay it before them. They refused to see it and took up the attitude that they had proceeded so far on their own initiative and responsibility and even Peel could not be allowed to interfere with the course of a university election. Lloyd, who moved restlessly from one mood to another, was now inclined to let them continue their work. Optimistic reports on the strength of the Peel party were coming in and there was a widespread impression that many who disagreed with Peel's policy would not actually vote against him in an election.² Certainly the formation of Marsham's committee had given a great impetus to the movement for Peel's return. Within forty-eight hours a committee had been set up in London to co-operate with that in Oxford. Granville Somerset, one of the Tory party managers, was appointed chairman; a number of well-known politicians signed the manifesto on Peel's behalf; an industrious canvass was started and several offers of support and influence came from outside the capital. Lord Londonderry promised to send his son's tutor to Oxford on

¹ Add. MS. 40398 f. 246; 40343 f. 369.

² Add. MS. 40343 fos. 361, 374, 383.

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polling day and wrote a card of recommendation on Peel's behalf while Granville Vernon offered to influence the clergy in his district. It was said that most of London and all the lawyers were on Peel's side and even the civic authorities took part in the campaign. The Lord Mayor of London proposed to give Peel the freedom of the city in the hope that it might prove useful in preventing some of the London clergy from acting against him.¹ On 22 February Granville Somerset was able to send Peel an encouraging account of the campaign in the capital. 'I cannot help,' he wrote, 'entertaining the most confident expectation of the successful issue of the election; at the same time it is so utterly impossible to know the intentions of a very large proportion of the members of convocation, that I will not pretend to anticipate what sort of majority is likely to be the result of our exertions. There is certainly a very strong feeling of Protestantism against which we have to contend, and my individual canvass has been the most unfortunate of any; at the same time we have obtained support in quarters where I little expected it.'²

But the real centre of events was Oxford; and the work of Peel's committee there was hampered by two doubts. The first was whether Peel would really consent to serve again as member; the second, whether there would be sufficient time for the university election to take place before he was returned to parliament for some other constituency. On the first point Peel's attitude was clear if also unsatisfying. In private, though this was perhaps the affectation of a proud and sensitive man, he professed complete indifference to the events at Oxford. All he wished was to do what was best calculated to save his college and university from embarrassment. He expressed no desire to be nominated and an extreme reluctance to fight an election. 'For God's sake,' he had written to Lloyd on 11 February, 'take no step directly or indirectly that would appear to intimate a wish on my part to be returned. I have no such wish and I think a protracted contest even if it ended successfully would be very embarrassing and painful to me.' On the other hand he was unwilling to do anything that would appear 'peevish and ill-humoured or disrespectful' and if his supporters chose to put him in nomination, he would not repudiate their action or vacate the seat if elected. But he would do nothing to assist them and would proceed with the business of resignation and re-election as though the university did not exist. All this was not encouraging. Yet it is at least possible that the committee at Oxford interpreted Peel's mind in a truer sense than his own words would convey. It is hard to doubt that he would have welcomed an honour

¹ The distinction was accepted by Peel but not until after the election.

² Add. MS. 40398 fos. 244, 313, 319, 320. See the printed account in the Brit. Mus. (731.m. 14/7) of the meeting of Peel's supporters in London at the British Coffee House on 14 February, 1829.

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which his pride and scrupulousness prevented him from soliciting. In any case the committee decided to persist with his nomination. The only problem was that of time. The vice-chancellor's reply to Peel's letter of resignation had left him free to select his own date for his retirement so long as the university received ample notice. Peel then named 20 February and this date proved acceptable to the authorities. To Peel's committee, however, who were under the impression that he would at once take steps to be returned to parliament elsewhere, it seemed useless to continue, as the university election was not expected to come on until several days after the 20th. Marsham, seeking a way out of the difficulty, enquired from Peel whether it would be possible for him to be returned for parliament at once and subsequently apply for the Chiltern Hundreds a second time in order to stand for the university election. But there was no need for these dramatic gestures. Peel, in spite of his earlier declarations, was prepared to remain out of parliament until 2 March and promised Marsham to put no obstacle in the way of his nomination for the university provided the election could be held before that date.¹ The last complication was now removed and Peel's committee moved confidently towards the election.

On 26 February, the first day of polling, Oxford was crowded with voters and onlookers and 'party, religious and political feeling . . . wound up to the highest pitch.' The animosity against Peel was made unpleasantly evident. Marsham proposed Peel in a speech that had to contend with a running clamour from the crowd, and Dr. Ingram, the president of Trinity, who proposed Sir Robert Inglis, had to stop short his speech because of the impatience of the crowd to poll. 'During these speeches,' reported George Dawson, Peel's brother-in-law and, though an eye-witness, perhaps a partial observer, 'the clamour, violence and insulting language used by your opponents was almost beyond endurance. The common courtesy, every decency of life was forgotten, and I assure you without exaggeration that I should have fancied myself on the hustings at Westminster—indeed I think Westminster has the advantage. I never felt less proud of having been a member of the university and cannot but think the honor of representing it, most over-rated. I did not think it possible that a large assembly, composed entirely of educated men, would have shown themselves so devoid of decency and so utterly deficient in everything that constitutes a liberal and enlightened audience. To you I may say the truth with respect to the conduct of the masters of arts and I regret to be obliged to add that their inveteracy against you, and their coarse and base remarks upon your conduct were almost enough to make the blood of your friends boil in their

¹ Add. MS. 40398 fos. 261, 269.

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veins.¹ By the end of the following afternoon the battle was seen to be lost; Peel was 126 votes behind with no hope of making up the deficiency. The final figures were Inglis 755, Peel 609. A few days later Peel returned to parliament as member for the little Wiltshire town of Westbury, a pocket borough in the Tory interest held by Sir Manasseh Lopez.

There were of course the usual recriminations. Peel's committee had been a poor one; Marsham's speech had been protracted, injudicious and ineffective; the enemy had resorted to such ungentlemanly devices as sending out an appeal in the name of a college when the college was in fact divided.² At this interval of time, other criticisms occur; a different result might have been obtained if Peel had delayed his resignation until the end of the session instead of challenging opinion from an over-strained sense of honour while it was still in the first shock of astonishment and dismay; and Lloyd's failure to preserve the unity of Christ Church on Peel's behalf and timidity in not naming him at the first possible occasion was a source of weakness which need not have been present. The opposition at least made capital out of it;

' Such is Peel—so much honoured,
his college, d'ye see,
Will not bring the man forward but
leave him to me.'³

But Peel, whatever his private feelings, professed satisfaction. No reproach could be levelled at his conduct and the strong support in the university for his policy had been revealed to the world. Meanwhile his friends could pride themselves on the composition of Peel's defeated but respectable minority. He had secured twice as many first class men as Inglis; fourteen out of twenty professors; twenty-four out of twenty-eight prizemen; all the noblemen who voted; and, crowning triumph, three hundred and thirty-three clergymen.

¹ *Ibid.*, f. 323, Dawson to Peel. See also the printed speeches and pamphlets on the Oxford election of 1829 in the Brit. Mus. (731.m. 14). Mr. J. N. L. Myres has appropriately reminded me that a permanent mark was left on Christ Church, illustrative of the bitter feeling aroused in the college at this election: the words 'NO PEEL,' branded on a door at the bottom of Hall staircase with red-hot pokers, and still to be seen there.

² Add. MS. 40398 fos. 323, 325.

³ B.M. 731.m. 14/10.