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**SIR ROBERT PEEL**

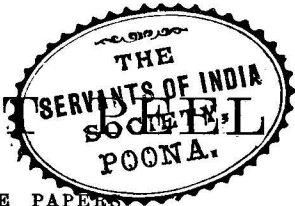
**VOL. II.**

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*The Duke of Wellington and  
Sir Robert Peel  
from the picture by Sir Martin Archer Shee in the possession of Her Majesty the Queen.*

SIR ROBERT



FROM HIS PRIVATE PAPERS

EDITED FOR HIS TRUSTEES BY

CHARLES STUART PARKER

SOMETIME M.P. FOR THE COUNTY AND FOR THE CITY OF PERTH  
AND LATE FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, OXFORD

WITH A CHAPTER ON HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER  
BY HIS GRANDSON, THE HON. GEORGE PEEL



*IN THREE VOLS.—VOL. II.*

LONDON

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## PREFACE

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THESE volumes are published under the authority of Sir Robert Peel's Trustees, the late Viscount Hardinge and the Right Hon. Viscount Peel.

The period dealt with extends from the death of Canning in 1827 to the death of Peel in 1850.

It includes the Administrations of Goderich and of Wellington; the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Bill; the revenge of its opponents in overthrowing the Duke's Government; the Administration of Lord Grey; the prolonged contest over the Reform Bill; the ruinous downfall of the Tories; the slow and toilsome building up of the Conservative party; Peel's refusals to take office in 1832 and in 1839; his short Ministry in 1834-35; six years more in opposition; and lastly, his great Administration (1841-46) and few closing years.

Of the three-and-twenty years comprised, three are memorable for crises in his career reviewed in later life by himself. On the Roman Catholic Relief Bill he prepared a Memoir incorporating 'all the documents that appeared necessary or useful for the complete elucidation of the events' attending its origin and progress into law; of his first Ministry he left a Narrative with a few selected letters; on the Repeal of the Corn Laws he also wrote a Memoir. All these were published soon after his death.

Hence arose a dilemma in editing his general corre-

spondence. To reprint the most interesting letters of those three years would overfill the book; to exclude them altogether would impair its value as a continuous record of Peel's public life from his own hand. It seemed best to take a middle course. The Memoirs are briefly cited, but so far only as may suffice to keep the biographical interest unbroken.

One point needs special explanation. In his Corn Law Memoir, Sir Robert Peel embodied letters of historical importance which had passed between him and the Queen. When the Memoir was published in 1857, these could not be included; the events were then too recent, and many of the actors were still upon the stage. But now, by her Majesty's gracious permission, the letters are given in full. Readers will kindly allow for any difficulties caused by their being disjoined from the original context.

The Trustees have ventured also to submit to her Majesty a request for leave to insert similar letters selected from the correspondence of other years with the Queen and Prince. By Sir Robert Peel's instructions, no public use could be made of any such communication without her Majesty's express approval. This has been most graciously accorded, enhancing the dramatic and personal interest of the political contests described.

The mass of papers (in all about 100,000) bequeathed to the Trustees furnished materials in formidable quantity and of great value. But it was found necessary to draw largely from other sources.

Among the fables doing duty (for want of facts) about Sir Robert Peel is one that 'he kept a copy of every letter he ever wrote.' Had that been true, an editor's task would have been more simple. But it is not true.

In youth, as Irish Secretary, Peel had his letters copied into quarto volumes in all the pomp of red morocco



with gilt edges. In later life, as Secretary of State, Prime Minister, or private Member of Parliament, for thirty years he had no such system. Letters of great interest, dashed off in haste to friends whom he could trust, as a rule were not preserved in copies or in draft. 'After 1827,' he says himself, 'when out of office, I very rarely, if ever, took copies of the letters which I wrote.' Mr. Croker writes, 'I keep all your letters for you.' Sir James Graham, at Peel's request, supplied many for the Memoirs; and those written to other colleagues could often be obtained only from inheritors of the original letters.

The Duke of Wellington most liberally granted every facility for consulting the rich collection at Apsley House, and with the kind assistance of Lieut.-Colonel Coxon a large number of Peel's uncopied letters were found there. He also wrote frequently to Wellington's confidential friend the Right Hon. Charles Arbuthnot. These letters—often secret, never copied—have been kept safe, and lent, by Mrs. Arthur Arbuthnot. The letters to Mr. Gladstone were lent, some years ago, by him; letters to Sir James Graham have been furnished by his daughter, Mrs. Charles Baring, letters to Lord Aberdeen by his son, Lord Stanmore; letters to Lord Hardinge by his son, the late Lord Hardinge; letters to Mr. Goulburn by his grandson, Major Goulburn. Warm thanks are due to all.

Peel's letters to Mr. Croker having been mostly published, no application was made for them, and none was made to the general public, lest there should not be room for what might be supplied. The papers of a great and busy statesman for thirty-eight years soon fill three volumes.

The book is indebted to Mr. Murray for some important papers preserved by his late father; to the Dean of Salisbury for a letter praising the administration of criminal law in Scotland; to Viscount Peel, to Mr. Murray,

and to Mr. James R. Thursfield for the care with which they have read the proofs, and for valuable suggestions; to Mr. Hallam Murray for pains taken in preparing the illustrations.

Aid has been obtained from several published works—Mr. Thursfield's excellent short Life of Peel, Mr. Shaw-Lefevre's 'Peel and O'Connell,' Mr. Fitzpatrick's 'Letters of O'Connell,' 'Lord Ellenborough's Letters' edited by Lord Colchester, and the Life of Sir George Pollock by Mr. Low, of the Prince Consort by Sir Theodore Martin, of Cobden by Mr. Morley, and of Lord George Bentinck by Mr. Disraeli. To these must be added the 'Greville Memoirs,' and Mr. Walpole's 'History of England from 1815,' a book most valuable for reference, and to be admired for careful verification of facts.

Lastly, the Editor is under special obligations to the Right Hon. Sir Frederick Peel, K.C.M.G., for accurate information on points of which he could speak from personal knowledge, and for consenting to the publication of the interesting letters addressed to himself and to his mother, Lady Peel, upon his father's death, and by Lady Peel to the Queen, and to a few of her husband's dearest friends. Without some such expressions of submissive grief and Christian consolation, the correspondence must have been brought to a more sudden and painful close.

It remains to say what has and what has not been here attempted.

In the instructions to his Trustees Sir Robert Peel thus indicates his general purpose :

'Considering that this collection includes the whole of my confidential correspondence for a period extending from the year 1812 to the time of my decease; that during a considerable portion of that period I was engaged in the service of the Crown; and that when not so employed I took

an active part in parliamentary business ; it is highly probable that much of that correspondence will be interesting, and calculated to throw light upon the conduct and character of public men, and upon the events of the time.'

He meant to leave materials for history, and that in using them full justice should be done to those who acted with him. Much space has therefore been assigned to letters that throw light upon the characters and conduct of his colleagues.

One correspondence recorded is unique as having been carried on for twenty years between the two Conservative chiefs, a great civilian, and a great soldier, leading their party, the one in the popular, the other in the hereditary House of Parliament. It shows with how much generalship these leaders managed to put off the final conflict when, as they feared, the Lords would be deprived, if not of nominal, at least of real power, and could no longer check by an appeal to the electorate any rash act of a temporary majority in one all-powerful Chamber. That service was rendered by Wellington and Peel.

Next, if not equal, in importance, and therefore in the space assigned to it, is the correspondence with Sir James Graham. His letters here given have not before been published. In style they are worthy to be read by public men who care to write good English. In substance they record the good work done together by Peel and Graham for Ireland and in Home affairs, and thus do justice, as Sir Robert Peel desired, to his most attached and most efficient colleague.

A third correspondence of singular interest was with Hardinge. It exhibits two devoted friends, soldier and civilian, separated by many thousand miles, each playing the chief part in a desperate but victorious contest, the one with foes abroad, the other with faction at home, yet

each finding time to watch with warmest sympathy the other's action, and to exchange assurances of mutual confidence and unalterable affection. Again such a series of letters is unique. There are also letters to and from Lord Ellenborough. Few know how large a part Sir Robert Peel took in the Government of India, so far as it was controlled from home. This subject fills four chapters.

Another chapter records the conflict in Scotland between Church and State. Englishmen are apt to treat that controversy as to them devoid of interest, and even of meaning. But it was due to the High Church party and to Sir Robert Peel to show what were the questions raised between them, and where he drew the line; that as regards Crown and other lay patronage he would have given to congregations full liberty of objecting to presentees, and to the Church courts unlimited power of deciding on all objections judicially without appeal; that he recognised the absolute supremacy of the Church in things spiritual, but not in dealing with civil rights of patrons or of presentees, secured by statute law, or in changing at will the constitution of her courts established by the State.

With Lord Aberdeen Peel's intercourse was not less affectionate and unreserved than with Graham or Hardinge; and if Lord Aberdeen did not, like them, attend Peel's deathbed, he is addressed by Lady Peel in her hours of deepest mourning for her husband as '*the friend* whom he most valued.' But to the letters exchanged with him, Lord Stanley, Mr. Goulburn, and Mr. Gladstone, with limited space, less justice could be done. For readers unfamiliar with foreign, colonial, and financial questions, explanations would have been required. Moreover, many of Lord Aberdeen's and of Mr. Gladstone's papers will ere long be made public; those of Lord Stanley would be more

fitly edited by his family; and some of Mr. Goulburn's were placed out of reach by the absence of his grandson on the expedition to Khartoum.

Sir Robert Peel himself is here portrayed not in private life—as the loving husband, son, or father; the country gentleman, fond of farming and of field sports; the friend of science, literature, and art; the good citizen, the loyal Churchman, the consistent Christian. Of all this there are glimpses, but the central subject is, his conduct as a public man.

On that point much has been written. He has been condemned as having broken that great political commandment: Thou shalt love thy party with all thy soul. Thou shalt not rise to power with one set of men and principles, and then use it for other principles and other men. That being the unpardonable sin imputed to him—especially at last when he gave up the Corn Laws—one object has been to show how much he sacrificed to party, and with what forbearance he applied the sound general principles of Free Trade, long since adopted and avowed by him, until at last he found himself compelled by duty to break with interests opposed to those of the nation. What forced it on him was a question that moved him deeply in 1842 and again in 1845—the question of a people's food in time of grinding poverty, or, still more, of impending famine.

Had not potatoes failed in Ireland, he had intended, in 1846, before the General Election, to purge himself and those who followed him from any old pledges, by a direct appeal to his party and to the country to give up the Corn Laws.

As it was, he risked his whole political credit and his personal character on the clear dictate of his conscience, that to avert starvation it was right to sacrifice the lower

to the higher, the old policy of his party to new necessities, and to the true interests, as he saw them, of the party itself and of the country.

On the point of honour, no man was more sensitive. Conscious of pure motives, he felt keenly the ungenerous disbelief of former followers, and of a candid friend who, in letters now published,<sup>1</sup> ascribed his conduct to the most ignoble causes—deliberate treachery, and abject fear, disguised by ‘the humbug of the Irish famine.’ Job’s three friends hardly matched Peel’s one. Peel might have answered as did Job: ‘God forbid that I should justify you. Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me.’

Those who know how he was treated, will respect his strong desire that history should judge him fairly.

Insulted by suggestions that his political conduct was inspired by self-regarding motives, when he withdrew from office he would accept no customary reward. Even to his Sovereign with much delicacy and tact he made this known. While soliciting, as a favour, that a promised portrait of her Majesty and the Prince should include one of the Prince of Wales, he added that this, together with the kind regard they had expressed for him, was ‘the highest reward it was in her Majesty’s power to bestow.’

He refused a peerage, he refused the Garter, he refused a national testimonial. His family, by his ‘instructions, declined for him a public funeral, and for themselves hereditary honours. He left the nation in his debt.

Forty years of devotion to the service of his country and Queen; then dismissal, with as much humiliation as his opponents could inflict. These stand on one side of the account; what shall stand on the other?

Two things he asked: that in the dwellings of the poor,

<sup>1</sup> *The Croker Papers*, iii. 51, 67-69.

whose lot he had helped to raise, his name might be sometimes remembered with goodwill ; and that posterity should do him justice.

He asked no more ; he was content to wait. Has justice yet been done to him in full ?

The men are gone who spoke of Peel as 'renegade,' 'apostate,' 'traitor.' But have they left no trace of their ill will, the mud that sticks where plenty is thrown ?

Small personal criticisms might pass, but for the hold they take on feeble minds. His manner, it is true, was apt to be constrained and frigid. 'I plead guilty,' he writes, 'to the charge of coldness ; particularly in reference to Irish candidates for office. I had early experience in that country of the danger of saying a civil word.' With favours to distribute, and secrets of the State to keep, it is not easy to cast aside reserve.

But fictions that his heart was cold, his feelings feigned, his friendships tepid, his thoughts too full of self, should be confronted with his letters to Graham and Hardinge, to Wellington and Aberdeen, and many humbler friends.

'In private intercourse he exhibited a warmer and stronger feeling of affectionate regard towards his friends than is usual in that relation when contracted in public life. He threw off reserve, and was free in his communications, beyond what is generally the case with political men.'<sup>2</sup>

He is charged with 'want of foresight,' perhaps chiefly on three grounds. He opposed the Roman Catholic claims ; he opposed the Whig Reform Bill ; he supported moderate protection of home-grown corn. His defence on each point may be read in his letters or Memoirs.

In Ireland some statesmen—Grattan, Plunket, Canning—imagined that they could give civil equality to the

<sup>2</sup> The Right Hon. E. Cardwell to Mr. Goldwin Smith.

Roman Catholic majority without endangering either the Protestant Establishment or the Legislative Union. Peel judged otherwise. To escape civil war, he granted civil equality; to save the Church and Union, he limited the county franchise. In 1868 this policy was reversed. The franchise was enlarged, and the Church was disestablished. In 1885 the franchise was again enlarged, and Ministers proposed Home Rule.

In Parliamentary Reform, Grey, Russell, Stanley, Graham, proposed to vest power in the middle class, excluding those engaged in manual labour. They would stave off manhood suffrage, ballot, short Parliaments, paid members, equal electoral districts. For the Commons they would retain a property qualification; for the Lords equal legislative rights. Again, Peel did not think this possible. Their Bill would end, he said, in full democracy. He did all he could to stay its coming, but it came. Household suffrage, lodger franchise, ballot came, and property qualifications went. Ministers proposed short Parliaments, paid members, and abolition, or mutilation, of the Second Chamber. And now the party cry 'One man, one vote,' and the counter-cry 'One vote, one value,' smack strongly of manhood suffrage and equal electoral districts.

Peel did not love disestablishment, or democracy. But he foresaw them.

As regards the Corn Laws, his position was different from that of Villiers or of Cobden. He had in charge the welfare of the whole nation. He had the authority of Adam Smith for dealing gently with existing interests by gradual change to a sounder system. He had also to reckon with his party. He was educating them, faster than they liked, for full Free Trade. He was about to recommend that policy to them for the next General Election, when all at once potatoes failed. What that meant, Peel



and Graham were the first to see. They could not make some of their colleagues see, and rather than maintain the tax on corn in famine they resigned.

In 1841 Cobden had informed large public meetings that Peel could, when he chose, repeal the Corn Laws. In 1845 Peel chose to repeal them, but could not; nor would Russell attempt it, with Peel's promised aid.

Then at last, under the double incentive of a personal appeal from the Queen and of famine (though invisible to many) staring him in the face, Peel nerved himself for desperate action, and was once more,

when the waves ran high,  
A daring pilot in extremity.

Abandoning Whig and Tory laggards, he re-enlisted first Wellington, and all his old Cabinet save Stanley, and by prodigious personal efforts, combined with his unrivalled skill in handling Legislative Assemblies, he freed the people's bread for ever from unjust taxation.

A statesman's foresight is best proved in action. Let that test be applied to Peel's well-known Reforms. On his Currency and Bank Acts; his Police, his Church Commission, on his later Irish policy—Bequests Act, Maynooth Act, Academical Institutions Act; Devon Commission; preferential patronage of Roman Catholics, &c.—on his Income Tax, and on his Free Trade Tariffs, he staked high. On many of these he was pertinaciously opposed—on Income Tax by Russell and Cobden, on Sugar duties by Sandon and Ashley, on Corn Laws by Stanley and Disraeli. On Maynooth, Gladstone resigned. Peel carried all these measures. Which of them have failed?

One year before the French Revolution of 1830 he passed the Roman Catholic Relief Bill. One year before the worst of the Irish Famine, and eighteen months before

the European revolutions of 1848—‘by a lucky accident, of course’—he repealed the Corn Laws.

In 1846 his Bill for protecting life in Ireland was thrown out, and he resigned. But what followed? The Whigs who helped to throw it out, and so became responsible for governing Ireland, applied for similar powers, and with his help obtained them.

So much in mitigation of the charge that Peel had little foresight. It is more true that what he did foresee he kept to himself and a few friends sometimes perhaps too long. Resolved, in a half-democratic age, to govern not as others but as he thought best, he had often a difficult course to steer. He kept the helm in his own hand, and twice by suddenly putting the ship about he saved the State, but not his party. For that they did not love him.

Some other faults, if closely examined, tend to disappear. Peel’s grandson, in his able summary (Vol. III.), admits that ‘for a British statesman, he was too bold.’ Others have said, too cautious. The contradiction may be explained. In arduous questions his habit was to wait in silence until the facts were all before him, then to choose his course. He took counsel mainly with himself. For examples see his answer in December 1834 to King William, and in December 1845 to the Queen. In either case the task proposed was formidable. To each, without consulting others, he answered, ‘I will be your Minister.’ To the Queen he added, ‘though I stand alone.’

‘To everything there is a season’—a time for caution, and a time for daring. No statesman knew that better than Peel.

‘It was peculiar to him that, in great things as in small, all the difficulties first occurred to him; that he would anxiously consider them, pause, and warn against rash resolutions; but having convinced himself after a long and

careful investigation not only that a step was right to be taken, but of the practical mode also of safely taking it, it became a necessity and a duty to him to take it. All his caution and apparent timidity changed into courage and power of action, and at the same time readiness cheerfully to make any personal sacrifice which its execution might rightly demand.'

The words are those of one who knew Peel well, and often sought his aid.<sup>3</sup>

If these were weak points, Peel had many strong. His command of principles and facts, his powers of argument and judgment, his promptitude, and patience, tact, and firmness, his command of temper (though Mr. Gladstone sometimes found him 'peppery'), his fine sense of personal and of national honour, his admiration of 'handsome' and contempt for 'shabby' conduct, his regard for truth, his public spirit, his generosity in gifts, his delicacy in conferring favours, his respect for conscientious difference of opinion, his delight in the society of men eminent in science or literature, his discriminating patronage of art shine out conspicuous in his letters.

One trait of greatness was his magnanimous silence as regards opponents. 'In Peel's letters to Mr. Croker' (says the editor of them) 'there is not a single allusion to Mr. Disraeli.' Nor is there in his other letters, except in one reply to Graham. On Canning, Russell, Cobden, Stanley, there is not an unkind word. It was the same in conversation. 'I never,' writes Mr. Cardwell, 'heard him speak unkindly of his persecutors; and when I mentioned this to Lady Peel, her reply was, "Yes, but you cannot know that he would never allow me to do so."''

Attempts have been made to point out in what Peel's chief strength lay. In the opinion of Mr. Disraeli, 'what

<sup>3</sup> Martin's *Life of the Prince Consort*, i. 163.

posterity will acknowledge him to have been is the greatest Member of Parliament that ever lived.' Mr. Gladstone, who thought this 'was perhaps meant as rather a left-handed compliment,' remarked once (to the writer), 'Peel was the best man of business who was ever Prime Minister of this country.' And to others he said, 'Taken all round, Peel was the greatest man I ever knew.'<sup>4</sup>

Some say, 'He had not genius.' He had these two notes of it, 'an infinite capacity for taking pains,' and in his work habitual success.

His forte was action. What he took in hand he achieved. Other statesmen of his time—as orators, Grantan and Canning; as philanthropists, Romilly, Mackintosh, and Ashley; as economists, Horner and Jones Loyd; as agitators, O'Connell and Cobden—proposed reforms. Peel gave them final shape. Convincing arguments, humane appeals, shrewd insight, popular demands—if just and feasible—his skill translated into laws that still endure.

A brief word in conclusion. To one whose duty it has been to read more of Peel's private letters than can ever be published, it may be allowed—and it seems but fair—to record the strong impression left by them as a whole; that Sir Robert Peel was more than a consummate man of business, more than a 'greatest Member of Parliament,' more than a great statesman, he was a great and a good man.

If the evidence here produced should serve to show him as he really was, not flattered, not misunderstood, not dimly seen through passing clouds of ancient prejudice or gathering mists of time, but as he thought, felt, wrote, and acted in the living present, fifty or eighty years ago, the labour spent upon these volumes will not have been thrown away.

CHARLES STUART PARKER.

Jan. 1, 1899.

<sup>4</sup> *Mr. Gladstone*, by Sir Edward Hamilton.

In addition to his Codicil published in the Memoirs, Sir Robert Peel left the two following testamentary papers of public interest.

*To be placed with my Will.*

I desire that I may be interred in the vault in the Parish Church of Drayton Bassett in which my father and mother are interred, and that my funeral may be without ostentation or parade of any kind.

I earnestly hope and entreat that no member of my family will apply for, or will accept if offered, any title distinction or reward on account of service I may have rendered in Parliament or in office.

If my sons entitle themselves to honorary distinction or reward by their own exertions, they will probably, if they are desirous of it, receive such acknowledgment as may be due to their own personal merits; but it is my express desire that no title or mark of honour be sought for or accepted on account of high stations held or acts done by me.

ROBERT PEEL.

May 8, 1844.

*Memorandum.*

These are the whole of my confidential papers. I have not withdrawn a single document of any kind.

The letters addressed to me and written by me were written frequently on the spur of the moment, for the pressure of official business rarely leaves sufficient time for the mature consideration of the various important matters on which a decision must be taken. It leaves none for the choice of words and careful construction of sentences. I think I can safely say that there is not a single letter which was written with a view to subsequent publication.

The confidential correspondence during the two periods for which I was head of the Government, taken in conjunction with the proceedings in Parliament, contains probably the best history of the domestic political events of the time which they embrace. In my correspondence with Lord Aberdeen will be found much interesting matter as to foreign affairs.

When I was absent from London, the communication with those of my colleagues who held the principal offices of Government was very frequent and was necessarily in writing. It was still more frequent when I was in London, but our intercourse was a personal one, and of this of course the traces are much less perfect. They hardly exist indeed, for I had no leisure to keep any memorandum of what passed.

The extent of their confidence in me, and the degree of control which I personally exercised over the general course of the Government, may, however, be inferred from the record of my written correspondence during my occasional separation from my colleagues.

ROBERT PEEL.

*Jan. 23, 1847.*

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