

relaxed, but the Catholics were still in a state of vassalage, and they were still pariahs compared with the Protestants. The rebellion of 1798, and the Union had dashed the hopes of the Catholic leaders, and their prospects of success seemed very remote, when, in the first years of the nineteenth century, the still unknown lawyer took up their cause. Up till this juncture the question had been in the hands of Grattan and other Protestants, and of a small knot of Catholic nobles and prelates; but their efforts had not accomplished much, and they arrived only at a kind of compromise which, whilst conceding their principal claims, would have placed their Church in subjection to the State. O'Connell inaugurated a different policy, and had soon given the Catholic movement an energy it had not before possessed. Himself a Roman Catholic of birth and genius, unfairly kept back in the race of life, he devoted his heart and soul to the cause and his character and antecedents made him the Champion who ultimately assured its triumph. He forwarded the bold design of combining the Irish Catholic millions, under the superintendence of the native priesthood, into a vast league against the existing order of things, and of wresting the concession of the Catholic claims from every opposing party in the State by an agitation, continually kept up and embracing almost the whole people, but maintained within constitutional limits, though menacing and striking the frame of society. He gradually succeeded in carrying out his purpose: the Catholic Association, at first small but slowly assuming larger proportions, was formed; attempts of the Government and of the local authorities to put its branches down were skilfully baffled by legal devices of every kind; and, at last, after a conflict of years, all Catholic Ireland was arrayed to a man in an organisation of enormous power, that determined its right with no uncertain voice. O'Connell, having long before attained an undisputed and easy ascendancy, stood at the head of this great national movement, but it will be observed that, having been controlled from first to last by himself and the priesthood, it had nothing in common with the mob rule and violence which he had never ceased to regard with aversion. His election for Clare in 1828 proved the forerunner of the inevitable change, and the Catholic claims were granted in the next year, to the intense regret of the Protestant Irish, by a Government avowedly hostile to the last, but unable to withstand the overwhelming pressure of a people united to insist on justice. The result, unquestionably, was almost wholly due to the energy and genius of a single man, though the Catholic question would have been settled, in all probability in the course of time, and it must be added that O'Connell's triumph, which showed what agitation could effect in Ireland, was far from doing the country unmixed good.

"O'Connell joined the Whigs on entering Parliament, and gave effective aid to the cause of Reform. The agitation, however, on the Catholic question had quickened the sense of the wrongs of Ireland, and the Irish Catholics were engaged ere long in a crusade against tithes and the Established Church, the most offensive symbols of their inferiority in the State. It may be questioned whether O'Connell was not rather led than the leader in this; the movement, at least, passed beyond his control, and the country was terrorised for many months by scenes of appalling crimes and bloodshed. Lord Grey, very properly proposed measures of repression to put the anarchy down, and O'Connell opposed them with extreme vehemence, a seeming departure from his avowed principles, but natural in the case of a popular tribune. This caused a breach between him and the Whigs; but he gradually returned to his allegiance to them when they practically abolished Irish tithes, cut down the revenues of the Established Church and endeavoured to secularise the surplus. By this time O'Connell had attained a position of great eminence in the House of Commons: as a debater he stood in the very first rank, though he had entered the St. Stephens after fifty; and his oratory, massive and strong in argument though too scurrilous and coarse, and marred by a bearing in which cringing flattery and rude bullying were strangely blended, made a powerful if not pleasing impression. O'Connell steadily supported Lord Melbourne's Government, gave it valuable aid in its general measures, and repeatedly expressed his cordial approval of its general policy in advancing Irish Catholics to places of trust and power in the State, though personally he refused a high judicial office. Though a strict adherent to the creed of Rome, he was a Liberal, nay a Radical, as regards measures for the vindication of human liberty and he sincerely advocated the rights of conscience, the emancipation of the slave and the freedom of trade. But his rooted aversion to the democratic theories imported from France, which were gradually winning their way into England, only grew stronger with advancing age. His conversion was most apparent in his antipathy to socialistic doctrines and his tenacious regard for the claims of property. He actually opposed the Irish Poor Law, as encouraging a communistic spirit, he declared a movement against rent a crime; and though he had a strong sympathy with the Irish peasant and advocated a reform of his precarious tenure, it is difficult to imagine that he could have approved the cardinal principles of the Irish Land Act of 1881, the judicial adjustment of rent by the State.

"O'Connell changed his policy as regards Ireland when Peel became minister in 1841. He declared that a Tory regime in his country was incompatible with good government, and he began an agitation for the Repeal of the Union. One of his motives in taking this course was, no doubt, a strong personal dislike of Peel with whom he had often been in collision and who had singled him out, in 1829, for what must be called a marked affront. O'Connell,