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CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION IN THE GREAT BRITAIN AND IRISH POLICY OF SIR ROBERT PEEL (1812–1829)

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The subject of research in this work is a historical and historiographical review of the Irish policy of one of the Tory leaders, Sir R. Peel (1788–1850), from the moment of his appointment as Secretary for Ireland in 1812 to the political crisis associated with the Catholic Emancipation in 1829. The relevance of the work is determined by the fact that the Irish policy of R. Peel is investigated here not only in the traditional problem-chronological way but also in a biographical context. *Methods.* The broad research context of the work is provided by the use of the prosopographic method and the historical-critical method of data processing of sources, some of which (archival sources from the Library of the University of Southampton and the Archive Bureau of Northamptonshire) are introduced into scientific circulation for the first time. *Analysis.* The aim of this work is to revise the thesis established in traditional British historiography, according to which the Irish policy of R. Peel in the period from 1812 to 1829 was based on the principles of “Orangism,” whereas after the Catholic Emancipation of 1829, R. Peel became “emancipated.” The analysis of R. Peel’s political strategy in the Irish question carried out in the article shows that none of these definitions fully reflects his actual position. *Results.* The result of the study is the thesis that R. Peel’s Irish policy turned out to be the personification of a conservative approach to problems, in solving which he was forced to concede in detail while preserving the basics. It is shown that R. Peel’s position on the issue of Catholic emancipation was not a rejection of Anglicanism, as it often seemed to contemporaries, but a rejection of anti-Catholicism. This circumstance makes it possible today to avoid extreme assessments of R. Peel as an unprincipled politician in favor of a more moderate assessment of his Irish policy. *Authors’ contribution.* V.V. Klochkov determined the basic concept of the article and the methodological foundations of the study, as well as identified unpublished sources from the regional archives of Great Britain; V.S. Nazarova prepared the introduction of the article, created its structural composition, and analyzed the historiography of the problem; I.M. Uznarodov carried out general editing of the text and formulated the main results of the study.

Key words: Great Britain of the first third of the 19th century, Catholic Emancipation of 1829, Robert Peel’s Irish policy, political biography of Sir Robert Peel, contemporary British historiography.

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ЭМАНСИПАЦИЯ КАТОЛИКОВ В ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ И ИРЛАНДСКАЯ ПОЛИТИКА Р. ПИЛЯ (1812–1829 гг.)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Предметом исследования в данной работе является исторический и историографический обзор ирландской политики одного из лидеров тори, сэра Р. Пиля (1788–1850), с момента его назначения секретарем по делам Ирландии в 1812 г. до политического кризиса, связанного с эмансипацией католиков в 1829 году. Актуальность работы определяется тем, что ирландская политика Р. Пиля исследуется не только традиционным проблемно-хронологическим способом, но и с использованием биографического контекста. *Методы.* Широкий исследовательский контекст работы обеспечивается использованием просопографического метода и историко-критическим методом обработки данных источников, некоторые из которых (архивные источники из библиотеки Саутгемптонского университета и Архивного бюро Нортгемптоншира) впервые вводятся в научный оборот. *Анализ.* Целью настоящей работы является пересмотр устоявшегося в традиционной британской историографии тезиса, в соответствии с которым ирландская политика Р. Пиля в период с 1812 по 1829 г. строилась на принципах «оранжизма», тогда как после эмансипации католиков в 1829 г. Р. Пиль стал «эмансипированным». Прделанный в статье анализ политической стратегии Р. Пиля в ирландском вопросе показывает, что ни одно из этих определений не отражает в полной мере его действительную позицию. *Результаты.* Итогом исследования стал тезис о том, что ирландская политика Р. Пиля оказалась олицетворением консервативного подхода к проблемам, в решении которых он был вынужден уступать в деталях, сохраняя основы. Показано, что позиция Р. Пиля по вопросу эмансипации католиков была не отказом от англиканства, как это часто казалось современникам, но отказом от антикатолицизма. Это обстоятельство позволяет сегодня избежать крайних оценок Р. Пиля как беспринципного политика в пользу более умеренной оценки его ирландской политики. *Вклад авторов.* В.В. Ключков разработал базовую концепцию статьи и методологические основы исследования, а также выявил неопубликованные источники из региональных архивов Великобритании; В.С. Назарова подготовила введение статьи, разработала ее структурную композицию и проанализировала историографию проблемы; И.М. Узнародов осуществил научное редактирование текста и сформулировал основные результаты исследования.

Ключевые слова: Великобритания первой трети XIX в., эмансипация католиков 1829 г., ирландская политика Роберта Пиля, политическая биография Роберта Пиля, современная британская историография.

Цитирование. Ключков В. В., Назарова В. С., Узнародов И. М. Эмансипация католиков в Великобритании и ирландская политика Р. Пиля (1812–1829 гг.) // Вестник Волгоградского государственного университета. Серия 4, История. Регионоведение. Международные отношения. – 2023. – Т. 28, № 5. – С. 116–126. – (На англ. яз.). – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2023.5.9>

Introduction. For all British cabinets of the first third of the 19th century, Ireland has been a source of constant political and religious problems. However, while it is difficult to consider the political tension in Ireland during the period as something fundamentally new, the situation in the religious sphere and in the field of church organization turned out to be very specific. After the conclusion of the “*Act of Union*” of 1800, which united England and Ireland into a single state, the United Church of England and Ireland arose, which the famous English historian Oliver Brose aptly called “a strange product of the “*Act of Union*” [18, p. 204].

By the time of the parliamentary reform of 1832, out of the 7 million people in Ireland, hardly 100 thousand supported the official church, mostly

Irish landlords. The overwhelming majority of Irish tenants were Catholics. Therefore, the problems associated with granting civil and political rights to Catholics (so-called emancipation), as well as with the payment of tithes in favor of the official Irish Church, acquired paramount importance in the domestic policy of Great Britain in the first third of the 19th century [26, p. 404, 422].

In this regard, the relevance of the article is determined by the argumentation of the thesis that the noted problems can be investigated not only in the traditional problem-chronological channel but also within the biographical and prosopographic (collective biography) approaches. In this case, biographies of leading political figures (such as one of the Tory leaders, Sir Robert Peel) provide context for their research and solutions. In turn,

the novelty of the research lies in the fact that the noted research discourse is implemented, among other things, on published sources as well as unpublished archival materials from the *Southampton University Library* and *Northamptonshire Record Office*, introduced into scientific circulation for the first time in this article.

The aim of this article is to revise the thesis established in traditional British historiography, according to which R. Peel's Irish policy in the period from 1812 to 1829 was based on the principles of "Orangism" (no wonder he was nicknamed "Orange Peel" as a hint of adherence to traditional Anglican values), whereas after the emancipation of Catholics in 1829, R. Peel, in turn, became, in the words of W. Gladstone, "emancipated." The analysis of R. Peel's political strategy carried out in the article shows that none of these definitions fully reflects his actual position.

Methods and materials. From the late 80s to the mid-90s of the last century, there was a sharp surge of interest in church issues in the public political discourse of the first third of the 19th century in English historiography. It was then that a number of interesting studies were published, covering a wide range of issues, from the relationship between church and state to the philosophical views of prelates and even church architecture. An overview of the situation was given in the generalizing work of S. Carpenter [20, pp. 23-38]. In 2001, a monograph by S. Brown appeared on the history of the official churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland [17, pp. 17-28]. In this work, church problems are closely linked to the political changes that became a reality in 1828–1829 and 1833–1834 during a series of religious reforms carried out by the cabinets of the Duke of Wellington, Lord Grey, and Viscount Melbourne. In a similar vein, R. McCarthy's recent work on the history of the United Church of England and Ireland is sustained [39, pp. 12-24].

As for the domestic historiography of the problem of recent times, its feature has also become a gradual revival of interest in religious issues. This trend has been quite clearly manifested since the beginning of the 2000s, having now formed a separate historiographical direction. The monograph by T.L. Labutina examines the general problems of national and religious identity in Britain [5, pp. 122-128].

M.S. Stetskevich investigated the role of anti-Catholicism in the formation of British national identity [9]. Special attention should be paid to T.S. Solovyova's research on the religious policy of the "liberal Tories" and the Catholic Emancipation in England in 1829 [8, pp. 15-24]. The role of the Duke of Wellington in resolving the political crisis associated with the emancipation of Catholics is explored in the article by Yu.I. Kuznetsova [4]. T.V. Petrova studied the projects of church reforms by the Tories and Whigs during the "constitutional revolution" on the material of political treatises and pamphlets [7].

In parallel with the formation of the noted historiographical direction, Russian researchers also used a special research methodology based on the "immersion" of religious and church issues in the biographical context. Back in 1992, the work of I.M. Uznarodov was published, where the biographical method of research was used to study party-political problems [10, pp. 13-20]. On the Irish material, this method was later successfully applied by A.V. Miroshnikov [6]. In 2022, V.V. Klochkov used it to investigate the details of R. Peel's political biography in the context of Irish issues [3]. It seems that the use of biographical context can be very productive in the study of R. Peel's Irish politics, the key aspects of which constitute the main problem field of this work.

Richard Gaunt, one of the most famous contemporary biographers of R. Peel, correctly noted that Ireland "was a rock on which a large number of promising political careers were forged or broken" [32, p. 17]. As for R. Peel, this remark is doubly true for him: before the political crisis of 1829 associated with the emancipation of Catholics, Ireland was the basis of his political capital, and this crisis itself became a feature that separated, according to W. Gladstone, "a young politician from a mature statesman" [42, p. 77]. The question of the extent to which contemporaries and historians shared this judgment is also the focus of this article.

Analysis. R. Peel's close connection with Ireland was established at the very beginning of his political career. In April 1809, he was elected to the House of Commons from the Irish rotten borough of Cashel City in County Tipperary, and in May 1812 (at the age of 24), he was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland in the Lord Liverpool administration. Not only was this the first serious

appointment received by R. Peel at such a young age. He held this post until August 1818, the longest of all his predecessors in the 18th century (with two exceptions) and longer than all their successors in the 19th century [45, p. 124]. Quite often, researchers tend to exaggerate the importance of the position held by R. Peel, comparing it with the post of “Prime Minister” of Ireland. In reality, the significance of this post was much more modest, and it would be fair to consider it as a necessary administrative channel between the unpopular Protestant administration in Dublin and the British government in London.

The Secretary for Irish Affairs. R. Peel was tasked with overseeing the implementation of cabinet policy on both sides of the Irish Sea, and due to this circumstance, he spent six months in London to ensure the passage of government bills through Parliament and report to both chambers on key issues of the Irish political agenda. The “*Irish Secretary*” did not have a clearly defined range of responsibilities, so the young and ambitious R. Peel not only “gladly took the opportunity to expand his powers at the expense of the central government” but also managed to establish a relaxed working relationship with the Viceroy of Ireland, the Duke of Richmond [31, pp. 68-69].

It was the patronage of the Duke, who gave his subordinate the most flattering recommendations, as well as the considerable freedom granted to the Secretary for Irish Affairs in the exercise of his official duties, that allowed R. Peel to actually control the Irish administration in Dublin for the entire duration of his tenure in office. In turn, the position occupied by R. Peel in society thanks to this post contributed to the strengthening of his ambitions so much that his reputation as a skilled administrator was significantly strengthened [18, pp. 208-209]. However, this led to the exacerbation of personality traits such as R. Peel’s inflated self-assurance and haughtiness towards his inferiors, which were already well-established during this period [3, p. 180]. These features clearly appear in the speech of July 23, 1818, with which R. Peel addressed the Lord Mayor of Dublin: “The hope and belief that the motives of my public behavior will be fairly evaluated... make me feel a sense of attachment to Ireland, many times exceeding the official duty” [46]. A completely different text,

penned by R. Peel on the occasion of parting with Ireland, was addressed to his friend J.W. Crocker. Peel wrote, “In two weeks I will be as free as air from... battles with the Irish that I cannot win, free from worrying that more needs to be done than can be done well” [41].

The unlimited ability to work and purposefulness of the young politician, moreover, whilst free from family ties, allowed him to fully concentrate on his official duties and the pastime in society befitting his status. R. Peel wrote, “...I have never dined at home since my arrival here, and I do not see much prospect for this, preferring the company of at least twenty-five guests” [24, p. 42]. By 1815, R. Peel had gained fame and status in Ireland as “living in splendor.” This “proper way of life” has been used by R. Peel to create a wide network of client relationships, which he subsequently used to achieve the political goals he needed. R. Peel actively built a line of behavior according to which receiving government favors and supporting the “*Act of Union*” of 1800 actually became not only synonyms but also the basis of the Irish political identity proper. For the same reason, R. Peel actively established relations with the Irish press, especially with the “*Dublin Evening Post*” and its editor-in-chief, J. Magie, not shying away from advertising various types of political activity directly related to his name [11, p. 117].

The dominant position of the young politician in the Irish administration was strengthened in 1813, when Lord Whitworth became Viceroy of Ireland, preferring not to interfere in the daily administrative concerns of his subordinates [30, p. 180]. R. Peel also established good working relations with his Deputy for Civil Administration Affairs, W. Gregory, and Attorney General of Ireland, W. Saurin; however, according to W. Gregory, Peel “did not allow any of them to forget who was their political patron” [40, p. 180]. Finally, the main evidence of the growing authority of R. Peel among the cabinet ministers was the fact that the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, being the main link between the government and the Irish administration, gave R. Peel virtually complete freedom of action [28, p. 136].

R. Peel himself never even allowed his closest successors as Secretary for Ireland – his personal friend G. Goulburn and Lord Francis Leveson Gower – to think about such

independence. The fact that Irish affairs were usually discussed at the very end of the parliamentary session, when a number of deputies were already anticipating an early return to more pleasant pursuits, to some extent facilitated communication with the opposition [36, pp. 745-748].

In recent British historiography, the position of Secretary for Irish Affairs is often described as “a nursery to which future legislators of England were sent without warning only in order to exercise their powers of mischief” [22, p. 58]. Indeed, among the outstanding prime ministers of Great Britain in the first half of the 19th century, R. Peel, the Duke of Wellington, Viscount Melbourne, and Lord Stanley began their political careers in this position. At the same time, it seems very interesting that R. Peel, for all his undoubted administrative talents and ambition, was rated very low by contemporaries who observed his activities in this post. Thus, the author of one of the most famous early biographies of R. Peel, J.B. Capefigue, described W. Pole (R. Peel’s predecessor as Secretary for Ireland) as “the best of the administrators who kept this place alive.” Viscount Melbourne was awarded the title of “the most impeccable,” while the results of R. Peel’s activities, despite the generally favorable tone of the biography as a whole, were assessed as “deplorable” [21, p. 546]. In turn, a contemporary of the events and the author of the famous biography of E. Burke, published in 1824, J. Prior wrote in 1827 that R. Peel’s activities in Ireland in 1812–1818 “contributed little to his mature reputation” [44, pp. 40-41]. In 1836, the same author condemned R. Peel as “the stubborn oppressor of Ireland, the main advocate of the application of harsh criminal laws and the great enslaver of Catholics, who caused the agitation of O’Connell, which became a direct product of his intolerance” [43, p. 13]. However, already in the mid-40s of the 19th century, assessing the stay of R. Peel serving as Secretary for Irish Affairs, contemporaries increasingly drew attention to his “detailed acquaintance with the life and habits of Irish peasants” and “sound conclusions” drawn from this experience. It is obvious that W. Gladstone’s arguments about a “young politician” and a “mature statesman,” which were mentioned at the beginning of the article, in this case had sufficient grounds [52, p. 126].

R. Peel and the Catholic Emancipation of 1829. The political crisis associated with the emancipation of Catholics in 1829 became a turning point in the Irish policy of R. Peel. In its simplest form, the cause of the crisis was the question of the need to free the Catholic population of Ireland from a number of legal restrictions introduced in the 16th century, concerning the inability to hold civil offices and be members of the British Parliament. In a broader context, the problem of Catholic emancipation was associated with a complex set of cultural and political contradictions, briefly outlined at the beginning of this article [53, pp. 164-168]. Since the “*Act of Union*” of 1800, when the Irish Parliament was abolished, Irish Catholics were promised emancipation, including, among other things, giving Catholics the opportunity to be members of parliament in Westminster. By the time under review, support for measures related to the emancipation of Catholics in Ireland led to the fall of two governments (W. Pitt the Younger in 1801 and Lord Grenville in 1807), and for six cabinets in the period from 1807 to 1828, the issue of Catholic emancipation turned out to be very significant in their current political agenda. This was also facilitated by the fact that emancipation was supported by such brilliant parliamentary speakers as G. Canning, F. Burdett, G. Brougham, and Ch. Graham, while the defenders of traditional “protestant freedoms” were clearly losing support [35, pp. 164-168].

Most of the opponents of emancipation have traditionally been concentrated in the House of Lords. As for the Commons, R. Peel’s place at the head of the Protestant majority of the lower house was practically not in doubt. His post as Home Secretary in the administration of Lord Liverpool (1822–1827) assumed a great involvement in Irish issues, so R. Peel could reasonably consider himself an expert on Irish affairs. A vivid confirmation of this was the situation in 1826, when the next bill on the emancipation of Catholics, introduced by radical F. Burdett, was passed by the lower house. R. Peel then threatened to resign if the bill was approved in the House of Lords. Lord Liverpool’s colleague in the Cabinet, Lord Bathurst, wrote to the Prime Minister at the time that “Peel’s intention is extremely serious, and its consequences may be deplorable, up to the fall of the cabinet.”

Liverpool's reply to Bathurst, preserved in the well-known diary entries of Ch. Arbuthnot, was also very revealing; the Prime Minister wrote, "Who can replace Peel? This should not be an ordinary person, and even a moment's reflection will convince you that such a person is not easy to find. No one is so familiar with the Irish question, and it will be difficult for me to discuss this topic with someone else" [23, p. 409].

R. Peel himself was also well aware of his exceptional position and the career benefits that it could bring him. R. Peel wrote to his colleague K. Wynn about "the advantage that may arise as a result of our resignation and the confidence that in this case we can return to power within the next three months" [48, pp. 105-106]. It is obvious that by 1826, R. Peel was not only aware of himself as the head of the "protestant party" within the Parliament but was also recognized as such by the majority of Tories in the House of Commons. But the growth of pro-Catholic sentiment in the House of Commons put R. Peel, as a minister of the Crown (which both he and the Prime Minister since January 1828, the Duke of Wellington, undoubtedly felt themselves to be), in a very difficult position. Back in 1828, R. Peel, formulating his anti-Catholic position in the House of Commons, said literally the following: "As a Minister of the Crown, I intend to abide by the principles that put His Majesty on the throne of the United Kingdom. We must remain firm among the numerous opponents, ...which will ensure to all of us an imperishable name and a tribute of high veneration among the unborn generations" [47, p. 8].

Nevertheless, it was R. Peel's deep involvement in the political agenda related to Catholic emancipation that served his contemporaries as a natural "dividing line" between the Whigs and the liberal Tory grouping, of which he had been an adherent since 1822. In March 1829, "*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*" claimed that "Peel was for a long time separated from the Whigs both in general doctrine and in politics on the Catholic question." The fact that he opposed the Whigs precisely because of his pronounced hostility to emancipation "reinforced expectations from him as firmly committed to this position" [13, p. 285].

However, when, as a result of by-elections in July 1828 in the Irish county of Clare, which were won by the famous lawyer and leader of

the Catholic Association, D. O'Connell, the situation for the government became critical, R. Peel not only supported the famous "*Catholic Relief Bill*" introduced by the head of the cabinet, Duke of Wellington, but also agreed to oversee its passage in the Commons. The reasons for such a sharp change in R. Peel's position on the key issue of the political agenda are still controversial among researchers. It is difficult to say for sure whether this was the result of an act of almost superhuman moral courage shown by the Minister of the Crown or symbolized a genuine change of beliefs on his part. For N. Gash, one of the most authoritative researchers and biographers of R. Peel, the latter is true: he believed that after the elections in County Clare, it was no longer the Duke of Wellington and R. Peel but circumstances that controlled the process. O'Connell's election as a member of Parliament raised "the question of Catholic emancipation from an abstract theoretical assumption to the main issue of the political agenda" [29, pp. 545-548].

Contemporaries of the events saw the situation somewhat differently: the observant vicar of one of the Oxford parishes of the Anglican Church, Reverend B. White, wrote in March 1829 in a letter to a friend that "despite the political measure that he (R. Peel. – V. K.) now supports as a minister of the crown, his daily behavior does not at all imply a fundamental change in his views on the abstract issue of emancipation itself" [16, p. 2]. On the basis of this astute observation, it can be assumed that R. Peel resolved an important dilemma for himself between two political roles (a staunch Protestant and a Minister of the Crown) in favor of the latter, realizing that otherwise he would not be able to ask George IV to consent to emancipation and thus make a sacrifice that he would not be able to make himself [37, p. 299]. Back at the end of 1828, R. Peel warned the monarch that "there is no need to make resistance to emancipation a matter of personal conscience, since the reasons for its implementation may be enough to suppress them" [49, pp. 102-103]. It is evident that in this situation, the Peel administrator overcame the Peel moralist: the former preferred to solve the problem simply and quickly, so as not to aggravate it and not provoke further constitutional deadlock, presenting George IV with the problem of emancipation as "an opportunity to avoid a split in

the Irish administration and ensure compliance with the constitutional order, and not any change of beliefs" [50, pp. 83-84].

Contemporary British historian B. Hilton, one of the founders of the "revisionist" view of R. Peel's biography, on the contrary, insisted that in 1829 the latter really changed his attitude toward Catholic Emancipation and recognized that the protected status of the official Anglican Church and the Protestant religion could no longer be supported by the previous constitutional means. According to B. Hilton, it was important for R. Peel to "free every Irishman from the continuing bitterness of the Catholic question" [34, pp. 63-64]. It should be noted that, despite the relative popularity of position B. Hilton, who received recognition in modern British historiography, for contemporaries everything was not so obvious. In the above-mentioned "*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*," one of the authors wrote that "we do not yet know enough about the course of thoughts and stages of development, during which Peel reached the final rethinking of his position on the Catholic question, although the result is already clear now" [14, p. 296]. It is obvious that the turning point for R. Peel in his attitude to the emancipation of Catholics was the creation in 1823 in Ireland of a Catholic Association headed by D. O'Connell, which was actively supported by Catholics who paid a weekly "Catholic rent" of 1 pence per household for the implementation of its activities [38, pp. 289-291].

Initially speaking out against emancipation, R. Peel argued that supporters of these radical steps have yet to prove the need to abolish restrictive measures against Catholics. However, already in 1826, opposing the next bill on emancipation, introduced in the lower house by the radical F. Burdett, he was no longer so categorical, stating that he was ready to "suspend his opposition to the bill" if "he was satisfied with the beneficial consequences that his supporters believe are inevitable." Such a somewhat ornate manner of speaking was shown to those who knew R. R. Peel well that the minister was open to discussing a painful issue [51, pp. 612-613]. Thus, Mrs. Arbuthnot, the author of a well-known diary, came to the conclusion that "a little persuasion and flattery" would be enough to turn R. Peel into a supporter of emancipation.

R. Peel's support for the abolition of religious restrictions for nonconformists in 1828 (the famous "*Test and Corporation Act*") to a certain extent confirmed the correctness of such an observation [27, p. 202]. Even more astute was Lord Ellenborough, who wrote in his diary on July 31, 1829, that "the problem of emancipation was not in Peel's real opinion or beliefs on this matter, but in his position as a minister of the crown and the reputation that could later create great difficulties in his way: he was embarrassed by his Oxford connections (in at that time, Peel was a MP for Oxford University, a stronghold of traditional Protestant values. – *V. K.*) and the fact that despite himself, he is almost the head of anti-Catholics" [37, p. 182].

Finally, for many of R. Peel's contemporaries, in particular Ch. Greville, clerk of the Privy Council, as well as Ch. Arbuthnot, it was believed that R. Peel's political future as a Tory was secured when his father, R. Peel Sr., received for him the post of chief secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1812. Regardless of whether this was true or not, it is difficult not to agree with Lord Hatherton's opinion that R. Peel was to a certain extent a hostage of his political apprenticeship [12, p. 386]. "Peel's great misfortune was that he was introduced into political life under the patronage of his father and (Spencer) Percival (Prime Minister in 1806–1812. – *V. K.*). Thus, he was involved in all the strife of Catholic emancipation from the wrong side. His common sense allowed him to gradually discard the slavery of early connections and... disavow the false principles that he was forced to defend. At the same time, it seemed that he had lost consistency and character, although every person in his situation would have done the same. Our voters freely granted us the forgiveness of errors of opinion and the privilege of becoming wiser with the course of events. But the classes and the party tried to keep him rigidly in the performance of his duty, and when he refused, they sought to brand him with shame" [33, pp. 123-124]. It seems that Lord Hatherton's observations deserve the closest attention. The characteristic secrecy that R. Peel usually shrouded his political course was in sharp contrast to the unbridled enthusiasm that he showed in advocating the Catholic emancipation of 1829.

One way or another, the main problem for the opponents of emancipation, including R. Peel, who eventually supported this unpopular measure, was that granting civil and political rights to Catholics was considered a healing measure capable of resolving all the contradictions between Britain and Ireland. However, the continuing status of the United Church of England and Ireland as an established church, reflecting the religious aspirations of barely a tenth of the country's population and at the same time supported by tithes paid by the rest (as shown at the beginning of the article), made the hope for such a desired reconciliation illusory. Ireland proved to be a stumbling block for the Whig cabinets of Lord Grey (1830–1834) and Viscount Melbourne (July–November 1834). The Cabinet of Lord Grey adopted the controversial “*Irish Church Temporalities Act*” of 1833, which liquidated bishoprics in Ireland but prohibited the use of church property for secular purposes [2, p. 115]. The cabinet of Viscount Melbourne was generally characterized by an unnatural alliance of Whigs and supporters of D. O’Connell, whose sole purpose was to overthrow the first conservative government of R. Peel during his famous “Hundred Days” (November 1834 – April 1835) [1, pp. 168-170]. It was the excessive commitment of the Whigs to the use of the property of the Irish bishoprics for secular purposes that gave R. Peel the opportunity to advocate for “violated constitutional principles” as well as the legitimate rights and privileges of the United Church of England and Ireland [15, pp. 124-125].

Results. So, although most modern historians, assessing the Irish policy of R. Peel in the period from 1812 to 1829 (or, going a little beyond this time frame, to 1835), follow W. Gladstone, declaring R. Peel an “Orangist” before 1829 and “emancipated” after that time, an analysis of his position in this work forces us to admit that none of these definitions fully reflects his actual position. From his very first involvement in Irish politics, R. Peel maintained his commitment to the Protestant establishment. The circumstances caused by the political crisis of 1829 required R. Peel to make such concessions on the issue of emancipation as could only be offered relatively safely as a means to discredit D. O’Connell’s campaign to repeal the “*Act of Union*” of 1800.

In this regard, the aspirations of the Minister of the Crown for the preservation of constitutional order prevailed over his religious preferences, which, however, did not mean that R. Peel ceased to be a respectable Protestant. D. Eastwood rightly noted that “the goal of mature Irish politics R. Peel’s attempt was to adapt various religious and economic interests in Ireland to a still conservative parliament, a limited monarchy and a strong union within the boundaries of the ‘*Act of Union*’ – this is what led not to R. Peel’s rejection of Anglicanism, but to the rejection of anti-Catholicism as a necessary consequence of this Anglicanism” [25, p. 36]. Thus, it was the strength of R. Peel’s “protestant reputation” before 1829 and the corresponding strength of reaction to his alleged rejection of this position after 1829 that represented the changes in the Irish policy of R. Peel sawing more sharply than it actually was, at least until the mid-1830s.

The Irish policy of R. Peel in 1812–1829 turned out to be the personification of the conservative statesman’s approach to problems, in which he had to concede in detail while maintaining the basics and realizing his participation in resolving the crisis associated with the emancipation of Catholics as the most significant event of his entire political career. At the same time, he remained, to a certain extent, a prisoner of the circumstances that influenced his position in British politics in the first third of the 19th century – an orangist and a champion of emancipation in one person. It is not surprising that it was Catholic emancipation that became the plot that R. Peel bequeathed for publication to his literary executors, Lord Mahone and J. Cardwell. The appearance of these fragments of R. Peel’s biography in 1856 made possible the first proper historical understanding of R. Peel’s Irish politics. H. Bulwer wrote 20 years later that “Peel’s memoirs were written as confirmation of his own claims to political integrity and chivalry; and he himself challenges us with disinterested devotion to the cause, leaving posterity to judge how much such a politician deserves the high reputation he claims” [19, p. 112]. Apparently, R. Peel should answer to his descendants not for having supported Catholic emancipation but for having opposed it for a long time, not for having carried out this most important reform in extreme haste but for having delayed earlier. The very

same Irish policy of R. Peel before 1829, once defined by W. Gladstone's mistake, which later turned into political wisdom, still has a chance to be revised in historiography, but, apparently, it will remain dominant in his posthumous political reputation.

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