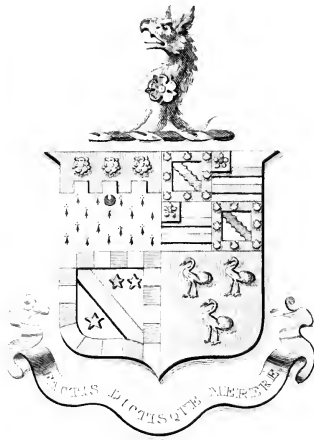


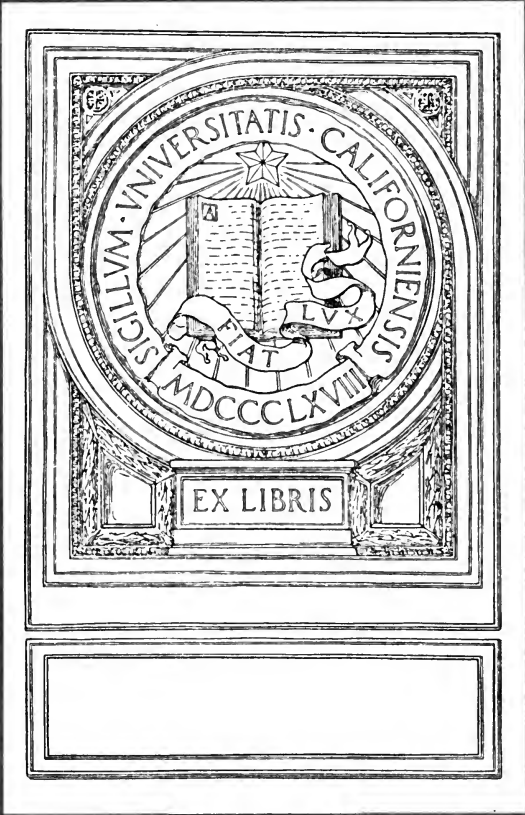
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SUBSTANCE

OF

A S P E E C H

FOR THE

CONVOCAATION HOUSE, OXFORD,

FEBRUARY 26, 1829.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES GIRDLESTONE, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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THE Vice-Chancellor not having allowed the Author to proceed with this speech, he has felt himself bound in publishing it to state, that nothing but respect for his high station, and for the public and private worth with which he adorns it, would have prevented him from exercising an undoubted constitutional right.

MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR,

I TRUST that a liberty of discussion, which obtains in counties, cities, and boroughs, will not be to our disgrace precluded by clamour in the Convocation of a learned University. I shall venture therefore, with your leave, to state in a few words my reasons for *opposing* the return of MR. PEEL.

His advocates, in a printed document signed by the Chairman of their Committee, admit that he has been guilty of an *offence*. They would have us take him with this offence upon his head, and wait his convenience for a satisfactory explanation. We will, however, rather examine first the explanation which MR. PEEL has himself already offered in his defence.

His justification, as I understand him to plead it, rests mainly on these two grounds: the general necessity of an *united Cabinet*; and some special circumstances in the *present condition* of Ireland, which determine him to "*break in*" (I use his own words) on the established constitution of the country.

A *disunited Cabinet* enfeebles the administration of affairs. Granted. But this proves no necessity for MR. PEEL to turn round, and act contrary to convictions, which he still professes to entertain, and on the profession of which his whole character and influence in the State is founded. Of the *twelve* members of the Cabinet, as it stood at the latter end of last year, *seven* at least, with the Premier at their head, were the avowed opponents of these contested claims. We are yet to learn that *union* might not have been effected at least as easily by the conversion of FIVE as of SEVEN.

As to the condition of Ireland, no reasonable man will I suppose contend that MR. PEEL has yet made out any worse case than we have all been familiar with for years. Nor has he once *attempted* to shew, that the extension of political privileges to members of the Romish Church will feed the hunger, clothe the nakedness of her people, or even silence the clamour of her factious demagogues. He knows it will not. He has proved over and over again it will not. Many as are the words of his own he has devoured during these eventful weeks, he has never ventured once to refer to this most reasonable ground of opposing their demands as they have been lately urged.

Ireland, and he knows it, has been afflicted by causes, not one of which will be removed by the projected concessions. She has had thrust on her a *degree of liberty*, which as her people had not the

energy to work out for themselves, so neither have they the prudence or fortitude to enjoy it. She has been cursed by a long series of *misrule*, by the selfish jobbing policy of *her own* men of property and influence; by the subjection of her misguided millions to the *degrading tyranny* of the Romish priesthood. And shall we believe MR. PEEL when he tells us that these evils, if indeed they are now come to a crisis, are to be healed by the repeal of disabilities which as *this very man* has all along reasoned, HAVE IN EFFECT NO CONNEXION WITH THEM AT ALL?

As to any *further explanation* yet concealed by the veil of futurity, I have not that amplitude of faith which will enable me to believe *against* knowledge *without* testimony. I cannot acquit *to-day* in the expectation of a witness who *may be* in court to-morrow. The Secretary might have learnt from the friends he has lately listened to, that auricular *confession* goes *before* absolution.

But MR. PEEL has made great *sacrifices*; therefore he is consistent. Has he sacrificed his *place*? If he had,—and that on the ground of his present opinions,—I say not he would have had fewer *friends*; but this I can with sorrow testify, he would have had *more opponents* here this day. He has kept his seat in the Cabinet, and has made every exertion within the limits of decency to keep also his *seat for this University*. Forbid it shade of injured CANNING! Forbid it every once-hallowed

principle of *justice, honour, and academical consistency!* I scruple not to say, that on this ground alone we are bound to reject Mr. PEEL, for on this ground alone he supplanted a rival in many respects greatly his superior.

But if he has kept his place, he has at least *sacrificed his reputation.* Without it much good may he do the cause he has espoused! A statesman who has lost his reputation, has lost all that can in a free country give effect or value to his services. He has lost, as his friend the Duke declares for his comfort, he has LOST HIS POLITICAL EXISTENCE.

Independently therefore of the main question now at issue in this country;—whether the proposed concessions be indeed the true panacea for all the ills of injured Ireland, or may be expected rather to foment the licentiousness of the people, and the factious influence of their leaders;—the *fitness or unfitness* of MR. PEEL to represent this University in Parliament is a question which may be decided on the more obvious ground of *high moral considerations.* Here, if I mistake not, there is less room for controversy. Here there is matter for his rejection so abundant, that John Lord Eldon and Daniel O'Connell themselves might meet and agree to oppose him.

Few men will indeed *vote* for our late Representative, who still entertain those opinions of which he was once the distinguished champion. But *no one* surely will come forward in his behalf, who has

respect for the memory of his great antagonist, till he can establish some clear distinction between his present case and the time when he once resigned the Seals of Office. *No one* surely will come forward in his behalf, who would be ashamed to receive homage with complacency for principles on which he had in secret resolved to act no longer. *No one* surely will come forward in his behalf, who loves the liberties of his country, and deprecates a system of government, which for the toilsome process of enlightened legislation substitutes the rapid energy of surprise and command. A high tone of moral feeling in the conduct of public life is a quality which it is OUR ESPECIAL DUTY to uphold, as having committed to us the education of future Statesman. Oxford could in no way more depreciate that quality in the eyes of her pupils, than by the support of a candidate whose public character is, to say the least, at this moment, in an EQUIVOCAL CONDITION.

Nor on an occasion like this will those who remain *neuter* very readily obtain the praise of moderation. Cases there are of moral and political interest in which conflicting probabilities are so nearly even, that an upright mind shall be unable to decide. But it is not easy to conceive such an equation where the justification assigned is nought, the evil apprehended infinite. They who are *neuter* in this contest, especially amongst the *opponents of the disputed claims*, must possess some secret

balance, in which private friendship, private obligations, or private interest, can be weighed against the first duties they owe to their country.

Against SIR ROBERT INGLIS no objection has been made, but what has been amply refuted by *unimpeachable testimony*. He has indeed been hitherto less known amongst us than might be looked for in the Candidate for a trust so high. But the success of an individual thus circumstanced against one so deeply rooted as MR. PEEL has been in the friendship of many, and the respect of all, will only the more fully demonstrate the *true public spirit* which animates our votes.

I beg pardon, MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, for having so long trespassed on your attention, in a matter wherein so many may be supposed to have already made up their minds. But where our opponents have assumed so largely the *exclusive character* of ENLIGHTENED PATRIOTS, I own I have felt anxious to express a conviction, common I trust to a great majority of Members of Convocation, that the *support of SIR ROBERT INGLIS* in opposition to our late Representative is at once NECESSARY FOR THE CHARACTER OF OUR UNIVERSITY, AND EXPEDIENT FOR OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD.

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