

and the Irish, they were quite willing to adopt cautious measures of advance in both constitutional and social legislation. The party, in fact, was led by chiefs who represented the Canningite Tories of 1828, and who were no longer divided by any very wide gulf from their Whig opponents. It was the same with the bulk of their adherents: the Chartists had frightened the middle classes into the Conservative ranks by tens of thousands. The feeble Melbourne government had entirely failed to keep together the great army which had won the victory of the Reform Bill. Peel himself was a commanding figure, more fitted to lead a great party than any statesman who had appeared since the death of William Pitt. He was the son of a wealthy Lancashire manufacturer, not one of the old ring of Tory landholders. His enlightened views on social and economic questions made him popular with the middle classes. In his foreign policy he was as firm as his rival Palmerston. As a financier and an administrator he was unrivalled in his age—finance, indeed, had always been the weak point of the Whigs. He was perhaps a little autocratic and impatient with the slower and more antiquated members of his party, but no one could have foreseen in 1841 that his rule was not to be a long one, and that he was ultimately destined to break up, not to consolidate, the Conservative party.

Sir Robert
Peel.

His firm rule kept down the Chartists, and caused the final collapse of the "Repeal" movement in Ireland. O'Connell had been promising his countrymen Home Rule for many years and with most eloquent verbosity, but they grew tired when all his talk ended in nothing. The installation in office of a Tory government with a crushing majority in the Commons, left him no chance of using the votes of his "tail" to any effect. He had always set his face against insurrection and outrage, and when peaceful means became obviously useless to attain his end, both he and his followers fell into a state of depression.

End of the
Repeal move-
ment in
Parliament.