

THE COUNTY CLARE ELECTION

W. Vesey Fitzgerald to Robert Peel

Ennis, 5 July 1828

The election, thank God, is over, and I do feel happy in its being terminated, notwithstanding its result. I have polled all the gentry and all the fifty-pound freeholders—the gentry to a man. Of others I have polled a few tenants only, my own, and not much besides what adhered to me in that way. All the great interests broke down, and the desertion has been universal. Such a scene as we have had! Such a tremendous prospect as it opens to us! My aim has been from the beginning to preserve good temper, and to keep down the feelings of my excited friends.

The conduct of the priests has passed all that you could picture to yourself.

The Sheriff declared the numbers to-night. To go on would have been idle. I have kept on for five days, and it was a hopeless contest from the first. Everything was against me. Indeed I do not understand how I have not been beaten by a greater majority.

The Sheriff has made a special Return, and you will say a strange one; but it will force Parliament instantly to take it up. It states that I was proposed, being a Protestant, as a fit person to represent the county in Parliament; that Mr O'Connell, a Roman Catholic, was also proposed; that he, O'Connell, had declared before the Sheriff that he was a Roman Catholic, and intended to continue a Roman Catholic. It states that a protest was made by the electors against his return; as well as the certificate that he was called to the Bar as a Roman Catholic. It states the numbers for each candidate - and thus it leaves the Return.

I shall see you soon, I trust. I shall be able to get away from here, I hope, on Monday. I must have a day's rest, and one day to settle my accounts, and, as far as I can, arrange respecting them. I care not for anything since I have terminated the contest. For the degradation of the county I feel deeply, and the organization exhibited is so complete and so formidable that no man can contemplate without alarm what is to follow in this wretched country.

Robert Peel, *Peel Memoirs* (1856), I:113–115.