



# Mr Secretary Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830

*Norman Gash*

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Norman Gash's magnificent two-volume life of Sir Robert Peel - *Mr Secretary Peel* (1961) and *Sir Robert Peel* (1972) - is the standard work on the great statesman, and is widely considered one of the great biographies of 19th-century prime ministers. Faber Finds is delighted to return both to print, beginning with *Mr Secretary Peel*.

As Gash puts it memorably, 'Peel, born in 1788 in the world of Gibbon and Joshua Reynolds, of stage-coaches, highwaymen and the judicial burning of women, died in 1850 in the age of Faraday and Darwin, of *Punch*, railway excursions, trade unions and income tax...' Over the course of Peel's life Britain was remodeled, and it may be argued that Peel himself did more than any other political figure in reconciling the new forces in society with its older institutions. But as a politician Peel could be a controversial figure, his pragmatism pressing him into unpopular decisions. The son of an industrial millionaire, his instincts were for the cause of good government over narrow party interest. Norman Gash interpreted Peel as the intellectual founder of the modern Conservative Party - an aristocratic administrator and natural consensus politician who believed in courting the urban middle class as well as landowners and farmers.

*Mr Secretary Peel* carries its subject's story from birth through his entry into politics in Ireland, his early positions in Tory governments, his tenure as Home Secretary from 1822 (which included his establishing of the Metropolitan Police Force) and up to the struggles over the issue of Catholic Emancipation.

'A rich and perceptive portrait of a statesman in the making,' Philip Ziegler, *Telegraph*.

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