THE GREVILLE DIARY

CHAPTER XLIX

THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST CINDERELLA

THE curtain now rises upon that great drama of monarchy, the accession of Queen Victoria, a story here told in its entirety for the first time. It is assumed that the accession was a mere matter of routine. What follows is evidence that there were serious designs upon the person of the Princess.

It was only at a much later date that Greville learned what was really happening. But at the time, that is in 1837, he was evidently conscious that something needed to be explained. The Duke of Wellington was not quite easy about it all:

June 19, 1837: . . . Last night I met the Duke, and dined at the Duchess of Cannizzaro's, who after dinner crowned him with a crown of laurel (in joke of course), when they all stood up and drank his health, and at night they sang a hymn in honour of the day. He asked me whether Melbourne had had any communication with the Princess Victoria. I said I did not know, but thought not. He said, "He ought. I was in constant communication with the present king for a month before George IV died. George IV was for a month quite as bad as this King."

Melbourne's administration seemed to be a "rickety concern" which would not "last very long." If Greville doubted whether its "speedy dissolution is so certain," it was only because "the public seems to have got very indifferent as to who governs the country."

Melbourne had to face the Radicals. And "the elected chief" of the Radicals had been Lord Durham.

"For no reason that anybody can devise but that he is son-in-law," wrote Greville on March 15, 1833, Lord Grey, as Prime Minister, had made Durham into an Earl, after which

ennoblement he had proceeded to St. Petersburg as Ambassador. And at St. Petersburg (July 29, 1837) "his language was always moderate." Indeed (December 10, 1838), he was "completely bit by the Emperor Nicholas."

Durham was home again. And "the eternal question in everybody's mouth" (June 29, 1837) was thus what post would be offered to Durham by Melbourne "or if it is indispensable that he should have anything at all."

Lord Durham was a statesman who made a great reputation by employing the right private secretary:

January 24, 1843: . . . Charles Buller is very clever, amusing, even witty; but the more I see of him the more I am struck with his besetting sin, that of turning everything into a joke, never being serious for five minutes out of the twenty-four hours, upon any subject; and to such a degree has he fallen into this dangerous habit, in spite too of the remonstrances and admonitions of his best friends, that when he is inclined to be serious, and to express opinions in earnest, nobody knows what he is at, nor whether he means what he says.

Buller, who thus "made a mockery of life," had a plan for pacifying Ireland, which, however, was destined to "vanish into smoke":

September 5, 1848: . . . He proposes strong government, abolition of jury unanimity in criminal cases, emigration on a large scale—particularly to the Cape of Good Hope, and the constitution of a board of employment and cultivation, who are to borrow money and invest it just as an individual capitalist might do. He adds to this, payment of the Catholic clergy by funds to be raised in Ireland, not asking imperial aid nor touching the Protestant Church; he only allots to this purpose £350,000, not enough. He very justly says, however, that unless Government do something bold, new, comprehensive, and on a great scale, they will incur disgrace and ultimately ruin.

December 2, 1848: . . . He was perhaps the most popular member in the House of Commons. By universal acknowledgment he was an admirable speaker, full of matter, lucid, never dull, and generally very amusing, so that he never rose without being sure of an attentive and favourable audience. His greatest speeches were on dry and serious subjects, such as colonization.

emigration, or records, none of which became heavy or uninteresting in his hands.

It is through Charles Buller that we meet Lady Ashburton (May 10, 1857), "on the whole the most conspicuous woman in the society of the present day":

May 10, 1857: . . . She was, or affected to be, extremely intimate with many men whose literary celebrity or talents constituted their only attraction, and while they were gratified by the attentions of the great lady, her vanity was flattered by the homage of such men, of whom Carlyle was the principal. It is only justice to her to say that she treated her literary friends with constant kindness and the most unselfish attentions. They, their wives and children (when they had any), were received at her house in the country, and entertained there for weeks without any airs of patronage, and with a spirit of genuine benevolence as well as hospitality.

To Lady Ashburton, John Mill was "sentimentally attached," though "she did not in the slightest degree return his passion." "Her other lover was Charles Buller with whom she was extremely intimate but without ever reciprocating his love."

June 29, 1837: . . . Now that he [Lord Durham] is returned, the Radicals, still regarding him as their chief, look anxiously to his introduction into the Cabinet. Charles Buller, whom I met the other day, said, in reply to my asking if Government would gain at the elections, "I think they will gain anyhow, but *if they are wise* they will gain largely." I said, "I wonder what you call being wise?" He said, "Take in Lord Durham." But they want Durham to be taken in as a pledge of the disposition of the Government to adopt their principles, whereas Melbourne will receive him upon no such terms; and if Durham takes office, he must subscribe to the moderate principles upon which both Melbourne and John Russell seem disposed to act. After all, it appears to me that a mighty fuss is made about Durham without any sufficient reason, that his political influence is small, his power less, and that it is a matter of great indifference whether he is in office or out.

We can best understand the bold temper of Durham by glancing here at his later conduct in Canada. The Dominion was disturbed. As Lord Anglesey put it in the House of Lords:

June 24, 1838: . . . "The spirit of faction had crossed the Atlantic; the demon of discord was abroad; one of the most favoured and interesting of our colonies was in revolt. The noble Duke [Wellington] saw this, and seemed at once to decide that it would require all the energies of the mother country to crush the Hydra at its birth."

Durham, as Buller's mouthpiece, was to take things in hand:

February 5, 1838: . . . I saw a letter yesterday with a very bad account of the state of Canada. It was to Lord Litchfield from his Post-master there, a sensible man, and he describes the beaten Canadians as returning to their homes full of sullen discontent, and says we must by no means look upon the flame as extinguished; however, for the time it has been smothered. On the other hand, there are the English victorious and exasperated, with arms in their hands, and in that dangerous state of mind which is the result of conscious superiority, moral and intellectual, military and political, but of (equally conscious) physical—that is, numerical—inferiority. It is the very state which makes men insolent and timid, tyrannical and cruel; it is just what the Irish Orangemen have been, and it is very desirable that nothing like them should exist elsewhere. All this proves that Durham will have no easy task. It is a curious exhibition of the caprice of men's opinions when we see the general applause with which Durham's appointment is hailed, and the admiration with which he is all at once regarded. . . . If he had continued plain John Lambton I doubt if he ever would have been thought of for Canada, or that the choice (if he had been sent there) would have been so approved. Why on earth is it that an earldom makes *any* difference?

July 8, 1838: . . . Durham had made his entry into Quebec on a white long-tailed charger, in a full general's uniform, surrounded by his staff, and the first thing he did was to appoint Sir John Doratt (his doctor, whom he had got knighted before he went) Inspector General of hospitals, superseding all the people there.

Over his expenses, Melbourne's government was nearly defeated, but happily Castlereagh abstained from voting. His father, Londonderry, and Durham (April 5, 1838) were "knit together by the closest of all ties—a community of *coal* interest."

Durham selected a suitable colleague:

August 11, 1838: . . . We were told that Turbon's indifferent moral character was to be overlooked in favour of his great legal capacity, and now it appears that his law is not a jot better than his morals.

Durham "passed an ordinance enacting that Papineau and the leaders of the Canadian rebellion should be transported to Bermuda, and that if any of them should return to Canada, they should suffer death." There was to be no trial. And the ordinance ignored the law:

August 13, 1838: At a Council to-day to disallow Durham's ordinance. Nothing was sent from the Colonial Office, and I did not know what it was for till I saw Lord Lansdowne. He told me, and then I wrote the order for the Queen to approve, and he took it in to her. Presently Glenelg arrived, and announced that nothing could be done, for the authenticated copy under the Great Seal of the Colony was not arrived. Then a consultation was held: Lord Lansdowne was for not minding about the Great Seal, and Melbourne chuckled and grunted, and said, "Why, you knock over his ordinances, and he won't care about the form, will he?" I said, "If there is no precedent, make one," and accordingly the order passed.

Durham's reply was an "astounding Proclamation" in which he censured the Home Government. "Even an impeachment," wrote Greville on November 8, 1838, "would be fully warrantable."

December 2, 1838: . . . Lord Durham arrived at Plymouth some days ago, but was not able to land (on Thursday last) owing to the violence of the storms. Great curiosity prevailed to see what sort of a reception he gets from Ministers and the Queen, and what his relations are to be with Government. Nothing they say can exceed the astonishment which he and

his court feel, or will feel, at the sensation excited in the country by his conduct. Gibbon Wakefield, the first to arrive, said he had never been so amazed in the course of his life, and owned that they had all expected to make a very different impression, and to be hailed with great applause.

December 10, 1838: Nothing can exhibit more strikingly the farcical nature of public meetings, and the hollowness, worthlessness, and accidental character of popularity, than the circumstances of Durham's arrival here. He has done nothing in Canada, he took himself off just as the fighting was going to begin, his whole conduct has been visited with universal disapprobation, and nevertheless his progress to London has been a sort of triumph; and he has been saluted with addresses and noisy receptions at all the great towns through which he passed. . . .

His speeches in reply to the addresses are most extraordinary performances, unbecoming in tone, contradictory, inconsistent, and inflated; for as to disclosures he has none to make of any sort or kind. He had the finest game to play in Canada that could be placed in his hands, for the proceedings here gave him a legitimate grievance, and would have enabled him to claim double credit for success, and exemption from any blame or discredit from failure.

Lord Durham issued a report on Canada which "was in fact written by Charles Buller." And the Durham Report became as historic as Buller's oblivion.

It was Lord Durham, then, whose eyes were directed to Kensington Palace where lived the Princess Victoria. The nation was not suspecting anything unusual.

At the prospect of Queen Victoria's accession, writes Greville, "the public in general don't seem to care much, and only wonder what will happen." And to this, he retorts, "nothing will happen, because, in this country, *nothing* ever does."

Of Cinderella in Kensington Palace, little was known:

June 16, 1837: . . . What renders speculation so easy, and events uncertain, is the absolute ignorance of everybody, without exception, of the character, disposition, and capacity of the Princess. She has been kept in such jealous seclusion by her mother (never having slept out of her bedroom, nor been alone

with anybody but herself and the Baroness Lehzen) that not one of her acquaintance, none of the attendants at Kensington, not even the Duchess of Northumberland, her governess, have any idea what she is, or what she promises to be. It is therefore no difficult matter to form and utter conjectures which nobody can contradict or gainsay but by other conjectures equally uncertain and fallacious.

When King William's health failed, the Duchess of Northumberland "resigned her office of governess," and, according to Peel, talking with Greville in the Park:

June 16, 1837: . . . It was very desirable that the young Queen should appear as much as possible emancipated from all restraint, and exhibit a capacity for the discharge of her high functions; that the most probable as well as the most expedient course she could adopt would be to rely entirely upon the advice of Melbourne, and she might with great propriety say that she thought it incumbent on her to follow the example which had been set by her two uncles, her predecessors, William IV having retained in office the Ministers of his brother, and George IV, although his political predilections were known to lean another way, having also declined to dismiss the Government of his father.

Sir Robert Peel's suggestion that the young Queen, on ascending the throne, should be "emancipated from all restraint" is significant. There was evidently a fear lest Victoria should be less than a free agent.

Durham had every reason to strengthen his position. So had the Duchess of Kent and Sir John Conroy. Hence, we read, Lord Durham was found at Kensington Palace where "the elements of intrigue do not seem wanting in this embryo Court." Durham set about "paving the way to future Court favour through a strict alliance with the Duchess of Kent and Sir John Conroy." If King William "hates" Durham, it is because (July 1, 1835) Durham is "magnus Apollo" to Princess Victoria's infatuated mother.

For the years of Queen Victoria's minority, a provisional regency by her mother had been legalized:

May 28, 1837: The King [William IV] prayed that he might

live till the Princess Victoria was of age, and he was very nearly dying just as the event arrived. He is better, but supposed to be in a very precarious state.

Victoria, as Princess, thus reached her eighteenth year and passed beyond the control of the Duchess and Conroy. To regain that control became their object.

The fifth daughter of King George III was the Princess Sophia. Her house was a convenient rendezvous:

May 31, 1848: . . . For several years she was much in the intimacy of Conroy, and it is supposed the Duchess of Kent used to meet him there. This connection (which was carried on secretly) set the Queen very much against her, and she resented it so much that she never took any notice of her aunt, except making her a formal visit once a year.

May 31, 1848: . . . The Princess Sophia died a few days ago, while the Queen was holding the Drawing Room for her birthday. She was blind, helpless, and suffered martyrdom; a very clever, well-informed woman, but who never lived in the world. She was the intimate friend of the Duke of York while he lived, and of the Duchess of Gloucester up to the last. The Princess left a letter for the Queen, which was delivered to her in the garden of Buckingham Palace by Andrew Drummond on Monday morning.

It was Lord Granville who told Greville, years later, what had been afoot. He had seen that faithful servant of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Baron Stockmar. And referring to the Duchess of Kent and Conroy, the Baron had said:

London, October 30, 1854: . . . Their objects were to get a regency established for a couple of years on the pretext of the Queen's youth and inexperience, and to force her to give a promise in writing that she would make him [Conroy] her private secretary. Conroy urged the Duchess to shut her up, and keep her under duress till she had extorted this engagement from her, but the spirit of the daughter and the timidity of the mother prevented this plot taking effect. The regency scheme was attempted through Melbourne himself, and it seems (what I did not know before) that he was in the first instance disposed to make up to Conroy, and Duncannon was eternally closeted

with him, particularly during the week or months preceding the death of King William; they evidently thought their political interests would be best consulted by a union with Conroy. Shortly before the death of the King, the Duchess wrote to Melbourne and told him it was her daughter's wish, and she was authorized to tell him so, that he would bring in a bill to establish a regency for a short time. Stockmar, who appears by some means to have been acquainted with everything that passed, spoke to Melbourne about it, denounced Conroy, and assured Melbourne that this demand of regency was made at the instigation of Conroy and without the consent or knowledge of the Princess. And he at the same time complained of the *commérage* continually going on between Duncannon and Conroy. Melbourne was struck all of a heap at this intelligence and at once promised that neither he nor anyone connected with him should have anything more to say to Conroy.

Precisely what a regency means, is told us, in another connection, by Greville:

January 13, 1842: . . . The appointment of a regent presupposes the incapacity of the Sovereign to discharge the functions of royalty, and the Regent is consequently invested with all the authority of the Crown. All its rights, privileges, and duties appertain to the Regent, who can and must do everything which the Sovereign would do if of full age. The age of the Sovereign can make no difference; the incapacity must be absolute, and the rule, whatever it be, equally applicable to a baby in arms and to a person within a month of her majority.

Strictly regarded, the proposal of Conroy to hold Victoria's person under duress and the letter of the Duchess of Kent, wrongfully claiming Victoria's authority, was high treason. And in dealing with Conroy, Queen Victoria, though no more than a girl of eighteen, displayed an immediate initiative, as decisive as the axe of the Tudors:

August 30, 1837: She lost no time in giving notice to Conroy of her intentions with regard to him; she saw him, and desired him to name the reward he expected for his services to her parents. He asked for the Red Ribband [Order of the Bath], an Irish Peerage, and a pension of £3,000 a year. She replied that

the two first rested with her Ministers, and she could not engage for them, but that the pension he should have.

Conroy, in fact, had "never once been invited to the Palace, or distinguished by the slightest mark of personal favour, so that nothing can be more striking than the contrast between the magnitude of the pecuniary bounty and the complete personal disregard of which he is the object."

To the Duchess, "the almost contemptuous way in which Conroy has been dismissed must be a bitter mortification." Indeed, "all things considered," it was "scarcely decent." And to Greville, not yet in the secret, the contrast between the "pecuniary munificence" of the Queen and the man's "personal exclusion from Court, has a remarkable and rather mysterious appearance."

With the Duchess and Conroy obliterated, Durham was left alone to face a Melbourne who had learned the facts. Durham, therefore, issued a manifesto which, by making no "allusion to the Ballot or the Radical desiderata," left his friends in the lurch:

December 8, 1837: . . . I asked Charles Buller if they would have Lord Brougham for their leader, and he said "certainly not," and added that "Durham had done nothing as yet to forfeit their confidence." He enlightened me at the same time about his own Radical opinions and views and the extent of them, together with those of the more moderate of his party, complaining that they were misrepresented and misunderstood; although for the Ballot and extension of the suffrage, he is opposed to reform of the House of Lords or any measure directly affecting the Constitution.

February 5, 1838: . . . Latterly he has been considered the head of the Radical party, and that party, who are not rich in Lords, and who are not insensible to the advantage of rank, gladly hailed him as their chief; for the last year or two, under the alternative influence of Russian Imperial flattery, Durham's sentiments have taken a very Conservative turn.

It is significant that, when Queen Victoria visited Germany, she declined absolutely to permit a Regency to be instituted. And the Government acquiesced—

August 30, 1845: . . . for no better reason than to gratify the nonsensical will of an obstinate girl who takes fancies into her head, and loves to have her own way. They will hear of it again without doubt, and I don't suppose they will ever let her go abroad again without appointing a regency, that is, Lords Justices.

When Greville wrote that, he did not know the reason why Victoria was suspicious of regencies.