CHAPTER LXIII

A WHITED SEPULCHRE

PERHAPS the most startling disclosures in Greville's unpublished material concern his near cousin and intimate associate, Lord George Bentinck. When "the Tory Democracy, as the *Standard* calls them," had to choose a leader in succession to Peel, it was upon Bentinck that the choice fell. Bentinck was supposed to be an honourable sportsman. What follows would appear to reduce his many epitaphs to mockery.

Bentinck, like Greville, started life as a private secretary. His chief was his uncle, Canning, who, it was said, "predicted great things of him if he would apply himself seriously to politics." But, like Greville, Bentinck "addicted himself with extraordinary vivacity to the turf," and even "lost £11,000 at Doncaster which he could not pay." The Duke, his father, "was greatly annoyed, but paid the money for him, exacting a promise that he would not bet any more on the turf."

"Of course," continues Greville, "he [the Duke] never dreamt of his keeping race horses," and hence arose a curious incident:

September 28, 1848: . . . The Duke, his father (the most innocent of men), had his curiosity awakened by seeing a great number of horses running in the names of men whom he never saw or heard of. These were all his son's aliases. He asked a great many questions about these invisible personages, to the amusement of all the Newmarket world. At last it was evident he must find out the truth, and I urged George to tell it him at once. With reluctance and no small apprehension, he assented, and mustering up courage he told the Duke that all those horses were his. The intimation was very ill received; the Duke was indignant. He accused him of having violated his word; and he was so angry that he instantly quitted Newmarket and returned to Welbeck. For a long time he would not see George at all; at last the Duchess contrived to pacify him;

he resumed his usual habits with his son, and in the end he took an interest in the horses, tacitly acquiesced in the whole thing, and used to take pleasure in seeing them and hearing about them.

The most important of the "aliases" was Greville himself in whose name Bentinck ran his animals. We read, "at this time and for a great many years, we were most intimate friends and I was the depository of his most secret thoughts and feelings," while "not an unkind word had ever passed between us, nor had a single cloud darkened our habitual intercourse."

When, therefore, Bentinck "fell desperately in love," Greville was his confidant; and it was perhaps unfortunate that the lady, so adored, should have been the Duchess of Richmond:

September 28, 1848: . . . This passion, the only one he ever felt for any woman, betrayed him into great imprudence of manner and behaviour, so much so that I ventured to put him on his guard. I cannot now say when this occurred, it is so long ago, but I well recollect that as I was leaving Goodwood after the races I took him aside, told him it was not possible to be blind to his sentiments, that he was exposing himself and her likewise; that I did not mean to thrust myself into his confidence in so delicate a matter, but besought him to remember that all eyes were on him, all tongues ready to talk, and that it behoved him to be more guarded and reserved for her sake as well as his own. He made no reply, and I departed. I think I repeated the same thing to him in a letter; but whether I did or no, I received from him a very long one in which he confessed his sentiments without disguise, went at great length into his own case, declared his inability to sacrifice feelings which made the whole interest of his existence, but affirmed with the utmost solemnity that he had no reason to believe his feelings were reciprocated by her, and that not only did he not aspire to *success*, but that if it were in his power to obtain it (which he knew it was not), he would not purchase his own gratification at the expense of her honour and happiness; in short, his letter amounted to this—

> Let me but visit her, I'll ask no more;
> Guiltless I'll gaze, and innocent adore.

At the time, it was much believed that a liaison existed between them, and there were persons who pretended that they knew it. Stradbroke spoke to Richmond about it, and articles appeared in some of the low weekly papers, dealers in scandal, which he traced (as he believed) to George Lennox, Richmond's brother. Once and once only he [Bentinck] spoke to me on this subject. He then poured forth all his feelings, but he gave me to understand that something had occurred of a painful nature. I did not ask and never knew what it was, and we neither of us ever referred to the subject again. His intimacy with the whole family continued the same in appearance, but it was not without disagreeable drawbacks and occasional clouds.

Between Greville and Bentinck, the "first quarrel" was over a horse, Preserve, bought for him in 1833. The tiff "was made up in appearance, never in reality," and a fierce letter from Bentinck, full of "gross and unwarrantable insults," ended "the turf connection." Greville contemplated a duel but, he writes, "I could not challenge my uncle's son." And, by consent, the letter was "destroyed," so obviating an "ostensible quarrel." Indeed, when Bentinck won £14,000 on Greville's Mango, the cousins "became mutually cordial again."

Bentinck's "career of success on the turf" was "astounding"; he was "the leviathan"; and "his stud was enormous."

June 6, 1843: . . . George backed a horse of his called Gaper (and not a good one), to win about £120,000. On the morning of the race the people came to hedge with him, when he laid the odds against him to £7,000; 47,000 to 7,000, I believe in all. He had three bets with Kelburne of unexampled amount. He laid Kelburne 13,000 to 7,000 on Cotherstone (the winner) against the British Yeoman, and Kelburne laid him 16,000 to 2,000 against Gaper. The result I believe was, to these two noble lords, that George Bentinck won about £9,000, and the other lost £6,000 or £7,000.

But if Bentinck's "authority and reputation were prodigiously great," so was "his arrogance." And when, at a meeting of the Jockey Club, Greville "made a speech in opposition to him," the resulting estrangement was "complete and irreparable." Writes Greville, "the next time he met me, he cut me dead."

In the year 1845, continues Greville (writing on September 28, 1848): "There was a great explosion in consequence of certain malpractices (and suspicions of others), on the turf, and here again George Bentinck took a very leading part in the committees in Parliament, and in the Jockey Club. He had now proclaimed himself to the world as the stern and indignant vindicator of turf honour and integrity, and he announced his determination to hunt out all delinquencies, and punish inexorably the delinquents in whatever station of life they might move. Accordingly a great enquiry took place in October, 1845, into the conduct of certain jockeys and others, as well as into that of two gentlemen (Messrs. Crommelin and Ives) against whom he displayed the most determined and bitter hostilities. These men were frightened out of their wits, well knowing the vigilance, perseverance, and virulence of their enemy, and they came to me to help them out of their dilemma. Their conduct has been very questionable, but there was enough that was doubtful in it and it was in fact so very little worse (if proved) than that of many who carried their heads high up in the air that I could without any violent breach of conscience lend them my aid to extricate them from his clutches. I had been now so long pitted against him and we had had so many encounters that I will not deny that I took a personal pleasure and interest in baffling him, and I did so before I became acquainted with the disclosures which were elicited in the progress of this case."

Lord George Bentinck's trainer had been John Day—"Honest John," as he was called—of Danebury, who was not too pleased when his patron's stable was transferred to Goodwood. The Days knew the gentleman, Crommelin, whom Bentinck was subjecting to discipline; and—to let Greville tell the story in his own way—

September 28, 1848: . . . In the hour of his danger they came in a very extraordinary manner, but very effectively to his assistance. They told him that they could furnish him with weapons which in case of necessity he could wield against Lord George with terrible effect, and that if the latter persisted in pursuing him to his ruin, he might overwhelm his accuser in a destruction not less complete. They had preserved all his [Bentinck's] correspondence during the whole period of their

connection and the whole of it they now abandoned to Crommelin. He selected from the vast mass a number of important letters, which he brought to me. They were damning in their import, for they disclosed a systematic course of treachery, falsehood, and fraud which would have been far more than sufficient to destroy any reputation (Note: While I am writing this I read in the *Economist* as follows: "He was the open and avowed enemy of the tricks by which horse racing is contaminated, and had acquired reputation by exposing and putting some of them down.") but which would have fallen with tenfold force upon the great Purist, the supposed type and model of integrity and honour. (Note: Stanley has written a letter to Tom Baring about a testimonial which is to be got up in honour of George Bentinck in which is the following passage, "an innate love of truthfulness and honour, and an intense abhorrence of all that is false trickery and underhand were among the leading features of his character, and able as he was etc., etc. . . . what won for him the respect of his opponents and the admiration of his countrymen was the conviction felt by all that he was never acting a part." What dupes people are in this world, and how it does abound in humbug and delusion! The Duke of Bedford may well write me word, "the nauseum that is written and spoken about George Bentinck surpasses anything I ever recollect.")

By Greville's advice the letters were not published. But—

September 28, 1848: . . . an intimation was conveyed to George Bentinck that he was threatened with a retaliation of some sort, and that the Days had put Crommelin in possession of certain letters of his. He affected great indifference, but the notification had a very evident effect on his conduct during the remainder of the enquiry, and from that time he never molested Crommelin any more.

Having served this purpose, the letters "were afterward destroyed."

We have thus no more than Greville's word for what "the black budget" contained. Indeed, says he frankly, "I have now only a faint recollection of many of these revolting details." But his summary is emphatic:

September 28, 1848 . . . Besides this unparalleled tissue of

fraud, falsehood, and selfishness, the secret correspondence divulged many other things, plans and schemes of all sorts, horses who were to be made favourites in order to be betted against. (Note: There was a horse called Meunier, against whom a great sum of money was laid which was divided between *the Duke of Richmond* and himself), not intended to win, then horses who were to run repeatedly in specified races and get beaten, till they were well handicapped in some great race which they were to run to win. (Note: One of his letters distinctly alluded to the bribery of jockeys who were to ride against him. He tells John Day he shall want to back some horse for so much for himself, so much for certain other people, and so much "for the jockeys who were to ride against him in the race." It would be unfair, however, to accuse him on this of direct bribery to the other jockeys not to win if they could. It was not this, but he thought it advisable as one of the means of success that the other jockeys should have some interest in his winning if they could not. However, such a letter, if it had appeared, would have had a very *ugly* and suspicious look, and one can easily imagine what he would have said of it in anybody else's case.) All these things were concocted with infinite care and explained in elaborate detail, the whole forming such a mass of roguery that any attempt at explanation, extenuation, or palliation would have been vain.

One specific incident was "indelibly impressed" on Greville's mind:

September 28, 1848: . . . The case of Crucifix is at once the strongest and the most personal to myself. She was an extraordinary animal and great was his anxiety to turn her to the best account. In October, just before she ran for the Criterion stake at Newmarket, she hit her leg while turning around in the stable and after the race it was very much swelled. When he went to the stable and saw this, he took fright, came down to the rooms and availing himself of the favour she was taken in, he laid a great sum of money against her for the Oaks by way of hedging. This was quite fair, but the important part is what follows. He sent for the veterinary surgeon, Barrow by name, who not knowing the cause of the swollen leg, gave an

opinion that it was a very bad case, that she probably would not stand sound, and at all events, must be blistered, fired, and thrown up for a long time. As soon, however, as she got home to Danebury, young John Day, who was himself a veterinary surgeon, ascertained that no mischief was done, and informed George Bentinck that she required none of the treatment that Barrow had prescribed but would be well again in ten days. On this he formed his scheme, his object being to get back all he had laid against Crucifix and as much more as he could, and in order to do this, to make everybody believe she was lame and would never run again. He began by writing to Barrow and desiring him to send in writing his opinion of the case, and having obtained this, he had a copy made of the letter, which he sent to John Day retaining the original in his own hands. Day was ordered to show this letter to everybody to whom he could find any pretext for showing it while he did the same with the other, amongst other people to *me* with whom he was then living on terms of amity and ostensibly of confidence. He knew that I had backed Crucifix, and he showed me this letter by way of friendly advice, that I might take an opportunity of hedging my money, while he took care to plant somebody to take the odds of me when I laid them, as I afterward did. This game he played with others who had backed Crucifix, showing them (as if by accident and while talking of other matters and complaining of his ill-luck) Barrow's letter and advising them to hedge. He spared nobody. One letter to John Day which I saw was to this effect. He told him that *George Byng* and *Mr. Greville* were going down to Mr. B. Walls and would probably go over to Danebury to see the horses, that he would naturally show them, and he must take care to make Crucifix look as bad and as "bedevilled" as he could, that at any rate *I* should go over and that if I did, he was to take care to show me Barrow's letter. In a subsequent letter he said that he need not show me Barrow's letter as he had already shown it me himself. The burthen of all his letters to John Day was to show Barrow's letter to as many people as he could. It completely answered, for he got a great sum of money upon her both for the 2000 gs. stake and the Oaks, both of which she won.

On Lord George Bentinck, then, Greville passes (July 5, 1844) this judgment:

"What a humbug it all is, and if everybody knew all that I know of his tricks and artifices what a rogue he would be thought! and yet strange to say, I am persuaded he would not commit for anything on earth a clear, undoubted act of dishonesty. He has made for himself a peculiar code of morality and honour, and what he has done, he thinks he has a right to do, that the game at which he plays warrants deceit and falsehood to a certain extent and in a certain manner. He cannot but know that if all the circumstances relating to Crucifix, by which he won so much money, were revealed, they would be considered disgraceful and dishonest, but he no doubt justifies them to himself. Then about betting against horses; nobody has ever been more unscrupulous than he in making money in this way. In short, while he is thundering away against poor low-lived rogues for the villainies they have committed, he has himself been doing the same things, which high-minded men (like his father, for instance), who do not split hairs and make nice distinctions in questions of honour, would think nearly if not quite as discreditable and reprehensible."

When Lord George Bentinck plunged into politics, he abandoned racing; and, writes Greville:

September 28, 1848: . . . I have always thought that his conduct in selling his stud all at one swoop, and at once giving up the turf, to which he had just before seemed so devoted, was never sufficiently appreciated and praised. It was a great sacrifice both of pleasure and profit, and it was made to what he had persuaded himself was a great public duty.

September 28, 1848: . . . His *début* in the House of Commons was a remarkable exhibition, and made a great impression at the time: not that it was a very good, still less an agreeable speech; quite the reverse. He chose the worst moment he possibly could have done to rise; the House was exhausted by several nights of debate and had no mind to hear more. He rose very late on the last night, and he spoke for above three hours; his speech was ill-delivered, marked with all those peculiar faults which he never got rid of; it was very tiresome; it contained much that was in very bad taste; but in spite of all de-

fects it was listened to, and it was considered a very extraordinary performance, giving indications of great ability and powers which nobody had any idea that he possessed.

June 25, 1848: . . . Everybody behaved ill; nothing could exceed the virulence and intemperance of George Bentinck's attack on Grey and Hawes, accusing them in terms not to be mistaken of wilful suppression of documents, and then the most disgraceful shuffling and lying to conceal what they had done and escape from the charges against them. On the other hand, John Russell lost his temper; and as gentlemen in that predicament usually do, at the same time lost his good taste and good sense. He twitted George Bentinck with his turf pursuits, and managed to make what he said appear more offensive than it really was intended to be. This brought Disraeli to the defence of his friend, and he poured forth a tide of eloquent invective and sarcasm which was received with frantic applause by his crew; they roared and hooted and converted the House of Commons into such a bear garden as no one ever saw before.

September 28, 1848: . . . Notwithstanding his arrogance and his violence, his constant quarrels and the intolerable language he indulged in, he was popular in the House of Commons, and was liked more or less wherever he went. He was extremely good-looking and particularly distinguished and high-bred; then he was gay, agreeable, obliging, and good-natured, charming with those he liked, and by whom he was not thwarted and opposed.

On September 21, 1848, he was walking in the grounds of Welbeck Abbey when he fell down dead, an event, writes Greville, "so strange and sudden that it could not fail to make a very great sensation in the world, and so it did."

September 28, 1848: . . . His memory has been kindly and generously dealt with; he was on the whole high in favour with the world; he had been recently rising in public estimation; and his sudden and untimely end has stifled all feelings but those of sympathy and regret, and silenced all voices but those of eulogy and lamentation. He has long been held up as the type and model of all that is most honourable and high-minded; "*iracundus, inexorabilis, acer*," indeed, but the lofty and incorruptible scorner of everything mean and dishonourable,

and the stern exposer and scourger of every species of delinquency and fraud, public or private.

"For his own reputation and celebrity, he died at the most opportune period; his fame had probably reached its zenith." Nor did Greville fail to add his tribute:

September 28, 1848: . . . The world will and must form a very incorrect estimate of his character; more of what was good than of what was bad in it was known to the public; he had the credit of virtues which he did not possess.

Bentinck's biographer was none other than Disraeli himself and, naturally, Disraeli applied to Greville for personal details:

November 24, 1851: Yesterday morning Disraeli called on me to speak to me about his work, *The Life of George Bentinck*, which he has written and is just going to bring out. I read him a part of my sketch of his character. I found that he meant to confine it [the *Life*] to his political career of the last three years of his existence, and to keep clear of racing and all his antecedent life. He seems to have formed a very just conception of him, having, however, seen the best of him, and therefore taking a more favourable view of his character than I, who knew him longer and better, could do.

When, therefore, the *Life* appeared, no emphasis was laid on these intimacies:

London, December 19, 1851: Mr. Disraeli has sent me his book, *The Life of Lord George Bentinck*, which, though principally recording very dry Parliamentary debates, he has managed to make very readable. He does ample justice to his hero, but I think without exaggeration; and he certainly makes him out to have been a very remarkable man, with great ability and a superhuman power of work.

The details which Disraeli thought it advisable to ignore in 1851 are now disclosed.