CHAPTER LXV

"JOHN"

When Sir Robert Peel forced Free Trade on his Protectionist party he plunged politics into chaos. His action "completely broke up" the Tory party. "The great Conservative schism in 1846," wrote Greville on August 14, 1854, "produced a final separation between the few able"—who believed in Free Trade—"and the numerous mediocrity"—who clung to Protection:

August 14, 1854: . . . Ever since that time the House of Commons has been in a state of disorganization and confusion: the great party ties had been severed.

Ten years later—that is, in 1856—there was "not one man in the House of Commons who has ten followers, neither Gladstone, nor Disraeli, nor Palmerston."

Broadly there were four parties, the Whigs, the Peelites or Free Trade Tories, the Protectionist Tories, and (May 12, 1852) "the 'Brigadiers,' as the Irish squadron was called."

August 14, 1854: . . . John Russell succeeded on the fall of Peel, but the Peelites warmly resented the conduct of the Whigs in Peel's last struggle, and, though they hated Derby and his crew much more, never gave Lord John's government a cordial support.

Lord John Russell, better known to-day as Earl Russell, was a younger son of the ducal house of Bedford:

September 27, 1841: . . . It is very pleasant to be at Woburn, with or without society, a house abounding in every sort of luxury and comfort, and with inexhaustible resources for every taste—a capital library, all the most curious and costly books, pictures, prints, interesting portraits, gallery of sculpture, garden with the rarest exotics, collected and maintained at a vast expense—in short, everything that wealth and refined taste can supply.

February 27, 1847: . . . A man (whose name and history I have now forgotten) who thought he had some claims on the Government for remuneration or employment made several applications to John Russell, who would not attend to them. The fellow turned savage, and was heard to utter threats of personal violence, which from his determined character gave great alarm to the friends and adherents who heard of them. Great uneasiness prevailed for a time, and many consultations were held, and the matter was deemed so serious that at last they resolved to get the man out of the country and to purchase his forbearance, though not with public money. In this emergency the Duke of Bedford came forward and agreed to pay him a pension of £300 a year, with which he was satisfied, and went abroad. . . . I do not believe Lord John himself has ever been informed of it.

King William IV had regarded Lord John Russell as a Radical. And Lord John had declined, frankly, to regard the Reform Bill as the last word of progress:

August 11, 1831: . . . Nothing remarkable in the House of Commons but Lord John Russell's declaration that "this Bill would not be final if it was not found to work as well as the people desired," which is sufficiently impudent considering that hitherto they have always pretended that it was to be final, and that it was made so comprehensive only that it might be so; this has been one of their grand arguments, and now we are never to sit down and rest, but go on changing till we get a good fit, and that for a country which will have been made so fidgetty that it won't stand still to be measured.

Russell's environment was surrounded by privilege. And even a necessity like copper was withheld from the nation by his family:

Endsleigh, July 14, 1848: . . . We have passed four days here pleasantly enough; it is exquisitely beautiful, so is the country round about it; a mass of comfort and luxury; house perfection, and everything kept as English houses alone are. This place was a creation of the Duke's. The house, which is a cottage, cost between £70,000 and £80,000, and the grounds, laid out with inimitable taste, must have cost thousands more. There are

sixty miles of grass rides and gravel walks. Yesterday we went to see a farmhouse, once one of the hunting seats of the Abbot of Tavistock, a great man whose ample domains were granted to the Earl of Bedford, who was gorged with ecclesiastical spoils here and at Woburn. We then went to see the great copper mine discovered three or four years ago, the best and most profitable in the West of England. The ground was leased three and a half years ago to certain adventurers, who covenanted to give the Duke one fifteenth of the *gross* produce; and as soon (if ever) as they made £30,000 a year from it, one twelfth. After some fruitless attempts, they came upon this lode very near the surface and found it of the best copper. A fortune was made *instanter*. The shares were at one time worth £700,000, i.e., £700 apiece; since that there has been a great fall, but they are now worth £200 apiece. The expense of working is, however, so much increased, that the Duke's agent told me he got nearly one half the *net* profits. All this country is full of copper, but the Duke told me he was resolved not to grant any more leases for mining, although he had applications every day and could make a great deal of money by giving them; and he is averse to promote the spirit of gambling, which money speculations very generally excite among the people, often greatly to their loss and always to the detriment of the agriculture of the country; the latter is neglected for the chances of the former; the farmers let their carts and horses to the miners instead of employing them on their own farms; and though mining is both a profitable and a popular employment, the Duke deems it so mischievous that he will not suffer any more of his ground to be broken up for the chance of the copper that may be found underneath it.

Lord John Russell rapidly swung to the Right:

June 27, 1836: . . . Tavistock talked to me a great deal yesterday about Lord John Russell, who, he declares, is by no means the Radical he is accused by his adversaries of being, that he is opposed tooth and nail to the reform of the House of Lords, much disagreeing with O'Connell, that he has constantly and firmly refused to comply with the demands of the Dissenters in the matter of Church rates, and that in the Ecclesiastical Commission he and the bishops are on the best terms, and they are abundantly satisfied with him that the greatest Reformer

there is Lord Harrowby, and John Russell has had to act as mediator between him and the bishops.

May 5, 1839: Lord John Russell's letter to the electors of Stroud came out late on Friday evening, and three editions were sold of it yesterday, and not a copy to be had. It is very sound and temperate, will be a bitter pill to the Radicals, and a source of vexation to his own people, but will be hailed with exceeding satisfaction by all moderate and really conservative men of whatever party.

To his brother, the Duke of Bedford (August 12, 1841), John wrote—

August 12, 1841: . . . that while he would be in his place to support what he considered the good cause (a somewhat vague phrase), he would adhere to a moderate course, and he was aware in so doing that he should run the risk of giving great offence to many of his party, and probably of determining his own exclusion from office.

Those were days when the Ballot was regarded as Bolshevism:

June 1, 1839: . . Macaulay is gone to Edinburgh to be elected in the room of Abercromby, so he is again about to descend into the arena of politics. He made a very eloquent and, to my surprise, a very Radical speech, declaring himself for Ballot and short Parliaments. I was the more astonished at this, because I knew he had held very moderate language, and I remembered his telling me that he considered the Radical party to be reduced to "Grote and his wife," after which I did not expect to see him declare himself the advocate of Grote's favourite measure and the darling object of the Radicals.

July 14, 1838: . . . Macaulay saw that he was as great a Radical as anybody, that is, that if ever the voice of the nation should be as clearly and universally pronounced for reform of the House of Lords, or any other great change, as it had been for the Reform Bill, he should be for it too, but that now he did not think it worth while to give such projects a thought, and it no more occurred to him to entertain them in this country than it would to advocate the establishment of a representative government in Turkey, or a monarchy and hereditary peerage in America.

February 18, 1838: . . . Parke [the Judge], who is an alarmist, had just before said that he had never doubted when the Reform Bill had passed that England would become a republic, and when Brougham said that he gave the Ballot five years for its accomplishment, Parke said, "And in five years from that we shall have a republic," on which Brougham gave him a great cuff, and with a scornful laugh, said, "A republic! pooh, nonsense! Well, but what if there is? *There are judges* in a republic, and very well paid too." "Well paid!" said the other in the same tone, "and no." "Yes, they are; they have £350 a year. But, never mind, you shall be taken care of; I will speak to Grote about you." This is the way he goes on.

The Ballot was not conceded by Parliament until the year 1872.

And over this plank in the Chartist programme John Russell "threw the Radicals into a paroxysm of chagrin and disappointment."

June 7, 1839: . . . The Tories had heard he was going to give way, and Peel, who is naturally suspicious and distrustful, believed it; but when he found he would not give way, nor hold out any hopes for the future, Peel nailed him to that point and spoke with great force and effect. This debate was considered very damaging to Whigs and Radicals, and likely to lead to a dissolution—first of Parliament, and then of Government. But the Radicals are now adopting a whining, fawning tone, have dropped that of bluster and menace, and, having before rudely insisted on the mighty slice of the loaf, are now content to put their tails between their legs and swallow such crumbs as they can get.

A day or two later, there was a change:

June 10, 1839: Notwithstanding Lord John Russell's speech on Fleetwood's motion, and Melbourne's anti-movement declaration in the other House, they have to their eternal disgrace succumbed to the Radicals, and been squeezed into making Ballot an open question. For John Russell I am sorry. I thought he would have been stouter. . . . I asked him [Lord Howick] if he was not conscious that it was only like buying off the Picts and Scots, and that fresh demands would speedily follow with

redoubled confidence; and he owned he was. It may prolong for a brief period the sickly existence of the Government.

To a man like Richard Cobden, Reform had no terrors:

February 18, 1848: . . . Cobden's tone and spirit were bad, and, so far as can be judged of his intentions, he means to go to work in the line of pure democracy, and with the object of promoting the power of the middle classes over that of the aristocracy.

February 8, 1848: . . . Everybody was disgusted at Cobden's impertinence and (it may be added) folly. His head is turned by all the flattery he has received, and he has miserably exposed himself since his return to England, showing that he is a man of one idea and no statesman.

But to Greville's friends (March 16, 1849) "the Reform Bill had destroyed the machinery of rotten boroughs, and let in a flood of popular influence."

January 27, 1848: The Attorney General [Sir John Jervis] has got into a scrape about his son's election, but it remains to be seen if he will not get out of it; there was a petition against young Jervis and they gave the petitioners £1,500 to drop it.

London, January 2, 1849: . . . Universal suffrage is to pick out the men fit to frame new Constitutions, and when the delegates thus chosen have been brought together—no matter how ignorant, how stupid, how in every way unfit they may be—they expect to be allowed to have their own absurd and ruinous way, and to break up at their caprice and pleasure all the ancient foundations, and tear down the landmarks of society; and this havoc, and ruin, and madness are dignified with the fine names of constitutional reform.

June 3, 1848: . . . He [Sir James Graham] said they must dissolve; they had no other course, and that revolution would be the inevitable consequence of a dissolution and a fresh election at such a time as this; that such a Parliament would be returned as we had never seen; Hume's reform and the four points [of the Chartists] would be carried, and the Monarchy swept away.

As a leader of the Whigs in the House of Commons (February 26, 1835), Lord John Russell "surpassed all expectations

hitherto . . . which is matter of great exultation to his party." And "by universal admission even of his enemies," so we read, he "made an excellent speech."

December 24, 1837: . . . He is a marvellous little man, always equal to the occasion, afraid of nobody, fixed in his principles, clear in his ideas, collected in his manner, and bold and straightforward in his disposition. He invariably speaks well when a good speech is required from him, and this is upon every important question.

But, according to Greville:

Stud House, May 22 and 25, 1848: . . . John Russell was not fit to be the *head* of a government, was admirable in the House of Commons, but wanting in the qualities that a Prime Minister ought to have.

July 13, 1847: . . . Lord John does not make up by his personal qualities for his political mistakes or shortcomings; he is not conciliatory, and sometimes gives grievous offence. The other night in the House of Commons he was so savage with Hume, without any cause, that he enlisted all sympathies in Hume's favour, and was generally blamed for his tone and manner. He is miserably wanting in amenity, and in the small arts of acquiring popularity, which are of such incalculable value to the leader of a party, still more of a government; then, while he has the reputation of being obstinate, he is wanting in firmness.

January 30, 1846: . . . Since his speech the first night, which was very good, John Russell does not shine; but he is a very clever, ingenious, but *little* man, full of personal feelings and antipathies, and not, I suspect, without something of envy, which galls and provokes him and makes him lose his head and his temper together.

March 21, 1846: . . . The more I see and hear of him, the more unfit I think him for the office of Prime Minister. He has so many littlenesses, such obstinacy, and often is so unprudent, that I doubt any government going on long, of which he is the head. He would be a very good leader of the Commons, with a Prime Minister to whom he looked up. If Lord Spencer had lived and had taken the office, matters would very likely have gone on well.

Sometimes "John" (February 11, 1849) "made a fool of himself in the House of Commons." He was (April 6, 1849) "so feeble and infirm of purpose." And yet (March 2, 1851) "he is not a man to be flung aside as damaged and used up." He had "still great qualities."

During Lord Derby's Tory Administration Lord John enjoyed the quiet life:

London, November 11, 1852: . . . Lord John has been engaged in literary pursuits, as the executor of Moore and the depositary of Fox's papers, and he is about to bring out two volumes of Moore and one of Fox, but in neither is there to be much of his own composition; he has merely arranged the materials in each.

March 31, 1855: I am busy on the task of editing a volume of Moore's correspondence left to me by John Russell, to complete the whole publication of the Journal, etc.

Toward Lord John Russell, the Queen (February 18, 1846) had a "bad feeling":

Newmarket, October 21, 1859: . . . I gather from him [Clarendon] that neither Palmerston nor John are much in favour with the Queen, but that they cannot have everything their own way in Foreign Affairs, as the rest of the Cabinet are very vigilant and not at all passive, and the Queen likewise.

May 3, 1848: John is very much annoyed with the Queen on two accounts. First she has chosen (without consulting him) to issue an order for everybody's appearing at her drawing rooms in garments of British manufacture. This was done by herself and the Prince, and is taken up eagerly by the Protectionists, especially the ladies. It is so directly contrary to the principles of Free Trade, and such a miserable claptrap, that John is disgusted. Spencer sent to him to say there was an intended association of ladies to carry out this object, and asked if Lady John would be on it. He wrote back, No, No, very angrily, much to Spencer's surprise, who fancied he knew of it. The other thing is this: the Government have only two business days in the House of Commons, Tuesday and Friday, and have great difficulty in getting their business through. The Queen has increased the difficulty by fixing on Friday for her balls, which take people away, so John begged she would change the day and give her balls on Wednesdays, which are *dies non* (except in

the morning) in the Houses of Parliament. She refused. This is very selfish, very wrong, and very impertinent. It seems she is mighty despotic about her social arrangements, and hates any interference with them. John is very wrong if he does not make her give way.

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"Of all men," wrote Greville in 1844, "he [the Czar, then visiting England] ought to have made acquaintance with the remarkable leader of the Whig party (Lord John Russell) but the Queen in very bad taste and very odiously had not asked him to her party the night before."

December 10, 1853: . . . Meanwhile John has got into a scrape with the Queen. He was to have been at Windsor the other day at the Council, but did not make his appearance, to the surprise and somewhat the displeasure of the Queen. She had asked Aberdeen to explain to her the provisions of the Reform Bill, and he referred her to John Russell, who he said was better able to explain them. Accordingly she desired John to attend her for the purpose and he was to have come to Windsor that day. He absented himself very cavalierly without making any excuse and she did not at all like it. The Duke spoke to him about it, and he said he was better employed at home in drawing up the Bill. The truth is the Queen and John dislike each other, and have their mutual complaints to make. She thinks he is neglectful and disrespectful to her, and he thinks she is wanting in graciousness and confidence to him, and no longer talks to him as she used to do. Of course, when he was her Prime Minister she was obliged to talk to him about everything and now she does so to Aberdeen instead, whom she infinitely prefers, and having no official obligation and no personal inclination to talk to John, she has very little communication with him, and this mortifies and offends him. He is very imprudent in letting his temper prevail and in giving her umbrage, because as he desires and expects in a few months to be Prime Minister again, it is very essential that he should keep on good terms with her.