CHAPTER LXXXI

THE RIVALS

With Peel committed to Free Trade, there gathered around him a group of Tories, like minded, who were known as Peelites. They were few in number, men to be weighed, not counted, and, for a dozen years or more, they served as the Girondists of Liberalism.

An example of the man with a cross-bench mind was Sir James Graham:

December 12, 1830: . . . Graham's elevation is the most monstrous of all. He was once my friend, a college intimacy revived in the world, and which lasted six months, when, thinking he could do better, he cut me, as he had done others before. I am not a fair judge of him, because the pique which his conduct to me naturally gave me would induce me to underrate him, but I take vanity and self-sufficiency to be the prominent features of his character, though of the extent of his capacity I will give no opinion. Let time show; I think he will fail. [Time did show it to be very considerable, and the *volvenda dies* brought back our former friendship, as will hereafter appear; he certainly *did not fail.*]

He came into Parliament ten years ago, spoke and failed, He had been a provincial hero, the Cicero and the Romeo of Yorkshire and Cumberland, a present Lovelace and a future Pitt. He was disappointed in love (the particulars are of no consequence), married and retired to digest his mortifications of various kinds, to become a country gentleman, patriot, reformer, financier.

In one debate, Graham was "a total failure, got into nautical terms and simile about a ship in which he floundered and sank."

For a time (July 5, 1848) Peel and Graham "were man and wife politically."

But:

November 24, 1851: . . . With all his ability he is a most strange and inconsistent politician. It is impossible to know what he will do, and I suspect he does not know himself.

February 7, 1849: . . . He said, "I have played some pranks before high heaven in my time. I quitted the Whigs once, and it would not do to quit them again; and unless I could subscribe to all their past conduct and policy, as well as feel quite satisfied for the future, it was better not to join." The great obstacle he owned was Palmerston.

July 9, 1837: . . . He is now little better than a Tory, a very high Churchman, and one of the least liberal of the Conservative leaders. In Lord Grey's Government he was one of the most violent, and for going to greater lengths than the majority of his colleagues. . . . Graham earnestly advocated the Ballot, and Lord Durham says he has in his possession many letters of Graham's in which he presses for a larger measure of reform than they actually brought forward.

Of the Peelites, the most notable was, to quote Macaulay, "a young man of unblemished character and of distinguished parliamentary talents, the rising hope of those stern unbending Tories who follow, reluctantly and mutinously, a leader whose experience and eloquence are indispensable to them, but whose cautious temper and moderate temper, they abhor."

Greville tells (December 24, 1837) Gladstone "spoke very well" on Canada and (April 2, 1838) "made a first-rate speech in defence of the [West Indian] planters which places him in the front rank in the House of Commons . . . he converted or determined many adverse or doubtful votes." At the outset, Gladstone was thus not very sound on slavery.

In conscience, Gladstone was so sensitive that when Sir Robert Peel proposed a grant of public money for the Roman Catholic College of Maynooth in Ireland, he resigned the Presidency of the Board of Trade:

January 30, 1845: Yesterday Lord Wharncliffe told me he had a secret to tell me. This was Gladstone's resignation, which has been in agitation nearly a year, ever since Peel gave notice that he would do a great deal more for the Irish education and improve Maynooth. Nor does Gladstone really object to these measures; but he thinks that he has so deeply and pub-

licly committed himself by his books to the opposite principle that he cannot without a great appearance of inconsistency be a party to them.

February 6, 1845: On Tuesday night, for the first time for some years, I went to the House of Commons, principally to hear Gladstone's explanation. . . . [It] was ludicrous. Everybody said that he had only succeeded in showing that his resignation was quite uncalled for.

The rise of Disraeli is full of encouragement to young politicians. He had wished to become a publisher, but had appeared to lack the discretion required in that industry.

April 2, 1847: . . . Moxon told me on Wednesday that some years ago Disraeli had asked him to take him into partnership, but he refused, not thinking he was sufficiently prudent to be trusted. He added, he did not know how Dizzy would like to be reminded of that now.

Disraeli thus turned to statesmanship and applied for recognition simultaneously to both parties:

December 6, 1834: The Chancellor called on me yesterday about getting young Disraeli into Parliament (through the means of George Bentinck) for Lynn. I had told him George wanted a good man to assist in turning out William Lennox, and he suggested the above-named gentleman, whom he called a friend of Chandos. His [Disraeli's] political principles must, however, be in abeyance, for he said that Durham was doing all he could to get him by the offer of a seat, and so forth; if, therefore, he is undecided and wavering between Chandos and Durham, he must be a mighty impartial personage. I don't think such a man will do, though just such as Lyndhurst would be connected with.

Lord George Bentinck, however, though destined to be a close colleague of Disraeli in later years, "won't hear of" him now.

Disraeli, dressed as a dandy, entered Parliament:

December 8, 1837: . . . Mr. Disraeli made his first exhibition the other night, beginning with florid assurance, speedily de-

generating into ludicrous absurdity, and being at last put down with inextinguishable shouts of laughter. . . .

It is said that such a scene of disorder and such a bear garden never was beheld. The noise and confusion are so great that the proceedings can hardly be heard or understood, and it was from something growing out of this confusion and uproar that the Speaker thought it necessary to address the House last night and complain that he no longer enjoyed its confidence, and if he saw any future indication that such was the case he should resign the Chair. His declaration was taken very quietly, for nobody said a word.

August 20, 1848: On Wednesday night Disraeli made a very brilliant speech on foreign affairs in the House of Commons, and Palmerston a very able reply which was received with great applause and admiration. It was, however, only a simulated contest between them; for Dizzy, while pretending to attack Palmerston with much fire and fury, did not in reality touch him on difficult points.

In April, 1846, Greville described the Protectionist Tories as "a party of which George Bentinck and Disraeli are the leaders." And there was a curious suggestion that this "party" should combine with the Whigs against Peel:

Newmarket, Sunday, April, 1846: . . . Bessborough, however, who seems to have taken a very *low* view of the matter all along, urged John Russell to connect himself with the Protectionists rather than with Peel, for this reason: that Peel was all staff and no rank and file; men who would want offices and high ones and bring little strength; whereas the others would bring great numbers and be satisfied with very few and very subordinate offices!

The breach in the Tory ranks developed:

Newmarket, Sunday, April, 1846: . . . On Friday night there was a breeze between Peel and Disraeli which at first appeared menacing, but ended amicably enough, though amicable is hardly a word to be used between these two men. But there was very near being something more serious out of the House owing to the excitement of Jonathan Peel. Disraeli had com-

mented on Peel's cheering a certain part of Cobden's speech in his usual tone of impertinence and bitterness, and he said that Peel had by his cheer expressed his concurrence with such and such sentiments. Peel interrupted him, saying, "I utterly deny it," on which Disraeli said he had given him the lie, and sat down. Then came all that is reported, which ended as I have said, but in the meantime Jonathan Peel went over to Disraeli, sat down by him and said, "What you have just said is false." He repeated it, and then went to George Bentinck and told him what he had just said. Disraeli was so astonished that he said nothing at first, but soon went to George Bentinck, told him also, and placed the matter in his hands. This made a referee necessary on Jonathan Peel's side, and he went and fetched Rous and put him in communication with George Bentinck. As soon as Rous heard the story, he saw that his principal could not be justified, and he consented to an apology which was agreed on between him and George Bentinck, who seems to have acted with becoming moderation. The apology was not abject, but it was ample. Peel is a man of quick passions and excitable temper, but he generally has great command over himself, which he lost on this occasion.

May 21, 1846: Last week the debate in the House of Commons came to a close at last, wound up by a speech of Disraeli's, very clever, in which he hacked and mangled Peel with a most unsparing severity, and positively tortured his victim. It was a miserable and degrading spectacle. The whole mass of the Protectionists cheered him with a vociferous delight, making the roof ring again; and when Peel spoke, they screamed and hooted at him in the most brutal manner. When he vindicated himself and talked of honour and conscience, they assailed him with shouts of derision and gestures of contempt. Such treatment in a House of Commons, where for years he had been an object of deference and respect, nearly overcame him. The Speaker told me that for a minute and more he was obliged to stop, and for the first time in his life, probably, he lost his self-possession; and the Speaker thought he would have been obliged to sit down, and expected him to burst into tears. They hunt him like a fox, and they are eager to run him down and kill him in the open, and they are full of exultation at thinking they have nearly accomplished this object.

"Dizzy" and Bentinck (June 20, 1846) were thus a "choice pair" and for "Dizzy," therefore, to deliver "a better Philippic against Peel" was thus "a labour of love" (June 19, 1846).

February 25, 1853: . . . Tomline told me that his system of attacking the late Sir Robert Peel was settled after this manner. When the great schism took place, three of the secéders went to Disraeli (Miles, Tyrrel, and a third whom I have forgotten), and proposed to him to attack and vilify Peel regularly, but with discretion; not to fatigue and disgust the House, to make a speech against him about once a fortnight or so, and promised if he would that a constant and regular attendance of a certain number of men should be there to cheer and support him, remarking that nobody was ever efficient in the House of Commons without this support certain. He desired twenty minutes, to consider of this offer, and finally accepted it. We have seen the result, a curious beginning of an important political career. Now they dread and hate him, for they know in his heart he has no sympathy with them, and that he has no truth or sincerity in his conduct or speeches, and would throw them over if he thought it his interest.

According to Reeve, Disraeli later "altogether denied the truth of the story."

March 1, 1846: . . . Their great hero, Disraeli, spoke on Friday for two hours and a half, cleverly and pointedly; it was meant to be an argumentative speech, and to exhibit his powers in the grave line. Accordingly there was very little of his accustomed bitterness and impertinent sarcasms on Peel, but a great deal of statistical detail and reasoning upon it. The Protectionists thought it very fine, but in reality it was poor and worthless.

January 23, 1846: . . . Then came an hour of gibes and bitterness, all against Peel personally, from Disraeli, with some good hits, but much of it tiresome; vehemently cheered by the Tories, but not once by the Whigs, who last year used to cheer similar exhibitions lustily. I never heard him before; his fluency is wonderful, his cleverness great, and his mode of speaking certainly effective, though there is something monotonous in it.

February 25, 1846: The debate [on the Corn Laws] drags on,

this being the third week of it. The Protectionists are very proud of the fight they have made, which in point of fact has been plausible and imposing enough.

June 20, 1846: Though ill with the gout, I made shift to hobble down to the House of Commons to hear Peel's defence last night. It was very triumphant, crushing George Bentinck and Disraeli, and was received with something like enthusiasm by the House. George Bentinck rose, in the midst of a storm of cheers at the end of Peel's speech, which lasted some minutes, in a fury which his well-known expression revealed to me, and, with the dogged obstinacy which supereminently distinguishes him, and a no less characteristic want of tact and judgment, against all the feelings and sympathies of the House, endeavoured to renew and insist upon his charges. Nothing could be more injurious to himself and his party. I never heard him speak before, and was induced to stay for five minutes out of curiosity. I was surprised at his self-possession and fluency, and his noise and gesticulation were even greater than I was prepared for. John Russell spoke handsomely of Peel, and so did Morpeth, which was very wise of them and will be very useful. Nothing could be more miserable than the figure which the choice pair, George Bentinck and Disraeli, cut; and they got pretty well lectured from different sides of the House, but not half so well as they ought and might have been. However, this affair has been of great service to Peel, and sheds something of lustre over his last days. The abortive attempt to ruin his character, which has so signally failed and recoiled on the heads of his accusers, has gathered round him feelings of sympathy which will find a loud and general echo in the country.

Disraeli (February 25, 1851), who "disgusted everybody by what he said and his manner of saying it"—

London, February 25, 1851: . . . has nothing but the cleverness of an adventurer. Nobody has any confidence in him, or supposes he has any principles whatever; and it remains to be seen whether he has tact and judgment enough to lead the House of Commons.

February 10, 1850: . . . The Government was only saved from a defeat on Wednesday morning by the bad tactics of Dis-

raeli, who moved so strong a resolution that few would support it.

Bath, July 7, 1852: . . . Disraeli has been a perfect will-o'-the-wisp, flitting about from one opinion to another, till his real opinions and intentions are become matter of mere guess and speculation. He has given undoubted proofs of his great ability, and showed how neatly he could handle such a subject as finance, with which he never can have been at all familiar; but having been well taught by his subalterns, and applying a mind naturally clear, ready, and acute to the subject, he contrived to make himself fully master of it, and to produce to the House of Commons a financial statement the excellence of which was universally admitted and gained him great applause.