CHAPTER LXXXII

THE DÉBUT OF THE INSCRUTABLE

THE world in which Greville lived and moved (and had his being) was apt to be anti-Semitic:

August 21, 1836: . . . The King [William IV] at his last levee received Dr. Allen to do homage for the see of Ely, when he said to him, "My Lord, I do not mean to interfere in any way with your vote in Parliament except on one subject, *the Jews*, and I trust I may depend on your always voting against them."

Even the Rothschilds were sometimes under suspicion:

January 17, 1830: . . . Charles Mills told me the other day that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been making enquiries as to the fact of Rothschild having sold his India stock at the time he did.

To recognize the citizenship of the Jews was a victory over prejudice:

June 7, 1858: . . . The most interesting event last week was the virtual settlement of the eternal Jew Question, which the House of Lords sulkily acquiesced in. It was very desirable for many reasons to put an end to it.

"Disraeli," so wrote Greville on February 25, 1853, "voted for the Jews but did not speak, which was very base of him."

It was against an age-long antipathy, then, that Benjamin Disraeli had to make his way. The Duke of Bedford (November 15, 1854) "spoke very disparagingly of Disraeli and said his want of character was fatal to him and weighed down all his cleverness." The idea that the Queen was taken with him at first is wholly a myth. On the contrary (June 24, 1848), she had "a horror of Disraeli which John [Russell] has been trying to get over":

March 4, 1850: Her [the Queen's] favourite aversions are first and foremost Palmerston, whom she seems to hate more than ever, and Disraeli next.

It was by tact and courage that Disraeli overcame these obstacles to a career. Greville (November 12, 1855) found him "wonderfully kind and serviceable" and "got into a sort of intimacy such as I never thought could have taken place between us."

January 23, 1858: On arriving in town yesterday, I received a visit from Disraeli, who said he had come to consult me *in confidence*, and to ask my opinion, by which his own course would be very much influenced.

It was an era when, of necessity, politics drew man into a gamble. In the House of Lords, there were two possible Prime Ministers. One was Derby, a Reformer turned Tory, and the other Aberdeen, a Tory turned Free Trader. And in the House of Commons, there were Disraeli, a Radical turned Tory, and Gladstone, a Tory turning Radical. Men were moving hither and thither and meeting, only to part company again.

Disraeli put his money on Derby and the Protectionists:

February 6, 1847: . . . Stanley [Derby] must now be ready to tear his hair at having quitted the House of Commons, for with all his great power of speaking (never greater than now) he is lost in the House of Lords where it is all beating the air. Then in the House of Commons he must trust to George Bentinck and Disraeli: the former with an intemperance and indiscretion ever pregnant with dangerous dilemmas; and the other with a capacity so great that he cannot be cast aside, and a character so disreputable that he cannot be trusted.

February 10, 1848: . . . The Protectionists met yesterday and elected Granby, all the world laughing at their choice. It appears that the reports of George Bentinck's easy and good-humoured retirement are not true. There was an angry correspondence, much heat, and considerable doubt about the successor; some being for Stafford, the majority for Granby, in the proportions of 60 to 40.

February 7, 1849: . . . There had been a great deal of squabbling among the Protectionists about their leadership, some wanting Herries, some Granby, and some Disraeli, and when Parliament met there was nothing settled. Stanley had written a flummery letter to Disraeli, full of compliments, but suggesting to him to let Herries have the lead. Disraeli, brimful of indignation against Stanley and contempt for Herries, returned a cold but civil answer, saying he did not want to be leader, and that he should gladly devote himself more to literature and less to politics than he had been able to do for some time past. Meanwhile Herries declined the post, and Granby with Lord Henry Bentinck insisted on Disraeli's appointment, both as the fittest man, and as a homage to George Bentinck's memory. I saw a note from Disraeli a day or two ago, saying he had received the adhesions of two thirds of this party.

February 20, 1853: . . . It does not look as if the connection between Disraeli and the party could go on long. Their dread and distrust of him and his contempt of them render it difficult if not impossible. Pakington is already talked of as their leader, and some think Disraeli wants to shake them off and trade on his own bottom, trusting to his great abilities to make his way to political power with somebody and on some principles, about neither of which he would be very nice. Tom Baring said to me last night, "Can't you make room for him in this Coalition Government?" I said, "Why, will you give him to us?" "Oh, yes," he said, "you shall have him with pleasure."

It was with infinite patience that Disraeli won his way:

February 27, 1851: Disraeli has behaved very well and told Stanley [Lord Derby] to do what he pleased with him; he would take any office, and, if he was likely to be displeasing to the Queen, one that would bring him into little personal communication with her.

January 26, 1856: . . . He said he had never stood so well with the *best* men of his party as he did now, that he is to have forty-five men, the cream of the Conservatives, to dine with him on Wednesday next. He then talked of Derby and the blunders he had made. . . . It was evident that there is little political cordiality between Derby and Disraeli, and a considerable split in the party.

It was, then, for Protection that Disraeli stood. Nor did it seem to be a losing battle. The fiscal system was still in the melting pot. And it was (February 2, 1850) "impossible not to feel that the Free Trade 'experiment,' as it is called, is a fearful and doubtful one."

Thursday, May 11, 1849 (Bruton Street): . . . The Protectionists are gone mad with the notion of reaction in the country against Free Trade. Many people, however, say that distress really has produced a very considerable change of opinion, and it is allowed on all hands that, in the event of a dissolution, the Irish, frantic with distress, would support any Protectionist government to a man.

March 8, 1850: . . . Arbuthnot told me the other day that the Protectionists are doing all they can to disgust the Yeomanry with the service, and to induce them to resign, not without success. This is their patriotism.

For years, the question was whether Disraeli and Gladstone would not join hands.

Disraeli as a Protectionist urged that relief be given to the farmers who had been hit by Free Trade, and Gladstone (February 23, 1850) supported him, so "exciting considerable sensation."

April 23, 1850: . . . Wood is uneasy about the continued low price of corn, and owned to me that it has continued much longer and had fallen lower than he had ever contemplated or at all liked. All the accounts represent that the farmers are behaving well, paying their rents, and employing the people; but there is a strong feeling of dissatisfaction and disaffection amongst them.

Peel was "much disgusted with Gladstone" who had "given indubitable signs of forsaking him and advancing toward the Protectionists":

February 28, 1850: . . . But Gladstone, though he has twice voted with the Opposition, loudly declares that he has not changed an iota of his Free Trade opinions, and has no thoughts of joining the other party, though they think they can have him whenever they vouchsafe to take him. . . . Ever since their

large minority, the Protectionists have been in a very rampant and excited state, overflowing with pugnacity and confidence.

London, March 26, 1852: . . . I asked him [Graham] if he thought Disraeli would consent to resign the lead to anybody. He thought not, certainly not to Gladstone; possibly he might to Palmerston. There are great complaints of Disraeli in the House of Commons. They say he does not play his part as leader with tact and propriety, and treats his opponents impudently and uncourteously, which is egregiously foolish, and will end by exposing him to some great mortification; the House of Commons will not stand such behaviour from such a man.

September 23, 1855: . . . Clarendon . . . told me that he had been informed that an alliance had been formed between Gladstone and Disraeli, and that the former was to be admitted into the Derbyite [Tory] ranks. Clarendon believed this, which I shall not do till it is publicly announced as a *fait accompli*. We live in days of extraordinary events, and nothing ought to surprise us, but such an alliance as this does appear to me impossible. Time will show.

Greville still believed that (April 3, 1856) Disraeli was "endeavouring to approach Gladstone" and that "a confederacy between those two and young Stanley [was] by no means an improbability." Indeed (December 12, 1856) there was a report "lately current that Gladstone will become leader of the Opposition *vice* Disraeli, a report I thought quite wild and improbable." Did not the Government depend on "Palmerston's personal popularity"? And it would not require much to pull that down!

Derby thus "announced to his assembled party that he is ready to join with Gladstone" but as "everybody detests Gladstone" (February 27, 1857)—everybody, that is, of a Tory opinion—there would be "a split" over the returning prodigal which Gladstone would then have been. Gladstone was ready enough to deliver "a magnificent speech" against Palmerston's first government, to which speech Palmerston's reply was "very bow-wow." But he never returned to the Tory fold.

In backing Derby, Disraeli was shrewd. It was Derby, not Aberdeen, who went first to Downing Street:

April 1, 1849: . . . It is understood that Lord Stanley means

to beat them [the Whigs] if he can, and is prepared to take the Government if it is offered to him. The Queen asked Graham the other night if it was true that Stanley really did mean it, and he told her he believed it certainly was true. She then asked him what would be the consequence. He said a struggle between the aristocracy and the democracy of the country, very perilous to the former. She said she entirely agreed in this opinion.

Bath, July 7, 1852: . . . The other members of the Cabinet have appeared as mere dummies, and in the House of Lords Derby has never allowed any of them to speak, taking on himself to answer for every department.

April 1, 1849: . . . The Queen will be reduced to the deplorable necessity, and even degradation, of taking such a pack as he would offer her, and of dissolving Parliament at their bidding. That she would struggle to avert such a calamity, and appeal to all the statesmen of both parties to save her, I do not doubt.

April 2, 1849: . . . The Duke of Wellington . . . promised to do all in his power to support the Government, and he advised Prince Albert, who called on him a day or two ago, to keep quiet and say as little as possible on the subject to anybody.

"A more disgraceful and more degraded government than this cannot be imagined," wrote Greville, and there was reason in the panegyric. The Government immediately forswore the very policy of Protection in which it had taken office:

London, May 12, 1852: . . . Disraeli's Free Trade speech on the Budget evidently gave deep offence to his party, for he felt himself obliged to make a sort of recantation a night or two afterward; and Derby [as Prime Minister] took the very unusual course of making a political speech at the Mansion House dinner, and in it, with much show of compliment to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, did his best to neutralize the Budget speech of the latter by a long and laboured exposition of the doctrine of compromise. . . . This speech, which was not particularly good, has been universally considered as a snub to Disraeli.

London, July 23, 1852: . . . Disraeli announced that he had no thoughts, and never had any, of attempting to restore Protection in the shape of import duties; but he made magnificent

promises of the great things the Government mean to do for the farmers and owners of land.

Lord Derby had to toe the line:

November 12, 1852: The question of Protection or Free Trade, virtually settled long ago, was formally settled last night, Derby having announced in terms the most clear and unequivocal his final and complete abandonment of Protection, and his determination to adhere to, and honestly to administer, the present system. His speech was received in silence on both sides. There has not yet been time to ascertain the effect of this announcement on the various parties and individuals interested by it.

The Tories themselves knew that the game was up. At their meeting "they all cheered and nobody said a word; in fact, they were all consenting to his abandonment of Protection, many not at all liking it but non-recalcitrant." "Dizzy" demanded that Free Trade be described, not as "wise and just" but only as "wise."

So it was that the Tories were reduced to "the necessity . . . of swallowing the nauseous Free Trade pill."

December 6, 1852: . . . The world has been in a state of intense curiosity to hear the Budget, so long announced and of which such magnificent things were predicted. The secret was so well kept that nobody knew anything about it, and not one of the hundred guesses and conjectures turned out to be correct. At length, on Friday night, Disraeli produced his measure in a house crowded to suffocation with members and strangers. He spoke for five and a half hours, much too diffusely, spinning out what he might have said in half the time. The Budget has been on the whole tolerably well received, and may, I think, be considered successful, though it is open to criticism, and parts of it will be fiercely attacked, and he will very likely be obliged to change some parts of it.

Disraeli's speech—

London, May 2, 1852: . . . was a great performance, very able, and was received with great applause in the House. But the extraordinary part of it was the frank, full, and glowing pane-

gyric he passed on the effect of the Free Trade measures of Sir Robert Peel, proving by elaborate statistics the marvellous benefits which had been derived from his tariffs and reduction of duties—not, however, alluding to Corn. All this was of course received with delight and vehemently cheered by the Whigs and Peelites, but in silence and discontent by his own side. It was neither more nor less than a magnificent funeral oration upon Peel's policy, and as such it was hailed, without any taunting, or triumphing, or reproaches.

December 6, 1852: . . . [The Budget] is certainly of a Free Trade character altogether, which does not make it the more palatable to them. He [Disraeli] threw over the West Indians, and (Pakington, their advocate, sitting beside him) declared they had no claim to any relief beyond that which he tendered them, viz., the power of refining sugar in bond—a drop of water to one dying of thirst. I think it will go down, and make the Government safe.

The Tories, though "dissatisfied and disappointed," seemed to be, "nevertheless, determined to swallow everything."

December 9, 1852: . . . Derby and Disraeli were both remarkably well received at the Lord Mayor's dinner the night before last, and this is an additional proof that, in spite of all their disreputable conduct, they are not unpopular, and I believe, if the country were polled, they would as soon have these people for Ministers as any others.

The Budget, "not ill-received at first . . . excited strong opposition." There was a great duel over it in the House of Commons—"two very fine speeches from Disraeli and Gladstone, very different in their style but not unequal in their merits." The Government (December 18, 1852) "were confident of winning." But they were defeated by nineteen votes.

Disraeli told Delane of the *Times* the inside story, and Delane told Greville:

London, January 24, 1853: . . . He acknowledged that he had been bitterly mortified. When Delane asked him, "now it was all over," what made him produce such a budget, he said, if he had not been thwarted and disappointed he should have carried it by the aid of the Irish Brigade whom he had *engaged* for that

purpose. Just before the debate, one of them came to him and said, if he would agree to refer Sharman Crawford's Tenant Right Bill to the Select Committee with the Government Bill, they would all vote with him. He thought this too good a bargain to miss, and he closed with his friend on those terms, told Walpole what he had arranged, desired him to carry out the bargain, and the thing was done.

At this arrangement with the Irish, there was, however, "a prodigious flare up," and "the whole Brigade voted in a body against the Government."

Disraeli actually suggested that there might have been a reconstruction of the Derby Cabinet:

January 24, 1853: . . . He said they should have remodelled their government, Palmerston and Gladstone would have joined them (*Gladstone* after the debate and their duel!); during the intervening two or three months the Budget would have been discussed in the country, what was liked retained, what was unpopular altered, and in the end they should have produced a very good budget which the country would have taken gladly. He never seems to have given a thought to any consideration of political morality, honesty, or truth, in all that he said.

Greville jumped to the conclusion that "real, if not avowed, distrust and dislike" would keep Disraeli and Derby apart; that Derby would chafe under "the necessity of trusting entirely to such a colleague as Disraeli in the House of Commons without one other man of a grain of capacity besides."

Thus (February 25, 1853) Disraeli "dislikes and despises Derby, thinks him a great Saxon speaker and nothing more."

Driven into opposition (May 22, 1853) Lord Derby "had now the mortification of seeing his son [young Stanley] devoted to him [Disraeli]."

July 9, 1853: The [Aberdeen] Government have been going on well enough on the whole. Their immense majority on the India Bill was matter of general surprise and showed the wretched tactics of Disraeli and his pupil, young Stanley, as well as the small influence of the former over that party.

Disraeli's position (December 4, 1852) was precarious. He "made a very important speech which disgusted many of his own adherents and exposed him to vigorous attacks and a tremendous castigation on the part of his opponents":

February 19, 1853: . . . His speech was very long, in most parts very tiresome, but with a good deal of ability, and a liberal infusion of that sarcastic vituperation which is his great forte, and which always amuses the House of Commons more or less. It was, however, a speech of devilish malignity, quite reckless and shamelessly profligate; for the whole scope of it was, if possible, to envenom any bad feeling that may possibly exist between France and England. . . . The French Government is too really desirous of peace and harmony to pay any attention to the rant of a disappointed adventurer, whose motives and object are quite transparent.