CHAPTER XC

MEN AS MICE

In the trenches around Sebastopol, brave men were dying of cold, hunger, and disease. At home, statesmen were still immersed in their usual jealousies and jobbery.

The Prime Minister, Aberdeen, had on his conscience the secret compact that he had signed with the Czar. And as for the war, he—

September 11, 1854: . . . was out of humour with the whole thing, took no interest in anything that was done, and instead of looking into all the departments and animating each as a Prime Minister should do, he kept aloof and did nothing, and constantly raised objections to various matters of detail. In the Cabinet he takes hardly any part, and when differences of opinion arise, he makes no effort to reconcile them, as it is his business to do. In short, though a very good and honourable man, he is eminently unfitted for his post, and in fact he feels this himself, has no wish to retain it, but the contrary, and only does so because he knows the whole machine would fall to pieces if he were to resign.

Lord Aberdeen could not conceal his opinions. In the House of Lords he "imprudently spoke in the sense of desiring peace." It was, writes Greville:

June 21, 1854: a speech which has been laid hold of, and drawn down upon him a renewal of the violent abuse with which he has been all along assailed. I see nothing in his speech to justify the clamour, but it was very ill judged in him with his antecedents to say what he did, which malignity could so easily lay hold of.

Happily, Lyndhurst, aged eighty-two years, was "grand" and "greatly admired." The speech doubtless helped to win the war.

According to Clarendon (September 11th) "he and Aberdeen do not very well agree, and therefore Aberdeen does not come to the Foreign Office as he used to do."

October 2, 1854: . . . Clarendon confirmed what I had heard, that Aberdeen is in a state of great dejection and annoyance at the constant and virulent attacks on him in the press; his mind is dejected by the illness of his son, whom he never expects to see again, and this renders him sensitive and fretful, and he is weak enough to read all that is written against him instead of treating it with indifference and avoiding to look at the papers whose columns are day after day full of outrageous and random abuse.

The Secretary for War was a Duke, other than Wellington:

November 26, 1854: . . . Newcastle, with many merits, had the fault of wishing to do everything himself, and therefore much was not done at all. . . . Newcastle, who is totally ignorant of military affairs of every sort, is not equal to his post, and hence the various deficiencies; nor is Sidney Herbert much better.

January 19, 1855: . . . He [Newcastle] has two very great faults which are sufficient to disqualify him: he is exceedingly slow, and he knows nothing of the qualifications of other men, or how to provide himself with competent assistants; nor has he any decision or foresight. He chose for his under secretaries two wholly incompetent men who have been of no use to him in managing and expediting the various details of the service.

In the House of Lords, Newcastle was "dull and feeble, totally unequal to meet Derby in debate."

The Government was suffering from "internal dissensions" which were "a cancer, continually undermining them":

January 26, 1855: . . . I now hear that Lord John Russell has been leading the Cabinet a weary life for many months past, eternally making difficulties, and keeping them in a constant state of hot water, determined to upset them, and only doubting as to what was a fit opportunity, and at last taking the worst that could be well chosen for his own honour and character.

There was "Hayward's abortive appointment," in which Lord John was "in high dudgeon":

January 18, 1855: . . . This business was near producing a difference between him and Gladstone. Though a trifle in the great account, it serves to add to the complication of affairs and leaves a sediment of ill-humour to be productive of consequences.

Lord John Russell had become a mere bundle of nerves. To begin with, he was as a Whig consumed with disloyalty to a Peelite Prime Minister like Aberdeen.

And he had married a second time, so involving himself in miserable femininities.

Discussing Lord Melbourne's government, Greville had told "how jobbing and selfishness and private interests prevail, and how they jostle one another, as well as the more unaccountable fact, of how useless, inefficient, and even mischievous men contrive to get into office and stay there."

A case was to be Clanricarde who, with his wife, were:

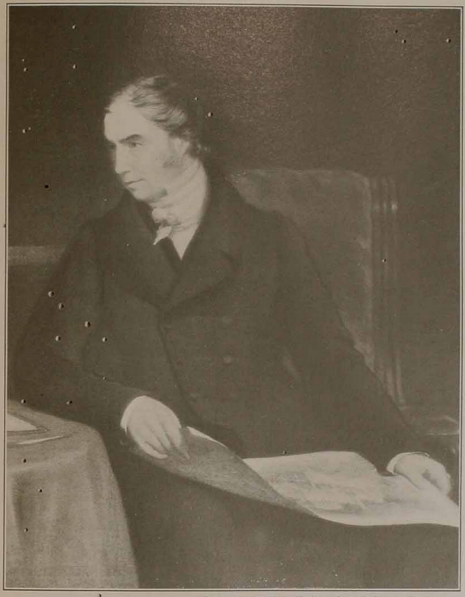
June 6, 1843: . . . Excellent members of society, both of them extremely clever, quick, light in hand; he with the blood of twenty generations of De Burghs in his veins, what in his own country would be called a big blackguard, and she descended from a footman and a gambler, [yet] towering with dignity.

The footman and gambler, it is explained in a note, were "Canning's father and Lady Canning's father, General Scott."

December 21, 1857: . . . [Grey] wanted to know if I thought Clanricarde would be objected to on account of the old scandal in which he figured three or four years ago, but which I told him I thought was forgotten, though it might be raked up by the Tory papers.

March 17, 1858: . . . He [Clanricarde] sits on the front Opposition Bench in the midst of his late colleagues who are evidently ashamed of his presence and would be glad to be rid of him.

Another case of "imbecility in employment" touched Lord John Russell:



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LORD ABERDEEN
by J. Partridge

February 21, 1840: . . . For a long time this Government has been embarrassed by having such a man as Minto among them, and in such an office as First Lord of the Admiralty, where there is enormous patronage and where the navy is the department most anxiously and jealously regarded by the country. He is in all respects incompetent, cannot speak, and never opens his lips but to blunder, expose himself, and injure the Government, and he is besides a great and notorious jobber, and more than suspected of a want of political integrity. Still, there he is, and after having hustled out the amiable, honourable, and really able Glenelg, they endure this imbecile and worthless fellow, because he is bolstered up by Lord Lansdowne and Lord Holland, and because they don't well know how to get rid of him.

Lord Minto (September, 1839), "the most incapable of all the Ministers," was thus "supported by Lord Lansdowne and Lord Holland" whose "influence preserves him." Minto's family name was Elliot:

May 2, 1841: The worst thing we have upon our hands is the China question. Between the two Elliots, first the Admiral and now the Captain, we have just got into a pretty mess. Auckland is excessively disgusted and everybody here dissatisfied, and all the while, Minto has never ceased jobbing. After his brother's failure, and sudden resignation of the command on the plea of ill health, Minto resolved to send out Parker [Lord of Admiralty] to take the command and to put Elliot as soon as he arrived into the vacant seat at the Board. This was so gross a job, that it stuck in the throats of half the Cabinet, and there has been a vast deal of skirmishing and remonstrating, and private management to prevent its being carried into effect. For a long time nothing was settled. Duncannon, the Mercury of the Cabinet, who goes between everybody, and manages everything, was to try his hand, but Minto was very obstinate and resolved to carry his point if possible. Melbourne, who as Prime Minister, ought to exercise a regulating authority in such matters as these, will not stir hand or foot; and Johnny who was courting Lady Fanny Elliot, was rather disposed to uphold his future father-in-law.

July 14, 1838: Minto cut so poor a figure, that there is talk of his resignation, not probably that he has any thoughts of the kind, and we are used nowadays to see Ministers cut poor figures with perfect impunity.

March 12, 1839: Glenelg, however, was evidently feeble and dastardly, and his faculties seem to have been entirely benumbed ever since the flagellations he got from Brougham in the beginning of last Session. His terror of Brougham is so intense that he would submit to any humiliation rather than again expose his back to such a merciless scourge. This craven fear has been lately exemplified in a way not very creditable.

February 24, 1839: In the debate on the Navy, Minto made a deplorable exhibition, which made everybody ask why was Glenelg dismissed when such a man as Minto is retained. But he is one of those geese of whom his friends continue to make swans. He was said to have written some good despatches from Berlin when Minister there.

Over Russell (October 12, 1853) the "influence" of his wife, Minto's daughter, was "very great." As Russell's colleague, Clarendon (September, 1854) was "disgusted with his perpetual discontent and the bad influence exercised over him by his wife, her family and confidants."

When he went to stay at Minto, "his mind has been as usual unsettled and perverted by his wife and her belongings." With Lady John and "her satellites" forming his "entourage," and themselves "in rabid opposition," we read (December, 1854) that "John Russell is in a bad disposition of mind." His wife (August 21, 1855) was "the bane of his political life":

August 21, 1855: She has just cleverness enough to do a great amount of mischief and her total want of judgment joined with her unfortunate influence over him have made him commit the innumerable faults which have reduced him to his present degraded and apparently hopeless position.

March 1, 1853: . . . His wife [Lady John Russell], whose tongue is an unerring index of his mind, says spiteful things when she has an opportunity and evinces an unfriendly disposition toward the Government.

Lady John and Lady Palmerston were not immune from jealousy. If Lord John's government was defeated in the House:

February 28, 1851: . . . Lord John, who is rather sore, and not unconscious of the blame that attaches to him, said with some bitterness to Granville yesterday, "Lady Palmerston called on Lady John for the purpose of telling her that all that has happened is my fault. Lady John might have told her that if Palmerston had chosen to be present on Locke King's motion, and have spoken, it probably would not have happened at all." Lady Palmerston is evidently provoked that Palmerston has not been thought of to form a government in all this confusion, and at hearing so much of Clarendon and Graham, and nothing of her husband.

Newmarket, October 12, 1853: . . . Lady John . . . writes at the same time in a strain of discontent, and she is particularly provoked at all the compliments and flatteries of which Palmerston has been made the object in Scotland, and is amazed and indignant at his being apparently so much more popular than John.

All kinds of offices were proposed about this time for Lord John Russell. Said Clarendon:

January 14, 1855: . . . Lord John never is and never will be satisfied without being again Prime Minister, which is impossible. I said the Duke of Bedford assured me that his brother did not *now* want (or she either) to be Prime Minister. "What does he want then?—to retire altogether?" "Yes," said Clarendon, "that is his intense selfishness; utterly regardless of the public interests, or of what may happen, he wants to relieve *himself* from the responsibility of a situation which is not so good as he desires, and to run away from his post at a moment of danger and difficulty. If we had some great success—if Sebastopol were taken, for example—we should hear no more of his retirement."

Lady John could not bear to see Lord John in any position, save the highest. And so when Lord Derby resigned, Lord John declared he would "take no office but that of Premier, considering any other a degradation." Then he said he would

"serve under" Lansdowne, which "evinced great magnanimity."

It mattered nothing to Lady John that her brother-in-law, Duke of Bedford (December 22, 1852), "said that it was evident Lord John could not make a government and that he was himself conscious of it." Why had not the Duke, when consulted by the Queen, advanced "John's" name?

September 2, 1853: . . . John told him [the Duke of Bedford] he did not wish to be sent for. After this he could not resent the advice the Duke [of Bedford] gave [to the Queen], but his wife did, reproached him bitterly, and did all she could to set him himself against the coalition, and to persuade him to have no concern with it. The Duke defended himself by urging that John had himself expressed his desire not to be sent for. She replied, "You ought not to have taken him at his word." Happily John for once was firm, resisted the conjugal blandishments or violence, and acted on the dictates of his own conscientious judgment and the sound advice of his friends.

If Russell agreed to join a Peelite administration, it was because—

London, December 21, 1852: . . . Macaulay was announced while Lord John was still there. Lansdowne told him the subject of their discussion, and the case was put before Macaulay with all its pros and cons for his opinion. He heard all Lansdowne and Lord John had to say, and then delivered his opinion in a very eloquent speech, strongly recommending Lord John to go on with Aberdeen, and saying that, at such a crisis as this, the refusal of his aid, which was indispensable for the success of the attempt, would be little short of treason. Lord John went away evidently shaken.

January 29, 1853: . . . [Lord Clarendon] is much disheartened . . . at the evident indisposition and uncordial feeling of John toward the concern he has joined. He hates his own position and his discontent is no doubt aggravated, by his wife and his own and her belongings, and this bodes ill for the concern.

With England at war with Russia (April 15, 1854) Lord John Russell was asked to drop for the time being his later Reform

Bill. "Encouraged by his foolish, mischievous wife and her father and her entourage of flatterers," he would "listen to no reason." Nothing mattered but "what his wife wants." Lord John "could not sleep and was in a terrible state of vexation and perplexity."

April 3, 1854: . . . The Duke told me that the Queen told him the other day that she had herself written to Lord John urging him to give up bringing up his Bill. Not long ago the Queen was in favour of proceeding with it, but circumstances were very different at that time.

After a week of hesitation during which Lord Palmerston offered to resign, Lord John surrendered and made—

April 15, 1854: . . . a very good speech, full of emotion and manifestation of sensibility which succeeded completely with the House, and he was greeted with prodigious cheering and compliments and congratulations on all sides.

Yet, though a Reformer, he did not hesitate to forswear his principles:

June 25, 1854: . . . Last week John Russell opposed the motion for the abolition of Church rates in a flaming High Tory and Church speech. The motion was rejected by a slender majority, but his speech gave great offence to the Liberal party and his own friends. Immediately afterward came on the motion in the University Bill for admitting Dissenters to the University. This John Russell opposed again, although in his speech he declared he was in favour of the admission of Dissenters, but he objected to the motion on various grounds. The result was that he went into the lobby with Disraeli and the whole body of the Tories, while the whole of the Liberal party and all his own friends and supporters went against him and defeated him by a majority of 91.

October 2, 1854: . . . He wrote to Clarendon the other day, and alluded to the necessity of having an autumn session, to which Clarendon replied that he was not so fond of Parliament as Lord John was, and deprecated very much any such measure. To this Lord John sent as odious and cantankerous an answer as I ever read, and one singularly illustrative of his character. He said that he was not fonder of Parliament than

other people, and his own position in the House of Commons had not been such as to make him the more so.

Russell's tactics made him, at any rate, for the moment, "totally unfit to be the leader of the Government in the House of Commons."

The Privy Council had to issue (April 14, 1854) licences to trade over sea. According to Lord Granville it would be futile to send for Lord John Russell, who "could not bear details." Granville "doubted if he would come, and, if he did [it] would be of no use, as he would be sure to go to sleep." This was "the way business of the greatest importance is transacted."

And it was no wonder that a private member called Roebuck (January 24, 1855) gave notice of a motion "for a committee to enquire into the conduct of the war." The Cabinet (January 26th) unanimously resolved not to resign but to face the music.

But there was one absentee—Lord John Russell, who "took no time to consider, but sent his resignation at once, the moment he returned from the House." His reason was that "he could not and would not face the nation." The Peelites "might defend the conduct of the war, but he could not."

The retort was obvious. "He will naturally be asked how long he has been dissatisfied with its management and why he did not retire long ago."

January 26, 1855: . . . I saw John Russell in the afternoon, and told him in very plain terms what I thought of his conduct, and how deeply I regretted that he had not gone on with his colleagues and met this attack with them. He looked astonished and put out, but said, "I could not. It was impossible for me to oppose a motion which I think ought to be carried." I argued the point with him, and in the middle of our talk the Duke of Bedford came in. I asked him if he did not think the remaining Ministers were right in the course they have taken, and he said he did. I then said, "I have been telling John how much I regret that he did not do the same," when John repeated what he had said before, and then went away. After he was gone the Duke said, "I am very glad you said what you did to John."

January 30, 1855: . . . John Russell made a cunning and

rather clever speech in explanation of his resignation, George Grey a good one and strong against Lord John. . . .

. . . They tell me he is in high spirits, and appears only to be glad at having at last found the opportunity he has so long desired of destroying the Government. Everybody appears astonished at the largeness of the majority. Gladstone made a very fine speech, and powerful, crushing against Lord John, and he stated what Lord John had never mentioned in his narrative, that he had been expressly asked in December whether he still wished the change to be made which he had urged in November, and he had replied that he did not, that he had given it up. This *supressio veri* is shocking, and one of the very worst things he ever did.

January 31, 1855: . . . John Russell's explanation, had he spoken the truth, would have run in these terms: "I joined the Government with great reluctance, and only at the earnest entreaty of my friends, particularly Lord Lansdowne. From the first I was disgusted at my position, and I resolved, unless Lord Aberdeen made way for me, and I again became Prime Minister, that I would break up the Government. I made various attempts to bring about such a change, and at last, after worrying everybody to death for many months, I accomplished my object, having taken what seemed a plausible pretext for doing it."

February 1, 1855: . . . We are exhibiting a pretty spectacle to Europe, and I don't think our example will tempt other nations to adopt the institutions of which we are so proud; for they may well think that liberty of the press and Parliamentary government, however desirable they may be when regulated by moderation and good sense, would be dearly purchased at the expense of the anarchy and confusion which they are producing here.

February 4, 1855: No one can remember such a state as the town has been in for the last two days. No government, difficulties apparently insurmountable, such confusion, such excitement, such curiosity, everybody moving about craving for news, and rumour with her hundred tongues scattering every variety of statement and conjecture. At last the crisis seems to be drawing to a conclusion. The Queen has behaved with admirable sense of her constitutional obligations. When Aber-

deen took down his resignation, she told him she had made up her mind what to do, that she had looked at the list of the division, and found that the majority which had turned out her government was composed principally of Lord Derby's adherents, and she should therefore send for him. Aberdeen said a few words rather discouraging her; but she said, though Lord Palmerston was evidently the popular man, she thought, according to constitutional practice, Lord Derby was the man she ought to send for.

Lord Derby failed to form a government. Lord John Russell, despite his lady's pretensions, did not succeed.

February 5, 1855: . . . Yesterday afternoon I saw Clarendon, who confirmed his refusal to join Lord John, but with some slight difference as to the details. He said he had spoken very openly to him, but so gravely and quietly that he could not take offence, and he did not. It was not till he received Clarendon's final refusal that he wrote to the Queen and threw up his commission.

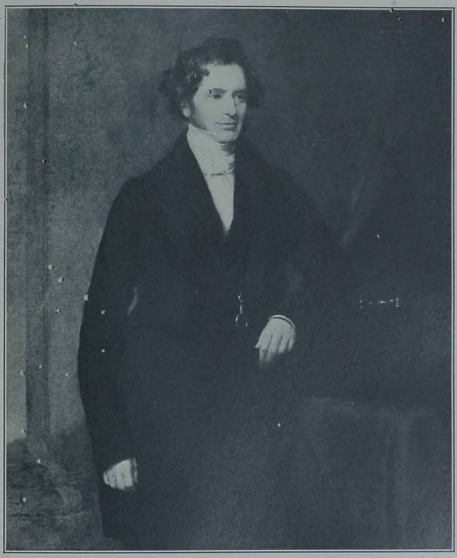
"The Queen wrote a civil and even kind answer to Lord John's note giving the task up."

With Aberdeen, Russell, and Derby eliminated, who was there left? Fate pointed her finger to an impossible man who had become inevitable:

October 18, 1853: . . . In a letter this morning, from my brother, he says, "Lady Palmerston goes crowing on at all the blunders of the Government, and the luck that it is for Palmerston."

Palmerstonians had been "indignant" that (June 11, 1854) Newcastle had been appointed to the War Office. And the Court itself was relenting:

December 22, 1852: . . . I had heard recently that the Court had changed their sentiments about Palmerston and particularly that they were satisfied with his move on Villier's motion, but Clarendon informed me that though this latter fact might be true, there was not much difference as to their feelings generally, and that when Derby formed his government and proposed to her Majesty that Palmerston should be invited, she had said she would not oppose his being in the Cabinet,



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LORD DERBY
by F. R. Say

but never would consent to his being either at the Foreign Office or Leader of the House of Commons, and she then said, and has since repeated, that no Minister whatever would be able to go on, who committed the lead in the House of Commons to Palmerston's hands. (Note: Curious and not true.)

Aldenham, January 6, 1855: I saw Cowley yesterday, who has been to Windsor, and tells me that he finds by conversations he has had with Stockmar that the Queen is much softened toward Palmerston and no longer regards him with the extreme aversion she did. On the other hand, she is very angry with John Russell, and this is, of course, from knowing what he has been doing, and resentment at his embarrassing and probably breaking up the Government. This relaxation in her feelings toward Palmerston is very important at this moment, and presents the chance of an alternative which, if this government falls, may save her from Derby and his crew, whom she cordially detests.

February 4, 1855: . . . The Queen will play her last card, and have recourse to *the man of the people!*—to Palmerston, whom they are crying out for, and who, they fondly imagine, is to get us out of all our difficulties.

February 5, 1855: . . . Her Majesty had seen Palmerston the day before, and told him if Lord John failed she should send for him, and accordingly she did so yesterday evening.

The Duke of Bedford admitted that his illustrious brother "had an invincible repugnance to taking the Duchy of Lancaster or any inferior office. He insisted on being Lord President of the Council although "they had been obliged to go back to the reign of Henry VIII to find a precedent for a Commoner" holding that office. "They say there was one," adds Greville, "but I don't know who he was."

June 11, 1854: . . . It seems that they wanted him [John Russell] to be Colonial Secretary but this he would not hear of and Lady John set her face against it on the score of his health.

When he took this office, Greville wrote (February 24, 1855), "if his wife had been with him, I don't believe he would have done it."

It was one of those occasions when (March, 1850) this husband was "urged by his wife and her clique to be firm."

In Palmerston's second cabinet, Russell was promoted to be Foreign Secretary:

London, October 30, 1859: . . . John was quite overwhelmed with the duties . . . of the weight of which he had no idea when he undertook it and that being extremely ignorant of Foreign Affairs, he relied entirely upon Palmerston, that he himself was constantly thinking of what would look well in a blue book and be listened to with applause in the House of Commons.

Lord John Russell—"sure to be very soon a *frondeur*"—

February 7, 1855: . . . told Clarendon "he meant to give his best support to the Government." Clarendon said, "You do; well, at what do you think I value your support?" "What?" he asked. "Not one sixpence."

February 6, 1855: . . . His popularity, which is really extraordinary, will carry him through all difficulties for the present. It was supposed that his popularity had been on the wane, but it is evident that, though he no longer stands so high as he did in the House of Commons, and those who know him can easily see he is not the man he was, in the country there is just the same fancy for him and sanguine opinion of him as ever.

October 16, 1853: . . . He [Russell] became popular again in the House and would have been more so if he had not chosen to quit the House early every afternoon and go down to his wife and his nursery at Richmond.