CHAPTER LIV

LADIES FIRST

MELBOURNE was no longer Prime Minister—that and not Jamaica was what mattered to the young Queen. On May 8, 1839, she wrote to him describing her "wretched state" over "this dreadful change"; how she did not go to bed till midnight; how waking up "brought back her grief"; and how "she could-n't touch a morsel of food last night, nor can she this morning." But she was young. "She slept well," and "became calmer," and "feels better now."[1] Still, Lord Melbourne, as she told the Duke, "had been to her quite a parent." And Greville tells us:

May 10, 1839: . . . The Queen had not been prepared for this catastrophe and was completely upset by it. Her agitation and grief were very great. In her interview with Lord John Russell she was all the time dissolved in tears; and she dined in her own room, and never appeared on the Tuesday evening.

On May 9th, at 11 o'clock in the morning, Lord Melbourne called at Buckingham Palace—

May 10, 1839: . . . and advised her to send for the Duke, and on Wednesday morning she sent for him. By this time she had regained her calmness and self-possession. She told him that she was very sorry for what had occurred, and for having to part with her Ministers, particularly Lord Melbourne, for whom she felt the warmest regard, and who had acted an almost parental part toward her. The Duke was excessively pleased with her behaviour and with her frankness. He told her that his age and his deafness incapacitated him from serving her as efficiently as he could desire, and that the leader of the House of Commons ought to be her Prime Minister, and he advised her to send for Peel. She said, "Will you desire him to come to me?" He told her that he would do anything; but, he thought, under the circumstances, it would be better that she should

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria, 1837–1861*, Vol. I, page 156.

write to him herself. She said she would, but begged him to go and announce to Peel that he might expect her letter. This the Duke did, and when Peel received it, he went to the Palace (in full dress according to etiquette), and received her commands to form a government. She received him (though she dislikes him) extremely well, and he was perfectly satisfied.

Over Sir Robert Peel, Victoria was candour itself. "The Queen," she wrote to Melbourne, "don't like his manner after —oh! how different, how dreadfully different, to that frank, open, natural, and most kind, warm manner of Lord Melbourne." Indeed, the Queen's English itself was upset for she wrote, "the Duke I like by far better to Peel."[1] And even her calligraphy suffered. The Queen hoped Lord Melbourne could read her letters; if ever there be anything he cannot read, he must send them back, and mark what he can't read.

Sir Robert Peel was faced by the task of holding office without a majority in the House of Commons:

May 10, 1839: . . . While the Tories were rejoicing in their victory, the Whigs, greatly exasperated, were already beginning to meditate the organization of a strong Opposition, and providing the means of carrying on an effectual war against the new Government.

At this interesting moment, while "the Tories were waiting in perfect security for the tranquil arrangement of the new Government, a storm suddenly arose which threatens to scatter to the winds the new combinations." The ladies (May 12, 1839) "recommended" to the Queen at her accession were "exclusively Whig." And "the female part of her Household" had thus "a political complexion." As Prime Minister, Peel asked therefore that Tory ladies be appointed:

May 10, 1839: . . . The Queen insisted upon keeping the ladies of her household, and Peel objected, but without shaking her determination. He begged her to see the Duke of Wellington, and she agreed to see the Duke and him together. He had, however, before this gone to the Palace with Lord Ashley [the future Lord Shaftesbury] whom he had taken with him,

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria, 1837–1861*, Vol. I, page 161, etc.

fancying that, because he had been in the habit of seeing a great deal of the Queen, he might have some influence with her —a notion altogether preposterous, and exhibiting the deficiency of Peel in worldly dexterity and tact, and in knowledge of character. Ashley made no impression on the Queen. When the Duke and Peel saw her, and endeavoured to persuade her to yield this point, they found her firm and immovable, and not only resolved not to give way, but prepared with answers to all they said, and arguments in support of her determination. They told her that she must consider her *ladies* in the same light as *lords:* she said, "No, I have lords besides, and these I give up to you." And when they still pressed her, she said, "Now suppose the case had been reversed, that you had been in office when I had come to the throne, and that Lord Melbourne would not have required this sacrifice of me." Finding that she would not give way, Peel informed her that under these circumstances he must consult his friends; and a meeting took place at his house yesterday afternoon.

On the issue thus raised (May 12, 1839) "a good deal may be said on both sides." From the "constitutional point of view," it had to be remembered that Victoria was not a queen consort, reigning as wife of a king, but "a *femme sole*" or queen regnant, the actual Sovereign of the Realm:

May 12, 1839: . . . Although it would be wrong and inexpedient for any Minister to exercise the right, unless in a case of great necessity, I think every Minister must have the power of advising the Queen to remove a Lady of her Court, in the same way as he is admitted to have that of removing a man. Notwithstanding the transaction of 1812, and Lord Moira's protection of George IV in the retention of his household, it is now perfectly established in practice that the Royal Household is at the discretion of the Minister, and it must be so because he is responsible for the appointments; in like manner he is responsible for every appointment which the Sovereign may make; and should any of the ladies conduct herself in such a manner as to lead the public to expect or require her dismissal, and the Queen were to refuse to dismiss her, the Minister must be responsible for her remaining about the Royal person.

That Peel had the right "to dismiss the Ladies" could not be denied. The only question was whether "they were *all* to be taken from her," which was the Queen's "impression." What led the Queen "to resist the encroachments which she anticipated" was a fear of them "taking the Baroness Lehzen herself from her."

Windsor Castle, November 15, 1839: I sat next to Baroness Lehzen at dinner—a clever, agreeable woman. She complained of Peel's having said in the House of Commons that he did not mean to turn her out, and says he ought to have said he could not, and that he had nothing to do with her, as she is not in the public service. I defended Peel.

May 10, 1839: . . . I had afterward a conversation with Lord Wharncliffe, who gave me an account of all that had passed, placed the matter in a very different light, and proved beyond a doubt that there was no lack of deference and consideration on the part of Peel, but, on the contrary, the clearest indication of an intention and desire to consult her wishes and feelings in every respect, and that, instead of a sweeping demand for the dismissal of *all* her ladies, he had approached that subject with delicacy and caution, and merely suggested the expediency of some partial changes, for reasons (especially when taken with other things) by no means insufficient. So little disposition was there on the part of Peel to regard her with distrust or to fetter her social habits, that when she said, "You must not expect me to give up the society of Lord Melbourne," he replied that "Nothing could be further from his thoughts than to interfere with her Majesty's society in any way, or to object to her receiving Lord Melbourne as she pleased, and that he should always feel perfectly secure in the honour of Lord Melbourne, that he would not avail himself improperly of his intercourse with her." When she said that she should like to have Lord Liverpool about her, he immediately acquiesced, and proposed that he should be Lord Steward, and he suggested certain other persons, whom he said he proposed because he believed they were personally agreeable to her; but when he began to talk of "some modification of the ladies of her household," she stopped him at once, and declared she would not part with any of them. Thenceforward this became the whole matter in dispute.

One suspicion was that the Queen had been put up by somebody to play her part:

May 10, 1839: . . . There had been some circumstances even in the first interview which Peel and the Duke regarded as ominous and indicative of her having been primed as to the part she should play. The principal of these was an intimation of her desire that there should be *no dissolution of Parliament.* This surprised Peel very much, but he only replied that it was impossible for him to come to any determination on that point, as he might be beaten on one of the first divisions, in which case it would be inevitable. It was indeed the fact of his taking the Government with a *minority* in the House of Commons which was his principal argument for desiring the power of dismissing the ladies, or rather of changing the household, that he might not, he said, give to the world the spectacle of a Court entirely hostile to him, consisting of ladies whose husbands were his strongest political opponents, thereby creating an impression that the confidence of the Crown was bestowed on his enemies rather than on himself. In the Duke's first interview with the Queen, he had entreated her to place her whole confidence in Peel, and had then said that, though some changes might be necessary in her household, she would find him in all the arrangements anxious to meet her wishes and consult her feelings. Notwithstanding her assurance to Melbourne that she was calm, she was greatly excited, though still preserving a becoming dignity in her outward behaviour.

In the negotiations, the Duke of Wellington played a prominent part:

August 15, 1839: . . . The ample discussion we had upon these matters, led naturally to the question of the Queen's character and capacity, and I asked him what he thought of it. He said as far as he had seen, that she expressed herself well, but he did not appear to be impressed with a very positive and high opinion of her abilities. In the communications which took place about the changes, she had been very civil and gracious to him, but rather irritable, particularly the second day.

I said she detested Peel. He said that he must say he had never seen Peel so gentle and conciliatory in his manner as he was to her, and that there was nothing at which she ought to

have taken umbrage. At his first interview, he implored her to put her whole confidence in Peel, and above all to make no conditions, that he could not come in upon conditions.

"But what am I to do if he proposes appointments that are disagreeable to me?"

"Fight upon the details as much as you please, but make no conditions as to principles, and depend upon it, there will be every disposition to consult your wishes and feelings in every respect. It is especially necessary and desirable in your peculiar situation that this should be done, and you will find such to be his anxious desire and intention."

She said, "You must promise me to be Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," but he represented to her, that it was impossible he could make any such promise, and that it would never do to put the formation of a government into Peel's hands and then to inform him that she and the Duke of Wellington had settled between them that he (the Duke) should have a particular office. She owned this was true, and did not insist.

In the grand discussion (on Thursday) it was after expressing his desire that the appointments in the household should be such as would be personally agreeable to herself, and after her own suggestion of Lord Liverpool, that Peel proceeded to say it was his wish that the changes which might be necessary in the female part of the household should be governed by the same principle, meaning (the Duke said) that she should herself express her own wishes as to who should retire, and the persons by whom they should be replaced, but she stopped him at once by saying she did not mean *any* of her ladies to be changed.

When the Duke arrived at the Palace, after the rupture was begun, he said on entering, "Well, I am very sorry to find there is a difficulty." To which she instantly replied with a naïveté so very girlish,

"Oh, *he* began it and not me."

The Duke argued the point with her, and tried to persuade her that nothing had been proposed to her but what the circumstances of the case rendered necessary, and employed all the arguments which have been repeatedly urged on the subject, to which she replied:

"But I thought you said that my situation demanded pe-

culiar consideration, and that my feelings and wishes were entitled to especial regard."

He said:

"So I did say, Madam, and to-day I say so ten times more, and I told your Majesty that you might depend upon it, every regard and attention would be (as it ought to be) shown to your Majesty's wishes, but I warned you against any contest upon principles, and told you that however you might make any objections you pleased upon details, it was impossible for you without the creation of insuperable difficulties to make any upon principles."

When he talked about the ladies, she said with some marks of irritation:

"It is offensive to me to suppose that I talk to any of my ladies upon public affairs."

He said: "I know you do not. I am quite certain you do not, but the public does not know this, and it is on account of the impression necessarily to be produced on the public mind, and not on account of any doubt of your Majesty's refraining from talking politics with your ladies, that the proposal is made to you."

"More details," culled from the Duke as a source, included "what had passed between Peel and the Queen," namely, "that her Majesty was in fact in a great passion." Indeed, adds Greville, "little things keep oozing out, throwing light on the recent transaction, and all tending to the same conclusion, showing how violent and wrong-headed the Queen was." The violence extended to Peel himself for, adds Greville:

June 1, 1839: . . . Peel (reserved and prudent as he is) cannot conceal the indignation with which he is boiling over, at the personal treatment he experienced at her hands, at her peremptory and haughty demeanour, and it is a vast evil that they have imbibed sentiments of mutual dislike and alienation, which nothing will ever get over.

In a note, he had to revise this prophecy for "all the world knows how completely they [the dislikes] were got over on both sides." Still, for the moment—

May 10, 1839: . . . she had already conceived a lively aversion

for Peel, and though her manner was civil, her heart was full of bitterness, looking back with regret, and forward with reluctance and dismay, and without foresight, judgment, and reflection sufficient to embrace remote consequences, she exhibited the talent of a clever, but rather thoughtless and headstrong girl, and secretly longing to get back her old Ministers, she boldly and stubbornly availed herself of the opening which was presented to her.

May 12, 1839: . . . The simple truth in this case is, that the Queen could not endure the thought of parting with Melbourne who is everything to her. Her feelings, which are probably not very well defined to herself, are of a strength sufficient to bear down all prudential considerations, and to predominate in her mind with irresistible force. In the course of the transaction, she thought she saw the means presenting themselves of getting Melbourne back, and she eagerly grasped at, and pertinaciously retained them. Nothing else would have emboldened her to resist the advice and opinion of the Duke of Wellington, and to oppose so unbendingly her will to his authority. There is something which shocks one's sense of fitness and propriety in the spectacle of this mere baby of a queen setting herself in opposition to this great man the decus and tutamen of her kingdom, invested with all the authority of his experience and sagacity, of his profound loyalty, his devoted patriotism, and to whom her predecessors had even been accustomed to look up with unlimited confidence, as their surest and wisest Councillor in all times of difficulty and danger.

. . .

The Queen's own letters and diary are sufficient evidence, apart from Greville's testimony, that she was greatly excited. While she claims that she maintained "composure and great firmness," yet she described the proposals of Peel as "infamous." And with prophetic scorn, this precursor of Lady Astor would "like to know if they mean to give the *ladies* seats in Parliament."[1]

We have also this:

November 15, 1839. E. Villiers wrote me a curious thing the other day. John Russell told his sister that the Queen had taken bitter offence at something that Peel said to her at their inter-

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria, 1837–1861*, Vol. I, page 162.

view, but that she had not repeated even to Melbourne what it was, but she could never forgive it!!! I should like of all things to know what this can be.

"It is," wrote Greville on May 12, 1839, "a high trial of our institutions when the caprice of a girl can overturn a great Ministerial combination, and when the most momentous matters of Government and legislation are influenced by her pleasure about the Ladies of the Bedchamber."

Somehow the deadlock had to be resolved, and on May 9th, Victoria, thus at variance with Sir Robert Peel, wrote to Lord Melbourne that the Queen of England would not submit to such trickery. Let Melbourne keep himself in readiness. He might soon be wanted.

At six o'clock in the afternoon, then, Lord Melbourne was summoned to an audience:

May 10, 1839: . . . In the meantime the old Ministers were apprised of the difficulty that had occurred, and Lord John Russell, who knew that there was a meeting at Peel's to consider what was to be done, entreated Melbourne, if the thing was broken off upon this difficulty, not to give any advice, but to call the Cabinet and have a general consultation. At nine in the evening he was summoned to a Cabinet at Melbourne's house, and from this he inferred that negotiations with Peel had closed. The Ministers were collected from all quarters: (Hobhouse from dinner at Wilton's, Morpeth from the opera) and Melbourne laid before them a letter from the Queen, written in a bitter spirit, and in a strain such as Elizabeth might have used. She said, "Do not fear that I was not calm and composed. They wanted to deprive me of my ladies, and I suppose they would deprive me next of my dressers and my housemaids; they wished to treat me like a girl, but I will show them that I am Queen of England!" They consulted, and a suggestion was thrown out that Lady Normanby (and some other I think) should resign. This was overruled, as was a proposition of John Russell's that the Queen should require from Peel a precise statement of the extent of his demands. The end was, that a letter was composed for her, in which she simply declined to place the ladies of her household at Peel's discretion. This was sent yesterday morning; when Peel wrote an answer

resigning his commission into her Majesty's hands; but recapitulating everything that had passed. . . .

It was speedily known all over the town that the whole thing was at an end, and nothing could surpass the excitement and amazement that prevailed. The indignant Tories exclaimed against intrigue and preconcerted plans, and asserted that she refused to part with *any* of her ladies, and that it was only a pretext to break off the Tory Government; while the Whigs cried out against harshness and dictatorial demands, and complained that it was intended to make a thorough clearance, to strip her of all her friends, and destroy her social comfort.

One question, much discussed, was whether the Whigs, having "no personal cognizance" of what had passed between Peel and the Queen, should have acted on "her own account of verbal communications." Had they not "incurred the risk of giving advice upon false or mistaken grounds?" On this aspect of the case, however, there was in the end no misunderstanding:

May 13, 1839: . . . The Queen had been very explicit with Lord John Russell and they are satisfied she did not deceive them, which is at all events consolatory, for one of the worst features of the case was the semblance of duplicity or falsehood on the part of the Queen. Of this they entirely acquit her.

. . .

Whatever may have been the Queen's impetuosity, her truth-telling was transparent.

The action of the Whigs in supporting the Sovereign was fiercely canvassed. Earl Grey, though a Whig, was not in the Cabinet, but "Melbourne sent for him and consulted him and he remained in another room while the Cabinet was in deliberation." The Prime Minister, under whom the Reform Bill was passed, "took it up very warmly and was strongly for supporting the Queen, saying they [the Whigs] could not do otherwise than they did." Broadly, the Whigs held that "they were bound as gentlemen" to support the Sovereign.

But, on the other hand, Greville considered (and I think rightly) that the Whigs played a "strange anomalous and unconstitutional part."

May 12, 1839: . . . While they really believed that she had

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SIR ROBERT PEEL
by J. Linnell

been ill-used, it was natural they should be disposed to vindicate and protect her; but after the reception of Peel's letter they must have doubted whether there had not been some misapprehension on both sides, and they ought in prudence, and in justice to her, even against her own feelings, to have sifted the matter to the bottom, and have cleared up every existing doubt before they decided on their course. But to have met as a Cabinet, and to have advised her what answer to send to the man who still held her commission for forming a government, upon points relating to its formation, is utterly anomalous and unprecedented, and a course as dangerous as unconstitutional. . . . *She* might be excused for her ignorance of the exact limits of constitutional propriety, and for her too precipitate recurrence to the counsels to which she had been accustomed; but *they* ought to have explained to her, that until Sir Robert Peel had formally and finally resigned his commission into her hands, they could tender no advice, and that her replies to him, and her resolutions with regard to his proposals, must emanate solely and spontaneously from herself. As it was, the Queen was in communication with Sir Robert Peel on one side, and Lord Melbourne on the other, at the same time.

Greville tells us "how wicked (for its merits no milder term) was the conduct of the Ministers in upholding and abetting her, instead of telling her the truth, showing her how it was her duty to act, and acting themselves as it was their duty to do."

May 13, 1839: . . . Brougham wrote a violent letter to Lord Tavistock, imploring him, while it was still time, to arrest the perilous course on which his friends had entered, and full of professions of regard for him and his. Tavistock went to him in the evening, found him in a state of furious excitement, abusing the Ministry greatly. . . . When he learnt, what he was not aware of, that Lord Spencer was come to town and would be in the House of Lords, he broke out again, and said that if they had brought him up to support that miserable rotten concern, he must speak.

May 10, 1839: . . . In the meantime Lord Melbourne and Lord John Russell went to the Queen, who told them her whole story. I met the latter coming from her; he said, "I have just been for an hour with the Queen; she told me her story, and

ended by saying, 'I have stood by you, you must now stand by me.'" They thought her case a good one, and resolved to stand by her.

The result of it all was that on May 11th, the Cabinet of Lord Melbourne "met . . . and resolved to take the Government again. They hope to interest the people in the Queen's quarrel, and having made it up with the Radicals they think they can stand."

When a debate was proposed in the House of Lords:

May 19, 1839: . . . Lord Grey and Lord Spencer would either of them have spoken, but it was deemed better they should not, or Brougham would have been unmuzzled, and as it was he adhered to his engagement to Lord Tavistock and held his peace. He had said, "If you let off Althorp or old Grey, I must speak."

Indeed, Brougham did, in the end, break loose:

June 1, 1839: . . . That boiling torrent of rage, disdain, and hatred, which had been dammed up upon a former occasion when he was so unaccountably muzzled, broke forth with resistless and overwhelming force. He spoke for three hours, and delivered such an oration as no other man in existence is capable of: devilish in spirit and design, but of superhuman eloquence and masterly in execution. He assailed the Ministers with a storm of invective and ridicule; and, while he enveloped his periods in a studied phraseology of pretended loyalty and devotion, he attacked the Queen herself with unsparing severity. He went at length and in minute detail into the whole history of the recent transaction, drew it in its true colours, and exposed its origin, progress, and motives, and thus he laid bare all the arts and falsehoods by which attempts had been made to delude and agitate the country. If it were possible to treat this as a party question, his speech would be a powerful party auxiliary, most valuable to the Tories as a vindication of them, most damning to the Whigs and the Queen as an exposure of their conduct, for it was the peculiar merit of this speech that it abounded in truths, and in great constitutional principles, of undoubted authority and unerring application.

"Brougham's speech," we read, "was received by the Tory Lords with enthusiastic applause, vociferous cheering throughout, and two or three rounds at the conclusion." But the Duke of Wellington displayed "moderation and dignity." He praised Melbourne for throwing over the Radicals and for his other "cautious ambiguities." And the Tories were "exasperated" with the Duke. "Even some of his real admirers thought he had 'overdone it.'" Indeed, at the Carlton Club (the headquarters of the Opposition), they said he was "in his dotage," and the *Times* produced "a sulky article."

To Greville's brother Algernon, the Duke made his position quite clear. "They must," he said, "do what they could to help that poor little thing out of the difficulty in which she was placed."

June 1, 1839: . . . He looks to the Crown of England; he wants to uphold *it* and not to punish *her;* and he does not care to achieve a Tory triumph at the expense of the highest Tory principle; he thinks the Monarchy is in danger, and he sees that the danger may be more surely averted by still enduring the existence of the present Government, depriving them of all power to do evil, and converting them into instruments of good, than by accelerating their fall under circumstances calculated to engender violent animosities, irreconcilable enmities, wide separation of parties, and the adoption of extreme measures and dangerous principles by many who have no natural bias that way.

May 19, 1839: . . . Peel's speech was excellent (though Lord Grey did not approve of it, and regretted not having the power to answer it) and without any appearance of art or dexterity he continued to steer through all the difficult points, and to justify himself without saying a word offensive to the Queen; not, however, that this will reconcile her to him.

June 7, 1839: Peel has written and published a very short letter in reply to a Shrewsbury declaration presented to him, in which he defends his recent conduct, and declares he will never take office on any other terms, an announcement that will be gall and wormwood to her Most Gracious Majesty.

Melbourne thus returned to his special chair at Windsor

Castle and the Queen was radiant. She asked Lord Melbourne "for a list of 'our' supporters in the House of Commons" and invited him to dine on "Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday." Also, she was generous in her victory:

July 14, 1839: Lady Breadalbane having resigned the Bedchamber, the Queen has appointed Lady Sandwich very dexterously, for she gets one of the favoured Paget race, and the wife of a Tory Peer, thereby putting an end to the exclusively Whig composition of the household.

Having retained Melbourne, the Queen could afford to make a concession that cost her nothing.

When a Queen suffers from a brain storm, the atmosphere of her court remains electric.

On the one hand, so we read, "the Radicals are full of exultation, and the Government underlings, who care not on what terms they retain their places, are very joyful." For the Queen "cannot endure that Tory Dogs and Cats shall mew about her, even for an instant."

But the Tory Dogs and Cats, being also human, "have their minds full of bitter animosity, and an impatience for party victory, and the acquisition of official power." They knew that "the real obstacle" to their "coming into office was the Queen." Indeed, "that was the only difficulty," and "her violent and undisguised antipathy to Peel, rendered him exceedingly reluctant to take office":

January 14, 1840: Into these feelings [of the Tories], resentment against the Queen personally, and a wish to mortify and thwart her, no doubt very largely enter, all which is in great measure attributable to her obstinate and headstrong determination to gratify her own predilections, and her antipathy to them. She has made herself the Queen of a party, and is at no pains to disguise her hatred of anything in the shape of a Tory. Her Court is a scene of party and family favouritism, a few chosen individuals being her constant guests, to the almost total exclusion of everyone however distinguished or respectable of the opposite side, nor are her favourites (except Melbourne himself) conspicuous for any superior qualities either natural or acquired, and it is with a mixture of aversion and contempt

that people read in the Court Circular of the Right Honourable George Stevens Byng and the Honourable William Cowper dining four days a week at the Royal Table, and the Ladies Eleonora and Constance Paget tagging after the Queen, on foot, on horseback, or in carriage, six days out of seven. There can be no doubt that all this has done her Majesty great disservice, and has largely contributed to augment that personal dislike, and the sense of her alienation from them, which in the minds of the Tories have stifled every principle of attachment to, and respect for, the Crown. The consequence is, that her government find their difficulties considerably increased by her manifestation of exclusive partiality for them, and instead of being a source of strength, it becomes (by the way in which she shows it) one of weakness.

June 14, 1839: Much talk with Lady Cowper [the future Lady Palmerston] about the Queen, who was eloquent on her merits, but admitted that she had faults, and those in her position dangerous ones, obstinacy to wit, and a very high opinion of herself, which is unquestionably the truth, and accounts for the pertinacity with which she adhered to her purpose and stood out against the Duke. . . .

I had much talk with Lady Cowper about the Court. She lamented the obstinate character of the Queen, from which she thought that hereafter great evils might be apprehended. She said that her prejudices and antipathies were deep and strong, and her disposition very flexible. Her hatred of Peel and her resentment against the Duke for having sided with him rather than with her in the old quarrel are unabated, and Melbourne had great difficulty in prevailing upon her to invite the Duke to the Castle in the summer. She said she did not think anything would induce the Queen to give way upon the point on which the former difference arose. It is very revolting to hear of a girl of nineteen, albeit Queen, pronouncing an opinion upon the conduct of the Duke of Wellington, and deciding what it was his duty to do, and that in a matter personal to herself. It is the worst trait of her character I have met with, because it is arrogant, vain, and ungrateful. As to the matter itself, I hope some way will be found of preventing any future collision upon it, but if not, she will have to learn the disagreeable lesson that her opinion does not make right, nor her volition law.

In the theatre, Victoria was cheered. But at Ascot, there were scenes:

June 24, 1839: . . . As if one scandal of this sort was not enough, there has been another, not so serious, but unbecoming and disreputable concerning the Duchess of Montrose and Lady Sarah Ingestrie, who were said to have hissed the Queen from Erroll's stand at Ascot as her Majesty drove up the course. This story was rife in London, and the Duchess when she found it was so insisted upon vindicating herself and besides appealing to Lady Lichfield who was in the stand, went to Buckingham Palace, and sent for Uxbridge to complain, and through him to ask for an audience of the Queen. The Queen declined seeing her, and the Duke of Montrose applied (through Melbourne) for one for himself, but this affair has ended by a gracious reception of the ladies at the Drawing Room and an assurance from Melbourne that the Queen never had believed a word of the story, and he hoped therefore that the Duke of Montrose would not press for an audience. The fact, however, in spite of the indignant denial of the ladies, is true. These two foolish vulgar women (for such they are) at a moment of great excitement, (for it was shortly after the grand scompiflio), did by some not decorous or feminine noises testify their dislike or contempt, not probably of the Queen particularly but of the general contents of the procession, and this was so openly, even ostentatiously done, that it could not escape the notice of the other women in the stand, more than one of whom, and one (the Duchess of Beaufort) a Tory, told me. It is a miserable matter, but it does harm. The Queen is to blame to listen to such tales, and to allow anybody to tell her them, whether true or false; it would be more dignified to treat such tittle-tattle with contempt, and discourage its being told to her at all.

Melbourne and his colleagues were uneasy.

September 28, 1840: Lord John and Palmerston had a long conversation amicable enough in tone, but unsatisfactory in result. No change. In the meantime John had had a communication from Melbourne enclosing a letter from the Queen to himself, for it seems that they are in the habit of writing each other from room to room at Windsor Castle. Melbourne had very imprudently shown the Queen one of John's letters in

which he had (not intending it for her to see) talked of breaking up the Government, if something satisfactory was not settled, and of the possibility of the Tories coming in and Sir Robert Peel in a strain very disagreeable to her. She accordingly testified her annoyance at the letter, and made a sort of appeal *ad misericordiam*, referring to her delicate state, all of which Melbourne thought might move John. In this letter she made use of one remarkable and ominous expression, for she said:

"The Queen will never send for Sir Robert Peel." (Note: She always writes in the third person.)

And John said she was right, and I was rather surprised to hear him express a very poor opinion of Peel.

On April 5, 1841, we read that "Sir Robert has dined at the Palace for the first time since the Bedchamber quarrel, and this is deemed important."

At a later date, the Queen discussed the whole matter with Lord John Russell:

January 29, 1854: . . . She said, if she had had the Prince to talk to and employ in explaining matters at the time of the Bedchamber quarrel with Peel, that affair would not have happened. Lord John said he thought she must have been advised by somebody to act as she did, to which she replied with great candour and naïveté, "No, it was entirely my own foolishness." This is the first time I have heard of her acknowledging that it was "foolishness," and is an avowal creditable to her sense. Lord John said, when Lord Spencer was consulted on the matter, he replied, "It is a bad ground for a *Whig* government to stand on, but as gentlemen you can't do otherwise."