



The Derby Cabinet of 1867, painted by Henry Gales. Those present include Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, John Pakington and Benjamin Disraeli

pool of talent was a small one. And as the names of his ministers were being announced in the House of Lords the aged and very deaf Duke of Wellington was heard to mutter, not very quietly, 'Who? Who?' as he failed to recognise those appointed. Derby treated this with good humour. But when he was quizzed at dinner by an opinionated marchioness, he was not so patient. 'Come now, Lord Derby,' she said, 'who are all these people you have got around you? Who are so-and-so and so-and-so? Is he a real man or only a puppet?' 'As to whether he is a real man or not,' Lord Derby replied, 'I can only assure your ladyship that he has had three wives. The marchioness did not stay to hear the rest! Neither did Derby's ministry stay for very long. When Disraeli tried to introduce his first Budget it was defeated and the government resigned.

The place of Toxophilite and politics

It was to be six years before Derby became Premier for the second time, again under peculiar circumstances and again without a Commons majority. Palmerston fell from power in 1858 when his bill to prevent conspiracies (prompted by the Orsini plot to murder Napoleon III) failed to win Commons support, so the Queen again sent for Derby. This time he was not at all pleased to be summoned. His interest in politics was waning. He was working on a blank verse translation of Homer's *Iliad*. And he was much occupied with one of his horses, Toxophilite, which he felt sure was going to achieve his long-held ambition of winning the Derby. But the Queen's government must continue, so reluctantly he accepted office.

This ministry lasted 15 months and had some notable achievements, including an act allowing Jews to sit in the Commons. But Toxophilite was pipped at the post in the Derby and, in May 1859, when trying to introduce a mild measure of parliamentary reform, the government was defeated and Derby resigned.

His third and final ministry began in 1866 after Russell's government fell over Gladstone's proposals for parliamentary reform. By now Derby was ailing, and he left more and more responsibility for policy in the hands of Disraeli. It was Disraeli who, largely single-handed, drew up the terms of the 1867 Reform Bill. But it was perhaps appropriate that Derby's career should end with a measure of parliamentary reform. Whatever his own feelings might have been about Disraeli's proposals he loyally supported them in Cabinet and in the Lords, though confessing in a speech that the government was taking 'a leap in the dark'. His old taste for party conflict hadn't quite left him either, for he gleefully announced to colleagues in private that 'we have dished the Whigs'. Shortly afterwards his health gave way and he resigned the premiership to Disraeli. Although in poor health he summoned the strength to return to the Lords in 1869 to attack Gladstone's proposals for the Irish Church, displaying in the process signs of his old fire and force. Many old Parliamentarians watching the performance must have realised it was his last, and wondered just what this gifted gadfly might have achieved if he had dedicated himself wholly to politics. He died in October 1869 and was buried, as he had wished, in the little village church at Knowsley.

www.history-ontheweb.co.uk - its farther expansion and development

To enable the marked development of the site over the next 18 months, the site was migrated to a new ISP over Christmas/New Year. A number of problems ensued: nearly all are resolved and we heard from only one Licence holder that was inconvenienced. Thank you for your forbearance. Gain a new Licence/new access by 28 May to benefit from our mailing-sheet offer and have all in place **before** September