

MAR 67

B.2.1 (pt.3)

**MEMORIES OF
BROCKET HALL (3)**



Lord Melbourne— guide, philosopher and friend to Queen Victoria

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED

by Rudolph Robert

AFTER the death of Lord Byron, and the accidental meeting with his funeral cortège as it moved solemnly along the Great North Road, Lady Caroline's nervous condition, as we have seen, again deteriorated. Her relationship with the arch-apostle of romanticism and revolutionary liberalism had received its death-blow years earlier, but the memory of it, brief and unhappy though it had been, lived on in the recesses of her mind and heart. Ever since the scandal at Lady Heathcote's ball and the publication of the novel *Glenarvon*, which pilloried so many people, society had made an outcast of her, yet she was too vital a person to idle away her days in the seclusion of Bocket, away from the main current of London life in which she had delighted to move and display her effervescent personality.

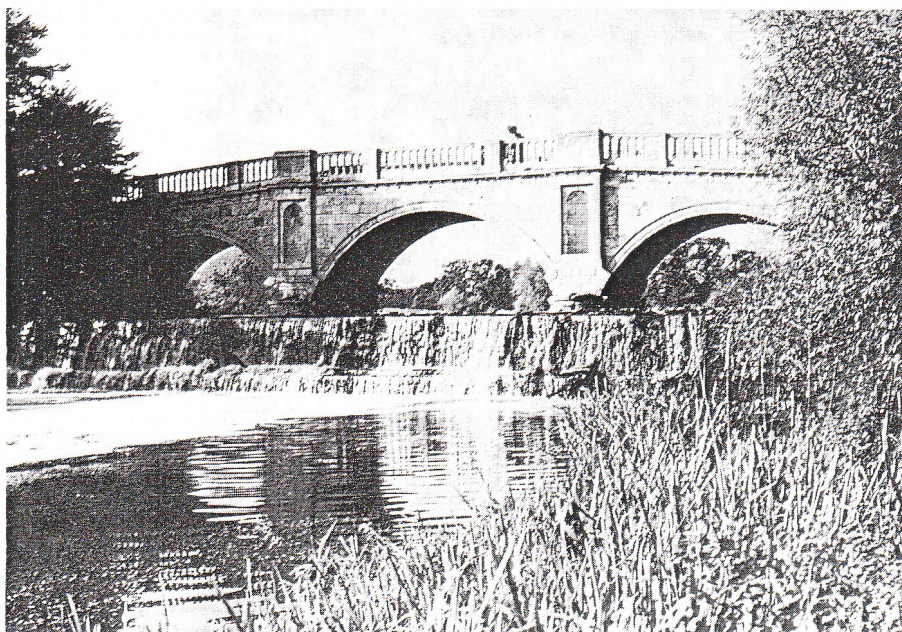
Brocket, of course, was by no means lacking in social life. Visitors from the nearby country houses were continually calling, and there were even occasions when the Lambs, both of hospitable disposition, threw a party. On one such occasion, in 1820, Caroline made a more than usually determined effort to rehabilitate herself in the eyes of at least her Hertfordshire neighbours. Eighty invitations were sent out and arrangements made

for a sumptuous supper, but when the night came only ten people sat down to table.

Caroline's troubles and unpopularity with guests extended to her servants, and they seldom stayed at the Hall for very long because of the constant scenes she created. Once when preparations were being made for a big party she was annoyed by something the butler did or said and, jumping on to the

dining-room table, tried with raised voice and imperious gestures to deal with what she thought, quite wrongly, to be his insolence.

William, her long-suffering husband, still feeling responsible for her, still half in love with her, put up with her moods as best he could. The tragedy of the situation was intensified by the fact that the mental abnormality of their son, Augustus, had been



**The much-admired Palladian
bridge and waterfall at
Brocket Park.**

The church of St. Etheldreda, Hatfield, where Lord Melbourne and his wife, Lady Caroline Lamb, lie buried. ►

◄ The painting on the opposite page is of Henry William Lamb, second Viscount Melbourne, a great Whig statesman, who became prime minister in 1834 and was for several years Queen Victoria's devoted friend and adviser. He lived at Brocket Hall for many years. Reproduced by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

declared incurable. William, therefore, absented himself from Brocket as much as possible, and in 1825 decided finally and irrevocably that the only solution of his marital affairs lay in a separation.

Caroline agreed to go to Paris, and a farewell ceremony then took place at which she conducted herself so admirably that everyone was touched—indeed, the butler whom she had antagonized was actually reduced to tears. William made her a generous allowance, but she proved totally incapable of managing her own affairs and within three months was back at Brocket, where she knew that the Lambs would care for her. In the autumn of 1827 she fell ill unexpectedly, and in January was moved to London, where, with William hovering near her bedside, she died. Despite all that he had endured he was deeply moved, and confessed later that Caroline “was to me more than anyone ever was or ever will be.” That he meant what he said is borne out by the fact that he did not marry again.

HOME SECRETARY

The death of William's father occurred in the same year that the gods, having finished their sport with Caroline, cut short her sad career. Melbourne, the first viscount, had survived his brilliant wife, Emily, by twelve years, and lived on six months after the death of his daughter-in-law, remaining to the end a shadowy nonentity. With his departure William inherited the title of Viscount Melbourne, and soon afterwards found himself half-reluctantly treading the road to power and eminence as a Whig politician.

The first office of importance held by the new Lord Melbourne was that of home secretary, in the period 1830-4, when the voice of Britain's industrial workers was first making itself heard. The agitation for parliamentary reform and extension of the franchise was to some extent met by the Reform Bill of 1832, which gave the vote to people with certain property qualifications. But the propertyless proletariat, living in slums and forced to work long hours in “dark Satanic mills,” was not satisfied and strove on with undiminished vigour for its rights. A development that worried Melbourne a great deal was the

formation of trade unions, particularly in the industrial north. While resisting the proposal of some Cabinet colleagues to outlaw the movement, which he thought unnecessary, he became more amenable to their arguments when trade union activities spread to the countryside, in which, as a landowner, he had a vested interest.

Eventually he resolved on a compromise measure that had been suggested to him by the lawyers: an old Act of Parliament was revived, under which it had been an offence to administer secret oaths. When in March 1834 it was learnt that a newly formed trade union had administered such oaths as part of its admission ceremony several men were arrested and, after the travesty of a trial, sentenced to seven years' transportation. Melbourne, grossly misled by the local magistrates as to the characters of the condemned men, confirmed the sentences.

The affair of the Tolpuddle Martyrs nearly sparked off the revolution that everyone expected and feared. Monster parades

marched down Whitehall, but Melbourne, taunted by the opposition critics for his irresolution, remained firm, and would not even accept a petition that tens of thousands had signed.

His name, therefore, will for ever be remembered as the “villain” of this historic episode, though the end of the story is entirely to his credit. Two years later, when his position in the Government was much stronger, he pardoned the Dorset labourers, who were allowed to leave Australia and return to their native land.

PRIME MINISTER

Political power appears to have meant little to Lord Melbourne, for he was under no financial compulsion to carve out a career for himself; in fact he disliked the incessant warfare of Parliament and would have much preferred to spend his days at Brocket, walking round the park with a gun under his arm





Sunshine and shadow in Bocket Park. Two rambles are crossing the bridge, the balustrade of which can be seen.

or browsing in his well-stocked library. From a personal point of view it was probably a good thing that greatness and the cares of office were thrust upon him, for though many of his Bocket memories were wholly delightful others, particularly those associated with Caroline in her last days, caused nothing but pain.

Melbourne became prime minister for the first time in 1834 and for the second time in 1835, and remained in office for a total period of seven years. The accession of young Queen Victoria in 1837 was the great turning point of his later career, for he found in her the stimulus to action that had hitherto been lacking. Victoria, then an ingenuous girl of eighteen who knew nothing of statecraft, roused his chivalrous instincts and gave him, for the first time, a sense of complete commitment to the nation's affairs. He did his best to be the wise, kindly and loyal counsellor. Victoria accepted his homage and advice willingly, and confided to her diary the belief that he was "a most truly honest, straightforward and noble-minded man . . . there are not many like him in this world of deceit." It is not too much to say that they became sentimentally attached to one another. Other people were quick to notice their mutual

admiration, trust and affection, and made many jokes about it. "I hope you are amused at the report of Lord Melbourne marrying the Queen," wrote a lady of the court to her friend; "for my part I have no objection." Every week a bouquet of flowers came from the Bocket gardens to grace the royal boudoir.

The romance, for it was no less, ended only when Victoria married her handsome hero, Prince Albert, in 1840; yet the friendship remained firm for many years, even after Melbourne had ceased to be prime minister and, in his late sixties, was living in the country—a recluse who watched from afar the colourful pageant in which he had once been a leading actor.

THE LAST YEARS

In the spring of 1842, just after he had retired from politics, Lord Melbourne's health deteriorated; he had a stroke and again the pattern of his life was altered. Friends and relatives rallied round him and kept him going for six years. His younger brother, Frederick, came with his wife to spend several months every year at Bocket; and

his sister Emily often left her home at Panshanger to keep him company and help with the housekeeping. Whatever their faults, the Lambs were certainly a united family and seldom defaulted on their obligations to one another.

Yet, inevitably, Melbourne tended to brood. With an open book on his knee he would stare out of the windows of the Hall to the lake and the spinneys of young trees on the opposite side. Walking round the spacious rooms he would be reminded of his mother, "a remarkable woman, but not chaste," of his wife Caroline and their imbecile son—all dead. His mind dwelt on the young queen, whom he had served faithfully but by whom he was no longer needed. He thought of Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace and the times when his presence there had been not only welcome but a vital necessity. As he allowed these vivid memories to overwhelm him the old man's eyes would fill with tears.

The end came suddenly on November 25, 1848, on a day when the leaves were sere and the skies grey. He was buried in the churchyard of St. Etheldreda's, Hatfield, in a spot close to Caroline, whose remains had been interred there twenty years earlier.