CHAPTER LXXVI

PETER PAM IMPENITENT

As THE gay dog of diplomacy, "Pam" was a gift from the gods of contrariness. No dog ever had so bad a name as his. His predecessor at the Foreign Office was grieved to death over his misdeeds:

February 6, 1847: . . . Aberdeen told him [Delane] that nothing could exceed the abhorrence in which Palmerston was held all over Europe, at the small Courts more than at the great ones, from Washington to Lisbon but one sentiment, and that the Queen could not endure him.

There was thus (June 3, 1848) "a distinct understanding that Lord John should exercise a control over the Foreign Office and secure the Cabinet against any imprudence of Palmerston's."

Happily, there was still Lord Howick to hold "Pam" in leash. Having succeeded to the Earldom of his father, the Prime Minister of the Reform Bill, Lord Howick, was now disguised as Lord Grey. And he would stand no nonsense:

March 8, 1850: . . . Lord Grey was paramount, allowing nothing to be done without his full knowledge and assent, and constantly altering Palmerston's despatches as a tutor might a boy's exercise.

Greville also assumed "that Palmerston's independent action in the Foreign Office has received a complete and final check," that (October 7, 1846) John Russell as Prime Minister would be "so very different from Melbourne."

It was not long before the merely hereditary Grey began "to kick very gently" against "Pam's" pinpricks. And with the former Howick, the trouble was that the people did not like him:

Ludford, June 24, 1839: . . . The spirit of contradiction eternally moves him, and especially in the Cabinet, where he makes a point of contesting almost every opinion that is suggested by anybody else. It is impossible to form an idea of the difficulty

which he causes to Lord John, and what he has to endure on his account, and all this is the more provoking because Howick is the only man who assists him in the way of hard work, and in mastering the details of measures, such for instance as thoroughly sifting Acts of Parliament, in all of which he is as laborious, accurate, and punctual as Ellenborough.

February 10, 1850: . . . He [Grey] is as unpopular as the other [Palmerston] is popular. The House of Commons swarms with his bitter enemies, and he commands very few friends. Notwithstanding his great and undeniable abilities, he committed blunders, which proceed from his obstinacy and conceit and from his contempt for the opinion of others, and the tenacity with which he clings to his own; and while those who know him are aware that a man more high-minded, more honourable and conscientious does not exist, he has contrived to make himself pass for a Minister whose word cannot be relied on.

At the Foreign Office, all the "old offences" were repeated. Melbourne himself, though brother-in-law of the culprit (January 26, 1848), confessed that he was "anti-Palmerstonian."

Shall we linger over the misdeeds? Some of them retain the fragrance of humour.

In a despatch, Palmerston had said that "the succession of the Duchesse de Montpensier's children would be inadmissible by the constitutional law of Spain (or words to this effect)." Lord John Russell, happening to be in attendance on the Queen, held that "it did not become *us* to lay down the constitutional law of Spain."

January 26, 1848: . . . The Prince and Beauvale both concurred, and Lord John said he would strike out this passage, and submit it so amended to the Queen. He did so, and Her Majesty took the same view. It was returned so altered to Palmerston; but when the despatch was published, it was found that Palmerston had re-inserted the paragraph, and so it stood. What more may have passed I know not, but it is clear that they all *stood* it, as they always will.

On another occasion, June 18, 1848, "Palmerston joined the Queen in Scotland, leaving the conduct of this affair"—

its precise nature does not matter—"in the hands of John Russell." Then the wires crossed:

June 1, 1848: . . . Lord John and the Duc de Broglie came to an understanding, but in the meanwhile Palmerston wrote a despatch to Normanby on the subject, which passed through London without being communicated to Lord John Russell.

True "Guizot acted with so much moderation" that the discrepancy "was adjusted amicably." Yet (June 1, 1848) to the annoyance of the mandarins, "Palmerston when urged on the subject threw the blame on the Foreign Office, which they say he is constantly in the habit of doing."

There was one lapse for which Lord Stanley (Derby), who found Palmerston "so good-natured and agreeable," had to administer a "drubbing" in the House of Lords "which Guizot was there to hear."

The British Minister in Madrid was Sir Henry Bulwer. In March, 1848, Palmerston instructed him to tell the Queen of Spain to change her government, and Bulwer, with Palmerston's approval, published the despatch in the newspapers of the Spanish Opposition!

According to the Duke of Bedford:

April 30, 1848: . . . Palmerston had shown John Russell the despatch, and Lord John had objected to it, stating his reasons for so doing. According to his custom, Palmerston made no reply; but they parted, Lord John naturally concluding that after he had stated his objection the despatch would not be sent. Shortly after he was with the Queen, and in conversation on this subject he told her what had passed between Palmerston and himself, and what he had said. "No; did you say all that?" said the Queen. He said, "Yes." "Well, then," she replied, "it produced no effect, for the despatch is gone. Lord Palmerston sent it to me; I know it is gone."

What the Queen thought of Palmerston's "spirit of meddling" was delicately indicated at her levee where she was "very civil" to Isturitz, the Spanish Minister in London. And (April 30, 1848) Greville's "impression was that this was such a daring defiance of the Prime Minister and such an insulting

indifference to the sentiments of his colleagues that it must lead to a quarrel, and that Palmerston would be forced to resign."

If Palmerston won this little game, it was because (June 18, 1848) the Spaniards "played their cards (not bad ones originally) so miserably ill." They were "like people who had a very good hand but revoked at a critical moment and so lost the game." Suddenly Sir Henry Bulwer was "driven out of Madrid, his passports sent him and he himself ordered to quit it in forty-eight hours."

Greville suspected that Narvaez, the Spanish Dictator, had "a good case against Bulwer." There had been (May 30, 1848) "a system of offensive and injudicious interference" and connivance against "the plots or intrigues going on against the Government [of Spain]."

Unfortunately, the Spanish envoy, Mirasol, sent to explain matters, only brought an indictment that was "flimsy and weak and unsupported by proofs." Bulwer was decorated with the K. C. B. and Isturitz was "civilly sent out of this country."

June 18, 1848: . . . Bulwer and Palmerston are triumphantly curvetting about, completely smashing their antagonists in argument, partly because the latter are blunderers who have deceived themselves and been misled by others, and partly because they cannot put forth their true case and the reasons which have influenced them. They know perfectly well that Palmerston and Bulwer have all along moved heaven and earth to keep or drive Narvaez out of office, and Montpensier out of Spain. . . . I read in Bulwer's own handwriting an account of his proceedings and of the failure of his schemes. It was through Serrano all this was to be done, but Serrano was under the influence of his mother, and Narvaez of his doctor, and these were both corrupted by the other side. This was the cause of failure.

In Parliament (June 10, 1848) "the Spanish debate went off as might have been expected—all fought in muffled gloves." Palmerston, "flippant and insolent," did not "care a straw."

Over Palmerston's pranks, Lord John Russell, amid his perplexities, sometimes was betrayed into "laughing heartily":

August 5, 1850: . . . While the fleet was in the Dardanelles, and when instructions were to be sent out for its removal, Palmerston wrote a despatch which he sent to John Russell

who was to send it on to the Queen. John Russell made several alterations in it and sent it to her Majesty. She wrote back in reply that she did not approve either of the despatch or of the alterations, but inadvertently and contrary to her custom, she sent back the box direct to Palmerston instead of to John Russell. Palmerston of course read the remarks and coolly said to John Russell,

"I think the Queen is quite right; her remarks are very just, and both the despatch and the alterations are objectionable, and had better not be sent," and accordingly he sent no instructions at all, which was the very thing he wanted to do.

It was because the people were behind him that Palmerston emerged from criticism so often "unscathed." He distributed "plenty of sops to the Radicals." In the House of Commons, he had "his devils," Bernal Osborne and Nugent, "the most troublesome *frondeurs* of the Government" and Dicky Milnes, "always [his] lacquey." Palmerston (August 8, 1849) "made his devils bring on a discussion in the House of Commons that he might make a speech." He was—

July 29, 1849: . . . impudent and clever as usual, skimming over with his usual nonchalance the bad parts of the case against him and interlarding his speech with some very judicious remarks and very sound principles (the very reverse of his practice) and divers plausible claptraps for his Radical friends, the whole being as usual exceedingly well received by a very select audience, for I understand there were not fifty people present.

August 8, 1849: . . . He is now evidently endeavouring to make for himself a great Radical interest in the House of Commons, and thus to increase his power, and render himself more indispensable to the Government by making them feel how dangerous he would be out of office.

With this enthusiasm for popular causes was associated a zeal for British interests. Palmerston was patriot as well as revolutionary. And it was his spirited foreign policy (February 24, 1850) that landed "himself and his colleagues" into "the worst scrape of all."

February 14, 1850: . . . Labouchere [from the Cabinet] came

into my room yesterday and let loose about it without reserve. He said it admitted of no excuse, and that John Russell, who alone could have prevented it, was inexcusable for not having done so; that it ought to have been brought regularly and formally before the Cabinet, who ought all to have known precisely what it was Palmerston proposed to do. Papers indeed were sent round in boxes, and Palmerston defended himself on this ground, and asked why they did not read them; but (said Labouchere) how was it possible for men who had large departments with a vast deal of business of their own, to read all the papers which were brought round in circulation? They neither did nor could.

Don Pacifico, a Jew from Gibraltar, had a claim on Greece. Palmerston ordered, therefore, a blockade of the Piræus, which "affair has dragged on [April 23, 1850] and wears rather a sinister apearance." The French attempted a mediation, and their Ambassador, Drouyn de Lhuys, dining with Reeve—

April 23, 1850: . . . complained in strong terms of Palmerston's conduct, said that France had exerted herself with great sincerity to arrange the affair, but had been met in no corresponding spirit here. He intimated that his government would publish to the whole world what had taken place, and that the matter was assuming a very grave character toward both Russia and France. . . . He repeated what Van de Weyer had said of the "universal execration" in which we were held, and that no country could excite such a feeling with impunity. . . . My own conviction has been all along that Palmerston never intended anything but to hoodwink his colleagues, bamboozle the French, and gain time.

The charge against Palmerston was that he wished "to terrify and bully Greece into complete surrender, baffle Russia and make France ridiculous."

Even Palmerston was anxious to get out of the business:

April 28, 1850: . . . The decision and alacrity of Palmerston last Saturday week form a curious contrast with his dilatory motions a few weeks ago. Then he could not manage to frame an instruction and despatch it in less than a week or more; but when matters were getting serious, and he found that he must

finish the affair, he was quick enough. On Saturday morning he received the despatches announcing the difficulties at Athens. He sent for Drouyn de Lhuys, concerted with him what was to be done, wrote his instructions, laid them before the Cabinet, got all the forms through, and sent them off the same evening.

But the harm was done. As Greville had "long ago predicted," Palmerston (June 21, 1850) was "proving the ruin of the Government."

May 17, 1850: This has been a day of agitation. On Wednesday night all London was excited by the announcement at Devonshire House (where there was a great rout) that Drouyn de Lhuys had been recalled and was gone to Paris, and that neither Brunnow nor Cetto had been present at Palmerston's birthday dinner. Everybody was talking yesterday in the two Houses of these things and of the cause of them, which of course had to do with Greece. Questions were put to Lord Lansdowne and to Palmerston, when both of them said that the French Government had desired the presence of Drouyn de Lhuys at Paris in order to explain matters, and they both said what was tantamount to a denial of his having been recalled. At the very moment that they were making these statements in Parliament, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs was reading in the tribune of the National Assembly the formal letter of recall which had been sent to their Ambassador, which he was instructed to communicate, and which he read to Palmerston on the preceding day, and he was at the same time explaining that the Ambassador had been recalled on account of the manner in which the English Government had behaved to that of France, which rendered it incompatible with the dignity of the Republic to leave any longer an Ambassador in London.

May 19, 1850: There is the devil to pay about this Greek affair, and at last there seems a tolerable chance of Palmerston coming to grief: "*Tant va la cruche à l'eau*," etc.

In the House of Lords, the Government was defeated by thirty-seven votes:

June 18, 1850: . . . I never was more amazed than at hearing the division, never having dreamt of such a majority; *reste à savoir* what Government (and Palmerston especially) will do.

If he was disposed to take a great line he would go at once to the Queen and resign, at the same time begging her not to accept the resignation of his colleagues if they tendered it. This would be creditable to him, and he owes them all the reparation in his power for the hot water he has kept them in, and the scrapes he has made for them for many years.

But despite this "buffet," the Cabinet decided "*to do nothing.*" John Russell was able to "lay aside all thoughts of getting rid of Palmerston, and the rickety concern will scramble on as before":

May 19, 1850: . . . On Friday Palmerston did not make his appearance; but the figures which Lord Lansdowne cut in the Lords and Lord John in the Commons were most deplorable and humiliating; such shuffling, special pleading, and paltry evasions were never before heard from public men of their eminence and character.

June 21, 1850: John Russell made his statement last night, giving the reasons why he did not resign, quoting two precedents, one above a century ago, and one in 1833, for not resigning in consequence of an adverse vote of the House of Lords. I concur in the constitutional doctrine he laid down on that score, but the rest of what he said was very imprudent and ill-judged. He has now committed himself more than ever to Palmerston, and has thrown down a defiance to all Europe, announcing that they will make no difference whatever in their administration of foreign affairs.

This time, it did really seem as if nothing could save Palmerston. And yet:

June 29, 1850: . . . Palmerston came out the second night with prodigious force and success. He delivered an oration four hours and three quarters long, which had excited unusual admiration, boundless enthusiasm amongst his friends and drawn forth the most flattering compliments from every quarter. It is impossible to deny its great ability; parts of it are strikingly eloquent and inimitably adroit. It was a wonderful effort to speak for nearly five hours without ever flagging, and his voice nearly as strong at last as at first. The ability of it is

the more remarkable, because on an attentive and calm perusal of it, the insufficiency of it as an answer and a defence against the various charges which have been brought against him is manifest; but it is admirably arranged and got up, entirely free from the flippancy and impertinence in which he usually indulges, full of moderation and good taste, and adorned with a profusion of magnificent and successful claptraps. The success of the speech has been complete, and his position is not unassailable. John Russell may save himself the trouble of considering, when this is all over, how he may effect some change involving the withdrawal of the Foreign Office from Palmerston's hands, for they are now all tied and bound to him in respect to the future as completely as to the present and the past. These discussions and attacks, which were to have shaken him in his seat, have only made *him* more powerful than he was before; but whether they have strengthened or weakened *the Government* is another question.

Even Grey ceased from grumbling:

London, July 1, 1850: . . . I rode with Lord Grey yesterday in the Park, when we talked over the debate and present state of affairs. He said that it was remarkable that this discussion, which was intended to damage Palmerston, had left him the most popular man in the country; that of this there could be no doubt. Bright had said that his vote had given great offence at Manchester, and that Cobden's vote and speech would probably cost him the West Riding at the next election; that amongst all the middle classes Palmerston was immensely popular. He spoke of Palmerston's speech as having been not only one of consummate ability, but quite successful as a reply, and he insisted that their side had much the best of the argument. I denied this, but acknowledged the ability of Palmerston and his success, though his speech was very answerable, if either Peel or Disraeli had chosen to reply to it, which neither of them would. It is beyond all contestation that this great battle, fought on two fields, has left the Government much stronger than before, and demonstrated the impossibility of any change, and it has as incontestably immensely strengthened and improved Palmerston's position; in short, he is triumphant.

"Uncorrected and unchecked," Greville had written on February 10, 1850, Palmerston "bears a charmed life in politics." He was now "invested with all the insignia of triumph." And "the close of the Session has left him and his spouse immoderately jubilant." Darby and Joan "escaped undamaged" and were "mounted on their high horse."

July 1, 1850: . . . He has achieved such a success, and has made himself so great in the Cabinet, and so popular in the country, and made the Government itself so strong, that if he turns over a new leaf, takes a lesson from all that has happened, and renounces his offensive manners and changes his mode of proceeding abroad, he may consider his tenure of office perfectly secure.

July 28, 1850: This day week the Radicals gave Palmerston a dinner at the Reform Club. It was a sorry affair—a rabble of men, not ten out of two hundred whom I knew by sight. They asked John Russell who would not go, and then they thought it better to ask no more of Palmerston's colleagues. Neither Lord John nor any of them liked it, but of course they said nothing. Palmerston would have done better to repose on his House of Commons laurels, and find some pretext for declining this compliment.