CHAPTER LV

PETER "PAM"

History may be defined as the impact of personality on environment. As Prince Esterhazy of Austria said to Greville (November 8, 1836), "for a long time past the affairs of Europe had been extensively influenced by personal feelings and individual interests and passions." We are now to be introduced to a statesman whose "politics" were, according to his colleague, Sir James Graham, "always personal."

Lord Palmerston was born in 1784. Greville appears first to notice him on March 19, 1829, when Palmerston delivered a speech in the House of Commons on Catholic Emancipation, which "astonished everybody." It was "the most brilliant" in the debate—"an imitation and not a bad one" of Canning:

June 11, 1829: . . . The event of last week was Palmerston's speech on the Portuguese question, which was delivered at a late hour and in an empty House, but which they say was exceedingly able and eloquent. This is the second he has made this year of great merit. It was very violent against Government. He has been twenty years in office and never distinguished himself before, a proof how many accidental circumstances are requisite to bring out the talents which a man may possess. The office he held was one of dull and dry detail, and he never travelled out of it. He probably stood in awe of Canning and others, and was never in the Cabinet; but having lately held higher situations and having acquired more confidence, and the great men having been removed from the House of Commons by death or promotion, he has launched forth, and with astonishing success. Lord Granville told me he had always thought Palmerston was capable of more than he did, and had told Canning so, who did not believe it.

When the Duke of Wellington was faced by the demand for Reform (November 9, 1830) he "certainly did make some over-

tures to Palmerston" and "they were very fair ones." But Palmerston did not identify himself thus with the Tories.

He joined Lord Grey's Government as Foreign Secretary and (December 12, 1830) was "said to have given the greatest satisfaction to the foreign Ministers and to have begun very well."

Not that "Pam," as he was called, with that straw in his mouth which was invented by caricature, was regarded as an orator. On one occasion, Peel, meeting Greville at dinner (May 12, 1834) told how Palmerston "had attempted a new line quite unusual with him—that of humour—and anything so miserable he had never heard." The Foreign Secretary "had seemed bereft of his senses." There was a report that "Palmerston was out and Durham in his place." And anyway, Durham was "under the gallery" of the House and "must have been well satisfied with the woeful exhibition" of his rival. Jove was quite too jovial.

"It is certain," wrote Greville on February 17, 1835, "that he cut a very poor figure in Parliament all the time he was in office."

If Greville was a critic of Palmerston, it must be realized that Greville also belonged to the Civil Service which frankly detested the Foreign Secretary. When Palmerston was "beaten in Hants," Greville records (January 20, 1835) that "everybody rejoices, for he is marvellously unpopular; they would have liked to illuminate the Foreign Office."

As England was to learn to her cost, "Pam" was easy-going:

February 17, 1835: . . . His great fault is want of punctuality, and never keeping an engagement if it did not suit him, keeping everybody waiting for hours on his pleasure or caprice. This testimony is beyond suspicion, and it is confirmed by the opinions of his colleagues.

August 7, 1833: . . . George Villiers is appointed to Madrid, but he tells me that he can neither see nor hear from Palmerston, that though his appointment is in everybody's mouth it has never been notified to him.

February 1, 1834: . . . Palmerston has never written to George Villiers once since *October*. I heard the same thing of him in some other case, I forget which.

February 13, 1834: . . . His unpopularity in his own office is

quite as great as it is among the foreign Ministers, . . . George Villiers complains that for above three months he has not received a single line from him, and he is a young minister, unpractised in the profession, to whom is committed the most delicate and difficult mission in Europe. He spends his time in making love to Mrs. Petre, whom he takes to the House of Commons to hear speeches which he does not make, and where he exhibits his conquest, and certainly it is the best of his exploits, but what a successor of Canning, whom, by the way, he affects to imitate.

To etiquette, Palmerston was sometimes indifferent:

August 8, 1833: . . . George Villiers . . . told me he was with Palmerston at his house yesterday morning, and was much struck with his custom of receiving all his numerous visitors and applicants in the order in which they arrived, be their rank what it may. Neumann told him he had never known him vary in this practice, or deviate from it in anybody's favour.

Palmerston did not always consult his colleagues:

September 22, 1840: . . . The manner in which business is conducted and the independence of the Foreign Office are curiously displayed by the following fact. Last Wednesday a Protocol was signed (very proper in itself), in which the four powers disclaimed any intention of aggrandizing themselves in any way. The fact of this Protocol was told to Clarendon by Dr. Bowring, who had heard it in the City, and to Lord Holland by Dedel, neither of these Ministers having the slightest notion of its existence.

March 14, 1841: . . . His [Palmerston's] colleagues meanwhile do not dare say a word and submit to be fobbed off with anything he chooses to say to them, all the time suspecting that he does not tell them the truth, and quite sure he does not tell the *whole* truth. In such a manner does one bold, unscrupulous, and able man predominate over his colleagues one of whom is John Russell, not less bold at times, and as able as himself, but of a quiet disposition, shrinking from contest, controversy, and above all, I take it, from the labyrinth of lies, underhand dealing, and deceit which he must thread and disentangle if he insists upon a regular settlement of accounts with Palmerston.

August 24, 1840: . . . Palmerston, in fact, appears to exercise an absolute despotism at the Foreign Office, and deals with all our vast and complicated questions of diplomacy according to his own views and opinions, without the slightest control, and scarcely any interference on the part of his colleagues. This apathy is mainly attributable to that which appears in Parliament and in the country upon all foreign questions. Nobody understands and nobody cares for them, and when any rare and occasional notice is taken of a particular point, or of some question on which a slight and evanescent interest is manifested, Palmerston has little difficulty in dealing with the matter, which he always meets with a consummate impudence and, it must be allowed, a skill and resolution, which invariably carry him through. . . . He is a man blessed with extraordinary good fortune, and his motto seems to be that of Danton, "*De l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.*" But there is a flippancy in his tone, an undoubting self-sufficiency, and a levity in discussing interests of such tremendous magnitude, which satisfies me that he is a very dangerous man to be entrusted with the uncontrolled management of our foreign relations.

Yet there was another side:

February 17, 1835: . . . The other night I met some clerks in the Foreign Office to whom the very name of Palmerston is hateful, but I was surprised to hear them (Mellish particularly, who can judge both from capacity and opportunity) give ample testimony to his abilities. They said that he wrote admirably, and could express himself perfectly in French, very sufficiently in Italian, and understood German; that his diligence and attention were unwearied—he read everything and wrote an immense quantity; that the foreign Ministers (who detest him) did him justice as an excellent man of business.

August 7, 1836: . . . It is surprising to hear how Palmerston is spoken of by those who know him well officially—the Granvilles, for example. Lady Granville, a woman expert in judging, thinks his capacity first rate; that it approaches to greatness from his enlarged views, disdain of trivialities, resolution, decision, confidence, and above all his contempt of clamour and abuse. She told me that Madame de Flahaut had a letter written by Talley-

rand soon after his first arrival in England, in which he talked with great contempt of the Ministers generally, Lord Grey included, and said there was but one statesman among them, and that was Palmerston. His ordinary conversation exhibits no such superiority; but when he takes his pen in his hand his intellect seems to have full play, and probably when engaged exclusively in business.

September 23, 1839: . . . [To Dedel] I said . . . he was very able with his pen, but I did not know how he was in conference. He replied: "Palmerston comes to any conference so fully and completely master of the subject of it in all the minutest details, that this capacity is a peculiar talent with him; it is so great, that he is apt sometimes to lose himself in the details."

But even here, opinions differed. According to Sir James Graham (December 22, 1853) "Palmerston, quite unlike most men, was often intemperate with his pen, while he was always very guarded in his language."

King William IV (September 23, 1837) still cherished "a very John Bullish aversion to the French"; indeed, "the junction of the English and French fleets two years ago was a bitter pill for him to swallow." It may have been a reason why he "liked Palmerston."

An interview with the French Ambassador was reported thus:

March 4, 1841: . . . A warm conversation followed, in the course of which (as Dedel says), Bourqueney saying, "*Nous ne sommes pas pressés.*" Palmerston replied in his most insolent tone, "*Et nous ne sommes pas pressés non plus; si vous ne craignez pas les bâtiments anglais, vous sentez bien que nous ne craignons pas les bâtiments français.* . . ."

It is only fair to say that, for some reason, Bourqueney himself denied that, on this occasion, the British bulldog with a bad name had thus snapped at him. But the story went the rounds.

When Talleyrand was in London, Palmerston had to elude the cleverest diplomat in Europe. "The principal cause of Talleyrand's hatred to Palmerston [February 2, 1837] was . . . his mortification at finding the part he played in London to be secondary to that of the British Ambassador in Paris."

Palmerston was against the reactionaries and they knew it, According to Matuscewitz, the Russian Ambassador:

Doncaster, September 15, 1835: . . . Louis Philippe had consulted Talleyrand about the maintenance of his intimate connection with England, and . . . Talleyrand had replied, "When you came to the throne four years ago, I advised you to cultivate your relations with England as the best security you could obtain. I now advise you to relinquish that connection, for in the present state of English politics it can only be productive of danger or embarrassment to you." Having omitted to put it down at the time, I can't recollect the exact words, but this was the sense, and I *think* Matuscewitz said that Louis Philippe had told him this himself.

Reaction, too, was nearer home than Paris. The Prime Minister was to be Lord Melbourne. His brother, Frederick Lamb, later Lord Deauville, was Ambassador at Vienna. Their sister, Lady Cowper, was the lover of Lord Palmerston and later his wife. And Vienna meant Metternich:

July 20, 1833: . . . There is another Ambassador [Frederic Lamb] whose principles are equally at variance with those of Palmerston, and who is completely be-Metternich'd, but his removal is out of the question; he knows it, and no doubt conducts himself accordingly. George Villiers told me that he touched incidentally one day with Palmerston on Lamb's conduct in some matter relating to Lord Granville, and he found that it was sacred ground, and he only got, "Ah, aw—yes, *Metternich* is, I suppose, too old to mend now." The position is a curious one as between his [Palmerston's] Envoy and his Chief [Melbourne]. The Chief is devoted to the Sister, and the Sister to the Brother. The Sister would not hesitate between the Lover [Palmerston] and the Brother [Lamb], and any injury to the latter would recoil upon the head of the former. So [in] this pleasant circle, the convenience of Government, and the interests of their policy are passed over, or compromised as they may.

September 29, 1841: Mellish gave me an account, last night, of Palmerston's last doings at the Foreign Office. He created five new paid attachés without the smallest necessity, and all within a few days of his retirement. This was done to provide

for a Howard, an Elliot, and a Duff, and a son of Sir Augustus Foster, whose provision was made part of the conditions of another job, the retirement of Sir Augustus to make way for Abercromby, Lord Minto's son-in-law—all foul jobbing at the public expense, and to all this useless waste the austere and immaculate Francis Baring, Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Cerberus who growls at every claimant on the Treasury, no matter how just his claims may be, gave his consent, complacent to his daring and unscrupulous colleague. Mellish told me another anecdote of Palmerston, that eleven thousand pounds (I put it in letters, because in figures some error might have been suspected) had been spent in *one year*, at the Foreign Office, in chaises and four conveying messengers to overtake the mail with his private letters, which never were ready in time.

In what follows, we shall find, as Greville put it on March 2, 1841, that "Palmerston has been at his tricks again." Indeed, "the truth is not in him."

November 4, 1857: . . . He [Granville] replied *that he could not trust Palmerston* but he meant to-night to speak in his defence at a dinner to be given to the Duke of Cambridge at the Mansion House. He begged me not to breathe to anyone what he had said about *not trusting to Palmerston* and that very likely after all he would not speak out for him.

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Then there was Lady Palmerston, Melbourne's sister:

January 2, 1847: . . . I have received a long letter from him [Clarendon] this morning in reply. He says Lady Palmerston is a gossip who multiplies by one hundred what she hears from Palmerston and thinks by overstating the case to make converts.

October 4, 1853: In his [Palmerston's] language he is prudent and reserved enough, but his wife is silly, chattering, and mischievous, beset by toadies, to whom she talks without measure or discretion according as her passions or her wishes prompt her.

Lady Palmerston (1853) was "the bane of his political existence, however she may contribute to his conjugal happiness."

Palmerston (May 2, 1848) could "wriggle and swagger out

of it"—whatever it was—and "his colleagues never quarrel with him." And nobody (1849) was "so popular in the House."

With Viscount Palmerston the Queen was often excessively annoyed:

August 28, 1853: . . . Nothing will induce her Majesty to have Palmerston. When I heard Granville was to go with her I thought it so desirable that if possible so marked a slight should not be put on Palmerston, that I spoke to Graham about it, and suggested to him to speak to Aberdeen and get him to prevail on the Queen to have Palmerston in his turn. He said he thought like me, that it was a pity but he did not believe anything would make her have him at Balmoral, as her antipathy to him was not the least diminished, nor her resentment for what she considered his bad behaviour to herself. Her dislike of him is, in fact, of very long standing, and partly on moral and partly on political grounds. There are old offences, when he was at the Foreign Office, which sunk deep in her mind, and besides this the recollection of his conduct before her marriage, when in her own palace he made an attempt on the person of one of her ladies, which she very justly resented as an outrage to herself. Palmerston, always enterprising and audacious with women, took a fancy to Mrs. Brand (now Lady Dacre) and at Windsor Castle where she was in waiting, and he was a guest, he marched into her room one night. His tender temerity met with an invincible resistance. The lady did not conceal her attempt, and it came to the Queen's ears. Her indignation was somehow pacified by Melbourne, then all-powerful, and who on every account would have abhorred an *esclandre* in which his colleague and brother-in-law would have so discreditably figured. Palmerston got out of the scrape with his usual luck, but the Queen has never forgotten and will never forgive it.

On August 28, 1853, when the Queen was visiting Ireland, Greville wrote, "Newcastle got leave to go to Clumber for his boys' holidays and her Majesty does not desire to have the Home Secretary," who happened to be Lord Palmerston.

September 3, 1853: . . . I was glad to find that the Queen has consented to let Palmerston take his turn at Balmoral, and Aberdeen has informed him that he is to go there. It was done by Aberdeen speaking to the Prince at Osborne, who said he

thought there would be no difficulty. The Queen did not like it, but on good reasons being put before her, she acquiesced with the good sense it must be owned she generally shows on such occasions, being always open to reason, and ready to consent to whatever can be proved to her to be right or expedient. Clarendon prevailed on Aberdeen to do this and I may take some credit to myself for having urged it both on him and on Graham.

March 11, 1855: . . . Palmerston seemed to consider all the blunders he made about these offices rather a good joke than a mischievous *gaucherie*. "Ha, ha!" he said, "a Comedy of Errors."