



Palmerston: The People's Darling

James Chambers

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The outline of Palmerston's extraordinary career is well-known: his near forty years in Cabinet office, his lead in bringing the Crimean War to an end, his attempt to bluff Bismarck over Schleswig-Holstein. Also known is his swashbuckling, womanising reputation. But not explored until now are the powerful intellect, perception and subtle diplomacy that lay behind Palmerston's high-handed, blustering style, and which made him one of the most internationally influential statesman in British history. James Chambers pays particular attention to the politician's early years, showing how his 'scandalous' private life and his long, frustrating apprenticeship at the War Office played their parts in turning the diffident 'Lord Cupid' into the notoriously over-confident 'Lord Pumicestone'. Instinctive and headstrong, he horrified his Cabinet colleagues with his brinkmanship. The apparent champion of the underdog and a pioneer in the exploitation of public opinion, 'the people's darling' became England's most popular and powerful politician since the elder Pitt. Even at the end of his career, Palmerston retained the nonchalance that had epitomised the bucks and dandies of his Regency youth. His levity irritated the redoubtable Queen Victoria, but a more astute observer, Florence Nightingale, saw through it. 'He was,' she said, 'so much more in earnest than he appeared.'

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