Balfour: A Life of Arthur James Balfour
Max Egremont (1980)

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Inside sleeve

Arthur Balfour was one of the most enigmatic of statesmen. Prime Minister for three years, Foreign Secretary for as long, he was at the heart of the Conservative Party and national politics for thirty years, yet somehow retained the status of an amateur. Architect of the Balfour Declaration, god-father of Zionism, he had little personal enthusiasm for the Jews and viewed any sort of fanaticism with mingled alarm and distaste. Coming to the government of Ireland with a reputation for langour and dilettantism, he set about its problems with a ruthless efficiency which amazed allies and adversaries alike. His putative love affair with Lady Elcho has perplexed posterity as much as it fascinated his contemporaries, yet there was an emptiness at its centre which seemed to reflect an emotional sterility in the heart of the man himself. One of the most intelligent and attractive men of his age, he cherished friendship but feared love, played politics with extreme dexterity yet shunned the total commitment that marks the crusader and the hero.

Max Egremont has pursued his elusive quarry through cabinet documents and private papers, the records of contemporaries and the studies of scholars. With the aid of new personal and political material he has got closer to his subject than any previous biographer. Both as a human being and as a political animal Arthur Balfour here comes vividly alive. As a picture of a statesman and of an extraordinarily rich and varied age, this book must be difficult to equal.

Max Egremont, who was born in 1948, was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he read Modern History. His work has appeared in The Times Literary Supplement, «Encounter, The Spectator, 'Books and Bookmen and Bananas. His first book, The Cousins, appeared in 1977, won the Yorkshire Post Award for the best work by a new author published in that year, and was runner up for the John Llewellyn Rhys Award. Max Egremont is married and has a daughter.
Arthur James Balfour, 1st Earl of Balfour, KG, OM, PC (25 July 1848 – 19 March 1930) was a British Conservative statesman and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1902 until 1905. The author of several influential works of philosophy, he was one of the most intellectual prime ministers of the 20th century. As Foreign Secretary he authored the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which supported the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine.