

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

The Man Who May Be the British Radical Dictator

BY FREDERICK JAMES GREGG



A perhaps prophetic picture in English politics. Mr. Lloyd George is here seen preceding Mr. Asquith

IF Germany hates England to-day more than she does all the other Allies-combined, she hates David Lloyd George more than any other British statesman, for he stands, to a degree unequalled by any of his contemporaries in public life, as the embodiment of the imperial idea, uniting the far Dominions of the Empire in the great anti-Teutonic enterprise. He is admittedly the leading Imperial minister. Yet he was known, during the Boer War, as a Little Englander, and, after he had smashed his way into the Liberal cabinet in 1906, he was described by angry Tories as the Little Welsh Attorney, the Artful Dodger of Carnarvon, and as a sort of combination of Cleon, Jack Cade and Robespierre. At this critical moment he is admired by every party and faction except the Socialists and the Socialistic wing of the Labor Unionists represented by Bernard Shaw, Sydney Webb, Ramsay Macdonald and the "work slackers." He is becoming the Radical Dictator of Parliament and People.

JUST as unpreparedness in South Africa in 1899 made Joseph Chamberlain's Colonial secretaryship—until then a minor one—the most important office in the Empire, so unpreparedness on land against Germany in 1914 made Lloyd George's specially created place—Minister of Munitions—the most conspicuous civil position in Europe.

No man ever overcame drawbacks in English public life so surprisingly as he did. In no other case did the whirligig of time bring in his revenges so triumphantly. He brought no Oxford or Cambridge manner to the House of Commons, and that great club likes the Oxford and Cambridge manner. He belonged to the lower branch of the legal profession. According to the English notion and tradition, a barrister is technically a "gentleman," an attorney is not. Lloyd George was only an attorney. In his native provence he was notorious for his hatred of bishops, priests and deacons. An ardent Non-Con-



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formist, he was regarded as a rabid hater of the Church as by law established. In Parliament, he once described the great territorial landlords as enemies of human progress and incited cheering mobs outside to spoil them as Moses directed his followers to spoil the Egyptians. He was out, flatfooted, for Home Rule—in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, or wherever the people wanted it. He was all for secular education. He had no respect for duchesses or any other women of fashion. He ignored

Versailles, 1919



convention, in hats and servants. Administrative London was horrified to learn that the hall door of the official home of Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in Downing Street, was opened by a trim housemaid instead of by the customary and terrifying butler. Old ladies threw up their hands in despair and said "But what could you expect?"

AS President of the Board of Trade, Lloyd George did some surprising things. His Merchant Shipping Bill had a distinct imperialistic air to it. But when he became Chancellor of the Exchequer, the so-called propertied classes became alarmed. His earlier Budgets were described in terms that might have been applied to the operations of Captain Kidd, or the persuasive activities of long John Silver. He was held up to execration, as a light-hearted, light-headed, flippant and superficial dabbler in finance, who would ruin the party and ruin the country. What did he know about finance that he should be the successor of Gladstone and Randolph Churchill? His National Insurance Measure made old-fashioned Liberals shiver, but he put it through. Every man who owned an acre of ground, every spinster with a few shares of stock, every Anglican clergyman, every advocate of sectarian education, every defender of the privilege of the old universities, every doctor in Great Britain, in his or her heart hated Lloyd George. As for the members of the Stock Exchange and the bankers, there were no terms adequate to express their rage and indignation.

But so successfully and so courageously did he face the financial crisis of 1914, brought on by the war, that when he gave up the Treasury to become head of the Munitions Department, a wail of distress went up in the most unexpected quarters. Country doctors vied with stockbrokers in proclaiming him one of the greatest Chancellors of the Exchequer the nation had ever had. Many admitted that he had saved British credit and wondered how the Government could possibly plan taxation and expenditures for the future without having him in exclusive control of the process.

There are several Lloyd Georges. There is the brilliant administrator. Then there is the adroit, diplomatic Parliamentarian. Finally there is the mob-favorite. Unlike Pitt or Lincoln or Gladstone, he has a different manner and method, as a speaker, for different occasions. Addressing a Welsh crowd, in Welsh or English, he has often shown the imagination of a poet. In the House of Commons he is direct and simple. Before hostile Labor audiences he can be brutally frank.

IF nicknames were applied to him and the man he served under for so long, the one

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might be called the Right Hon. Wait-and-see Asquith, and the other the Right Hon. Do-it now Lloyd George. Unlike his colleagues he has not followed the English habit of flying into the country for week-ends, while the nation was in peril. In the conduct of business, as in the formulation of policies, he has followed his old theory that "thorough is a safe policy, and compromise a dangerous one." He has been the master of whatever department he found himself head of, and has the great advantage of the man who doesn't drive, but who leads.

When the crisis over conscription arose a few weeks ago, the public was not shocked at the thought of the substitution of Lloyd George for Asquith. It had become accustomed to the most unexpected changes. It had seen Lord Fisher go, though he had created the new navy. It had seen Sir John French recalled, though he was as popular as ever, and General Haig put in his place. It had seen Winston Churchill and Sir Edward

Carson resign from the Cabinet because they did not approve of the way it was run. It had seen one blunder after another in the detailed conduct of the war. It longed for decisive results on land, in addition to the complete success which had been obtained by the fleet in cutting off the Germanic Powers by sea outside submarine activities.

While Mr. Asquith advised patience, the Minister of Munitions took the other tack. He went down to Scotland and made his "always too late" speech. Reading that address in the light of Carson's explanation of his retirement, it was easy to see what was wrong with the



DLG with Italy's Vittorio Emanuel Orlando

Cabinet. It was too big to be effective. It had been put together for a political purpose—to stop criticism. Many of the men in it were more anxious about their rights as party men than about the needs of the hour, just as the organized Laborites were more anxious about the rules of their unions than about the future of the Empire.

MR. ASQUITH was always noted for being what New York politicians would call an easy boss. He left the heads of departments pretty much to themselves. He was famous for patching up quarrels between his subordinates. He was the excellent head of a happy, united family in peace time. But under different circumstances he was not a conspicuous success. When the country wanted victories he gave it statements, and sometimes they were not much more informing than those of Sir Edward Grey, who is the past master of the difficult art of saying a great deal and saying nothing at the same time.

The result of having twenty-two in the Cabinet was that it was necessary to create an Inner Cabinet. This again had to be refined away into an inner group, or War Council of five members. Of the big Cabinet and the little Cabinet Mr. Asquith was in no sense the dictator, as British Premiers and American Presidents had been dictators of their subordinates. It was said of Grover Cleveland that he turned his Cabinet officers into clerks, yet he had no war on his hands. Sir Robert Peel used to talk of the Government as "I." John Hay, describing Lincoln in 1863, said: "I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the Cabinet till now. He is managing the war, the draft, foreign relations, and planning a reconstruction of the Union all at once."

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People began to doubt whether or not Mr. Asquith had the "will to win," the necessary determination to make all things work together to that end. There was no doubt in the case of Lloyd George. He had supported credit, he had supplied ammunition, he had inspired general confidence, he had reconciled the irreconcilable. The question arose whether or not the box seat on the coach of state should not be given to him.

The breadth of Lloyd George's view is shown by the way he discussed, while still Chancellor of the Exchequer, what England could do, as one of the Allies. He pointed out first that she might keep command of the seas. as against Germany: second, she might maintain a great army, putting her population into it exactly as the Continental Powers were doing, and third, she might finance the allied countries in their necessary purchases for carrying on the war, and also help with the manufacture of munitions and equipments. He declared that the first and the third were easy, but that she could only do the second within limits, if she was to attend to the other two.

As things turned out it was through attempting to do the second that Lloyd George was converted to virtual conscription. He found that, if the necessary supplies were to be forthcoming, it was necessary to ride roughshod over the supposed rights of the skilled workmen. The hands in the factories had



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to make up their minds to regard themselves as being as much under the control of the Government as their relatives in the trenches. In case of war, in the new style, the army is divided into two parts, one at the front or in training, the other at work making arms and munitions. There was no difficulty about the men who put on a uniform. They had to do what they were told. It was different with the others. They still had the notion that, ignoring existing conditions, it would not do to jeopardize their welfare in the future. So there was great waste through the employing of the skilled to do work which could have been performed as well by the unskilled.

THE politician has entirely disappeared in the practical statesman in the case of Lloyd George. He has not considered the possibility of losing votes in his dealings with the population at the great manufacturing centers, always hotbeds of Radicalism. He might define his attitude by quoting the words of the older Pitt: "Being responsible, I will direct and will be responsible for nothing that I do not direct."

The shortsightedness and stupidity of the Socialists is shown by the fact that they don't see the great argument that the war has made for them. They could point out that the country is being run virtually on a Socialistic basis, that it is through the Socialization of the resources of Great Britain that Great Britain is being preserved, and that it is through one man's activities, acting as the agent of the State, that the work is being done. Far from this, all that they can do is make protests and put forward conditions which are blandly ignored by the vigorous individualist who is determined to get the results he considers necessary whether they like it or not.

WHETHER or not Lloyd George will ever be just a radical again it is hard to say. But, at any rate, he is quoted as having said that when the war was over the public would be tired of domestic controversies. It would be only reasonable to suppose that what he meant by this was that, in view of what had been gone through, there would be a better understanding all around, and old party squabbles would seem less important than ever before. At any rate the expression measures the extent to which the man of the hour has grown from a local to a world figure.

