

# Lloyd-George: A Spent Star or a Growing Force?

By H. LINTON ECCLES

Some people have been busy trying to read into Mr. Lloyd-George's recent illness a preliminary hint of his impending retirement from politics. No doubt with most of them the wish fathered the thought. For the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the present British Liberal Government, from being looked down upon and barely noticed as a country lawyer and Radical M.P., has, by reason of his strength of character and his tenacity of convictions, grown to be a respected, and even a feared, man.

To everyone who knows anything at all about the inside of British politics, the Right Hon. David Lloyd-George personifies the democratic driving force behind Premier Asquith's Administration. As a simple, though very pregnant, fact he is a little more than 50 per cent. of that driving force. Therefore, he is idolized by democrats and anathematized by Tories, particularly, in the latter case, those of the old school. To his own immediate followers he is the social salvation of his country. To the hide-bound Tory he is the greatest menace to Britain's social, political and commercial present and future.

By probing down into a man's ideas one gets to know a very large part of the man himself. Unfortunately for the working out of the British Chancellor's ideas, the mass of his enemies and a large part of his friends do not take the trouble to dig below the surface of his politics. The former class fancies, and in some cases seriously believes, that he is a serious and growing danger to its interests. The latter class has a hazy notion that he is working—and working obviously to the best of his very considerable ability and energy—for something new, something different, something, that somehow, is aiming at the benefit of the many as distinct from the selfish interests of the few. But it is a very small class that knows really what are either his ends or the means he is using to achieve them.

## His Personal Integrity

I have had the advantage, during twelve years' experience in Britain with modern politics and newspaper work, of studying, and to some extent knowing, Mr. Lloyd-George in the three most important phases of his life—as a politician, as a churchman and as a family man. And I may say, from my knowledge of the subject, that without knowing him in at least two of these capacities, it is impossible to understand him and his life's work.

And if I were asked to take a solemn and binding oath on my knowledge of the character of the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, I would assert without hesitation that I believe no more honest or more moral man is playing a prominent part in politics to-day, either in Great Britain or in any other country. No man in the political game anywhere has been more ruthlessly, more violently or more deliberately attacked by his opponents, and yet, curiously, not even the worst of his enemies—with the ex-

ception of a single newspaper—has ever charged him with dishonesty of purpose or hinted that his private life is not what it should be. There has been one definite charge and one indefinite insinuation made against the personal character of Mr. Lloyd-George. Prior to and during the Boer war he considered it his duty to protest—as many others did, or through moral cowardice failed to do—against that terrible and costly mistake. He was promptly denounced as a pro-Boer and an enemy of his country. He has not only lived all that down, but he is generally admitted now to have been in the right. As to the insinuation made in a not too respectable or too scrupulous newspaper against the character of Mr. Lloyd-George, the fact that the newspaper, on being publicly challenged, admitted that it had no evidence for its statement hardly warrants any attention being paid to it.

## The Celtic Fire

As a matter of fact, as his opponents freely grant, the Chancellor's whole life and actions prove his sincerity of purpose. The Welshman as a class is an object of suspicion in Britain, chiefly because English stolidity never did, perhaps never could, properly appreciate the warmth of his Celtic fire. David Lloyd-George is about the only Celt who ever did, or perhaps ever could, break down this stone-wall stolidity. It would have been stupidity, and not stolidity, had it failed to see the honesty behind the "little Welshman's" enthusiasm.

It has been said that a man minus ambition is like an engine without steam. Lloyd-George is a man with plenty of ambition, and yet it is ambition with a difference. I would not like to compare it to the more personal type of his colleague and friend, Winston Churchill, or to the more family concern of his opponent and friend, A. J. Balfour. I do not doubt the honesty of intentions of either of those considerable politicians, but I think Lloyd-George identifies more closely, because he realizes more completely, his personal desires with what he holds to be his country's good.

## Democrat not Demagogue

A man of the people who knows the people from their hard cradle to their rough grave, David Lloyd-George never could be anything but a democrat. A demagogue and a socialist he has often been dubbed, but he is more and less than either, because he is first a man, next a Christian, then a parent. His soul looks out of those bright, mirthful eyes of his and sees the world as it is, and as it might become so far as the limits of human legislation could make it. The average politician does not, nor hardly can, know the huge difference there is between the standard of comfort of the rich and the standard of comfort of the poor in England. Lloyd-George knows, because he has seen it all and lived through most of it. The only one of his colleagues who knows it as well as he does is John Burns.

The Chancellor's conscience tells him that the distance between those standards of comfort is far wider than it ought to be, than the Creator meant it to be; that the conditions of ordinary living between the two classes are too unequal; that the wealth created or developed solely by the industry of a community should be shared by that community. So far he is a socialist, but his is Christian, human, commonsense socialism, the truth and application of which are admitted by the best minds the world through.

## Salvation from Within

He sees that the people's salvation must come from within, from the people themselves, through their better education and fuller enlightenment. Legislation has helped slowly, and will now help more quickly, to accomplish this salvation, but legislation, after all, is but the machine which makes the fabric. The conditions of living, he says, it is true, are hard and unequal, and ought not to have been tolerated so long. They have become clogged with the abuses of privilege, with the oppression of the weak by the strong, with the patronage of the poor by the rich, who live richly on their poverty.

"All this," says the Radical leader, "must be changed, but you, the people, are the tribune; you have to decide whether it shall be changed now, and forever. It is you who, through your ignorance and inaction, have allowed these things to develop into abuses, and it is you who have the right to right them. I and the men I can trust will do our best, sacrifice our lives if need be, in your service, but you must do your part. I have colleagues and friends who are more conservative than I am, who do not know you and your lives as I do; their friends are among that class whose interests, whose pockets, are bound to be affected, though nothing to the extent they pretend. I have to carry my ideas in the face of strong opposition, of personal abuse, of physical weakness. You must show me that, working in your behalf, I can rely upon your loyalty, your votes, your moral as well as your financial support. If I spoke the truth of you bluntly, knowing what I know, I should tell you you will be fools to your own interests, risking your own salvation as a free, democratic people, if you fail me in this hour of my need, on the threshold of these, under God, my

greatest achievements, at this time most significant in our country's domestic history."

It is because the Chancellor of the Exchequer believes all that and lives up to it that he is where he is, that he has the influence in the Government and the support in the country which he has, and that he will probably achieve more and have wider authority than any man who has come to the front in political Britain since the days of Pitt.

Lloyd-George a spent force? Pray God, no, say his real friends; Providence, grant it, say his most devout enemies. Spent? I think not. It may be that the "People's Budget" will be remembered in history as his noblest achievement. Perhaps he will not have the physical ability to carry over as tremendous obstacles as that met with anything else so great or greater. But the life of the biggest little Welshman of these or any other times will never be lost. He has carved his name on the statute book; it is engraved on the hearts, in the homes, and upon the lives of his fellow-countrymen. The mere sound of it may be forgotten, but its influence, its honesty, its achievement will always be felt.

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