

## REVIEWS

Unionist leader would hold in his hands the fates of the last two Liberal Prime Ministers. In both cases he let them drop. The greatest mistake that Asquith ever made, surely, was to fail to recruit him as an ally,

preferring instead the slippery Balfour who deserted him in the final crisis.

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## Lloyd George

Hugh Purcell, *Lloyd George* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

**H**AUS PUBLISHING are to be warmly congratulated on the launch of this splendid enterprising series. This highly impressive offering on David Lloyd George, written by former BBC producer and author Hugh Purcell, augurs well for the success of the series as a whole.

This concise, lucid, highly readable volume is an excellent starting-point for readers unfamiliar with the course of Lloyd George's life and career. From beginning to end the text provides evidence of wide, thoughtful and up-to-date reading, and the conclusions which Mr Purcell reaches as a result of his researches are generally judicious and penetrating. The volume is superbly paced, with a nice balance of political history and personal and family background, and the amount of fascinating detail apparently effortlessly packed into a relatively short tome is truly amazing.

Nor does the author shy away from discussing the many skeletons in LG's cupboard, among them his highly colourful private life, the Marconi affair before the First World War, and the blatantly obvious 'sale of honours' and resultant accumulation of the notorious Lloyd George Political Fund which only served to poison relations within the Liberal Party literally

for decades. But it would also probably be fair to claim that there is something of an imbalance in the book's coverage. The period of the First World War, the 1919 peace conference, the Irish question and LG's so-called 'wilderness years' from 1922 until his death in 1945 are given a much more extended treatment than his early career as the backbench Liberal MP for the Caernarfon Boroughs from April 1890 and his innovative work as President of the Board of Trade, 1906–08, and as the reforming, truly radical Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1908 until 1915.

The very readable text is enlivened by the inclusion of tinted blocks containing additional panels of information: usually brief potted biographies of some of the key players in the Lloyd George story or pungent quotations from the mouth of Lloyd George himself. Here we can also read key extracts from the seminal works of other historians of LG, like the late John Grigg, Kenneth O. Morgan and Lloyd George's great-granddaughter, Margaret Macmillan. The text itself abounds with lively quotations from many sources, notably Lloyd George's own *War Memoirs*, which the author has clearly quarried with great gusto, the telling diaries of Frances Stevenson and those of other less well-known

characters like C. P. Snow and D. R. Daniel. The author has an eagle eye for the catchy phrase which he blends into his text with great dexterity to enliven his narrative. There are also a number of superb cartoons and illustrations, many of these previously unpublished and taken, we are told, from Getty Images and Topham Picturepoint. The use of helpful footnote references is to be welcomed, although this is haphazard and inconsistent, and many striking quotations in the text remain unidentified.

The final chapter – 'Lloyd George; an assessment' – is perhaps the most impressive in the book. Not everyone would agree with all of Hugh Purcell's conclusions, but this superbly written, thought-provoking section reflects on the decline of the Liberals and concomitant rise of the Labour Party, looks at Lloyd George and the land question, and the theme of anti-socialism. The parallels drawn with Tony Blair are lively and stimulating. Purcell has considerable

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HUGH PURCELL

LLOYD GEORGE

sympathy for his subject; his final conclusion is that Lloyd George's long period in the wilderness after 1922 was 'such a waste, for him and for Britain' (p. 145).

Inevitably the valiant attempt to include so much information within so confined a space leads the author to a few misjudgements and misinterpretations and to some statements which verge on the crude in style or expression. Few historians would agree that, in May 1929, Lloyd George 'was poised to take power again at the head of a reunited Liberal Party' (p. 2). We are twice (pp. 5 and 101) told boldly that Jennifer Longford is LG's daughter, but this is far from certain. The author has, it would seem, forgotten totally about the existence of Lloyd George's second daughter, Olwen Elizabeth (1892–1990), later Dame Olwen Carey-Evans, the only one of his children in fact to remain true to her father's brand of Liberal politics. Many historians would challenge the outspoken view that Lloyd George was simply 'an opportunist over his new cause of home rule for Wales' (p. 17) up until 1896; some would argue that his devotion to devolutionary solutions for Wales in his early political career was totally sincere and well-meaning.

Was Stanley Baldwin really seen as 'the rising star' (p. 96) in the post-war Conservative Party as early as the autumn of 1922? The opinion that the beleaguered Labour Prime Minister J. Ramsay MacDonald offered LG (whom he positively loathed and was determined to exclude from government) the position of Foreign Secretary or Chancellor of the Exchequer at the height of the political crisis of the summer of 1931 (see p. 106) would appear to have little foundation in fact. Finally, the view of Lloyd George that 'His attachment was always to Wales, the Welsh language' (p. 135), expressed as part of the concluding section, would by now

**The parallels drawn with Tony Blair are lively and stimulating.**

be widely challenged. Most historians would today argue that his devotion to the national eisteddfod and to Welsh hymn singing around the family hearth were little more than paying token lip-service to the conventions of his native land.

But these are all, of course, relatively petty quibbles, and such minor blemishes are only to be expected in a work which attempts (generally successfully) to pack so much information into so confined a space. They

do not detract from the long-term value of the book which is guaranteed to inform, entertain and enthral a large number of readers interested in the ever-fascinating, quite unique life and career of David Lloyd George. It will stand the test of time. One anticipates eagerly further volumes in this fascinating series.

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## Balfour

E. H. H. Green: *Balfour* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Bob Self**

**A**RTHUR BALFOUR has not been judged kindly by historians, and there has been no full-scale biography for almost thirty years. Against this background, the revisionist appetite is inevitably whetted by Francis Beckett's claim in the introduction that this volume will demonstrate that Balfour was 'a much more substantial politician than he is normally given credit for'. Expectations are raised still further by the fact that its author is eminently well-qualified to write such a reappraisal.

Yet as Ewen Green suggests, the most conspicuous features of Balfour's early career were nepotism and privilege rather than outstanding ability or application. Indeed, as the favoured nephew of the Conservative Prime Minister, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Salisbury, Balfour was 'almost born to inherit the Prime-Ministerial "purple"' (p. 9). Certainly the Cecil family connection ensured his unopposed entry to Parliament in 1874. Moreover, although Green tells us that Balfour achieved early prominence through membership of Lord

Randolph Churchill's 'Fourth Party' and his skilful attacks on the Gladstone administration, what he omits to mention is that it was Balfour's loyalty to his uncle in Salisbury's battle against Churchill's 'Tory Democracy' in 1883–84 which guaranteed his first ministerial appointment. There is little hint either of the widespread incredulity which accompanied the early rise of this 'silk-skinned sybarite' through the ministerial ranks. Nevertheless, by 1888 Balfour's success in dealing with crofter protests as Britain's first Scottish Secretary earned him the even more surprising promotion (aged only 38) to the post of Chief Secretary for Ireland, to do the same with the far tougher challenge posed by the Irish Land League. In the event, Balfour's judicious combination of tough coercive measures and assisted land purchase did not succeed in 'killing Home Rule with kindness', but it did transform 'Pretty Fanny' into 'Bloody Balfour' and replaced a past reputation for dilettantism with the air of leadership. By the time Salisbury retired in 1902, he thus emerged as the natural successor.