

are singularly impressive and helpful.

Welsh political historians are generally in agreement that the WLP came into existence, at least in part, because of the mounting threat posed by Plaid Cymru, which was rapidly gaining ground at this time. In consequence, WLP policies were heavily focused on Wales. Given that each of the main political parties now had distinctive Welsh policies by this time, the Liberals, too, felt impelled to act. *The Heartland* (1965) (dissected here on pp. 147–50) prepared jointly by Emlyn Hooson and Geraint Jenkins, summarised their party's policies for rural Wales (but this proved to be very much in the nature of a one-off publication), while a Welsh Radical Group was set up to advance policy formulation for Wales and made a number of specific suggestions in three distinct 'phases'. The top proposal was that a Rural Development Corporation should be set up. It is argued here that some of these radical proposals were in due course adopted by the Labour governments of 1964–70.

A detailed analysis follows of the all-important policy directorate set up in January 1967 and its 'spokespersons', notably Martin Thomas who became the influential vice-president of the WLP. Policymaking was vigorously stepped up, especially in relation to Wales, and the Government

of Wales Bill 1967 was presented by Emlyn Hooson. Evidence is put forward to illustrate how much the two general elections held during 1974 saw a sharply enhanced presence for the WLP which was able to put up candidates in every Welsh constituency and double its tally of MPs from one to two. The party citadel of Cardiganshire was captured by local farmer Geraint Howells. New figures like Dr Jennifer Lloyd and Gareth Morgan came to the fore.

The final chapter is introduced as 'an unashamed revisionist history of the WLP's electoral fortunes' between 1966 and 1979. Much attention is lavished on the key by-elections held in Wales from 1966. Emlyn Hooson's advocacy of 'Welshness' is pressed strongly here. Every Liberal MP for a Welsh constituency between 1945 and

1983 could speak Welsh. But the party's electoral fortunes, analysed thoroughly here, were very much 'a mixed bag'. At the end of our period, Emlyn Hooson was defeated by his Conservative opponent in the Thatcher-led Tory avalanche which engulfed the country. The overarching conclusion is that, by and large, the Welsh Liberal Party was 'electorally stronger than Plaid [Cymru]'.

The author is now planning to prepare a full biography of Emlyn Hooson as a follow-up project. It will be eagerly awaited by a wide, appreciative readership. ■

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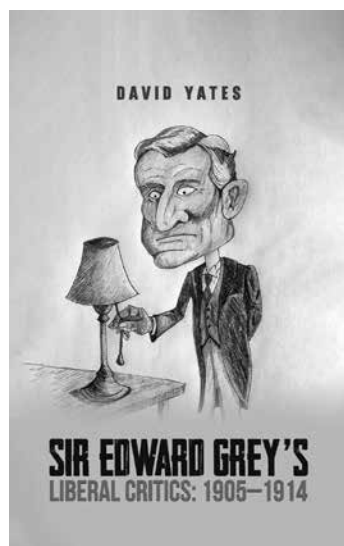
Grey and his critics

David Yates, *Sir Edward Grey's Liberal Critics, 1905–1914* (Austin Macaulay Publishers, 2026)

Review by David Dutton

It was once uncontroversial to suggest that the ending of the Boer War in 1902 initiated a transformation in the fortunes and, more particularly, the coherence of the British Liberal Party. During a decade of division and dispute following the removal of Gladstone's controlling hand, the party had badly splintered into its competing factions. But

the new century soon ushered in a different political climate. Opposition to the Unionist government's Education Act of 1902 made for a good start. But it was Joseph Chamberlain's campaign for tariff reform and the threat it posed to the sacred creed of free trade that saw the fractured Liberals coalesce with remarkable speed and effectiveness.



Apart from a passing spat over the so-called Relugas Pact, the party that entered government in December 1905 was strong and unrecognisable as the querulous political ragbag of the 1890s.

Even now this broad picture is not without merit, but detailed research has shown that in both parliament and the cabinets of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith there persisted clearer lines of division than was once appreciated. A body of dissent to both the domestic and foreign agendas of the new government did emerge, usually gathered by historians under the convenient umbrella of 'Radicals'. A particular focus of their discontent was the foreign policy of Sir Edward Grey, foreign secretary from the formation of the Liberal government in December 1905 until the fall of the Asquith coalition eleven years later. The cause for concern was obvious. Grey fitted comfortably into a longstanding

tradition of British foreign policy which held that it was the preserve of a specialist elite and not something that lent itself to the amateur scrutiny of backbench MPs or even the ill-informed commentary of cabinet colleagues. The fact that, in contrast to the accepted norm of the nineteenth century, Grey actually sat as a representative of the people in the House of Commons speaks volumes about the prevailing view that his trade was largely beyond any concept of democratic supervision. And even Grey spent the final six months of his ministerial career in the upper chamber. Over his eleven-year stint, Grey got used to conducting diplomacy with minimal input from the politicians, relying instead on the supportive and generally like-minded senior personnel of the Foreign Office. He has been accused of concealing important elements of his thinking even from senior ministerial colleagues.

But defining the sizeable band of 'troublemakers', to use A. J. P. Taylor's word, is no easy task. As David Yates's study stresses, there was no formal 'club or organisation membership' but only a 'loose assembly of non-coalesced individuals, coming together periodically in an arbitrary manner, with differing points of view on foreign policy' (p. 23). Thus, 'no specific all-embracing [label] can be accurately attached to those who regarded themselves as

"Radicals"' (p. 26). Furthermore, an MP's stance on foreign policy was not a reliable guide to his attitudes in the domestic arena. Yates writes that several who were 'quite Radical in respect of domestic issues, were reactionary conservative[s] in matters of foreign policy' (p. 15). Indeed, the reverse was also true. Several who thought of themselves as radical critics of Edward Grey traced their domestic roots in the politics of W. E. Gladstone. Their resulting belief in small government and constrained taxation and spending sometimes put them at odds with the domestic agenda of the Asquith-Lloyd George administration and its progressive reforms. Reasonably enough, Yates finds it more productive to describe the dissidents than to define them. The typical Edwardian radical wanted to restore the noble Liberal values of conciliation, cooperation and international peace. He was an advocate of the old Concert of Europe rather than the system of alliances and ententes which had replaced it. He was determined to foster improved relations with Imperial Germany, even if this was at the expense of the Entente Cordiale. And he looked for some form of democratic control to ensure that no foreign secretary or government could surreptitiously take Britain on a different course.

The relationship between Grey and his critics is not the easiest historical path to explore.

Full-scale Commons debates on foreign policy were the exception, largely for the reasons outlined above; and the absence until December 1916 of cabinet minutes has long been recognised as a major impediment to academic scrutiny of the policy-making process in Edwardian Britain. Even so, examination of the radicals of this era is not virgin territory. As long ago as the 1970s, A. J. A. Morris published both a monograph (*Radicalism against War*, 1972) and a collection of essays (*Edwardian Radicalism*, 1974), works of which Yates is perhaps excessively dismissive: there is 'no analysis or conclusions drawn, or weighing of the evidence, merely ... bold statements that the Radicals were ineffective' (p. 16). Over the last half-century, however, the archival position has greatly improved, and historians now have access to the private papers of a number of prominent 'radicals', while the obscurities of cabinet discussion have been partially relieved by the discovery of diaries kept, largely contrary to prime ministerial instruction, by ministers such as Hobhouse, Pease and Harcourt. It is with these advantages that Yates seeks to challenge the conclusions reached by Morris and, in particular, to suggest that the radical critique did have a significant impact on Grey's conduct.

The focus of the author's argument is the Agadir Crisis of 1911 and subsequent developments

which, he believes, began a process of limiting Grey's freedom from democratic constraint. He notes the assurances given at a crucial cabinet meeting on 15 November that, in future, that body would be consulted on any 'directional change' in the country's foreign policy, with the newly created Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee providing additional safeguards. 'Having been the sole master in his own house for six years, with relatively little Cabinet control or interest, in one stroke, Grey was now made more theoretically accountable to his colleagues' (p. 121). Agadir changed a system that had allowed Grey to go his own way and marked 'the beginning of accountability' (p. 226). If earlier practice had not been 'completely broken by 1914, it had been severely fissured, with the foundations of democratic control established, [which bore] fruit after the cessation of hostilities in 1919' (p. 221). It is a controversial conclusion which not all will accept. Certainly, there were many radicals who concluded in 1914 that Grey had done little if anything to change his ways. Percy Molteno MP was one who complained that Asquith and Grey had continued to deny the existence of secret agreements concealed from parliament, which now compelled British participation in European war. But this will be a matter for future academic debate. Yates has made an important contribution

which others will need to take on board.

Sadly, however, the impact of this book will be reduced by its poor presentation. The author's use of punctuation is idiosyncratic, his prose routinely opaque and his meaning sometimes quite impenetrable. 'Ancillary to the main objective of Radical attack, namely the balance of power argument which, taking on board Bright's doctrine, this was identified as foul idolatry' (p. 47) is by no means an isolated example of his unfortunate style. Many errors of fact, detail and identification could have been avoided with careful checking. It is unlikely that James Joll delivered his celebrated inaugural lecture on diplomacy's 'unspoken assumptions' in 1934 when he was only 16 years of age (p. 63). Sir Arthur Nicolson, permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, is frequently presented as 'Nicholson' and, in the index, is apparently confused with his more famous son, Harold. 'Lou-lou' Harcourt, colonial secretary at the outbreak of war is also confused with his late father, William (p. 171). Similarly, Paul Cambon, French ambassador in London, is mixed up with his brother Jules who held the corresponding post in Berlin (p. 157). Beauchamp becomes 'Beachamp' (p. 198), while John Morley becomes 'Morely' and, at the age of 63 in 1901, scarcely merits inclusion among the party's 'younger members' (p. 31). Finally, the

archivist Christine Woodland is consistently styled 'Woodward'; the distinguished newspaper editor was J. L. Garvin not 'Garvie' (p. 68); and Disraeli was still alive in 1879 (p. 67). Yet, providing the reader can navigate these lapses, there is much of value in this book. ■

After over forty years writing books and articles on twentieth-century British politics, David Dutton has more time in retirement to pursue other interests. His latest book, *Game, Set and Championship: A History of the South of Scotland Tennis Championships* was published in 2023.

from infection, whilst applying no equivalent restriction on the activities of the latter. Butler objected to the double standards implicit in the treatment of men and women by the Acts and argued that, unless that was addressed, improving the position of women as a whole in society was impossible. In retrospect, Butler herself argued that the Contagious Diseases Acts were driven from the statute book by concerted prayer. Williams acknowledges that it is virtually impossible to review prayer life as a historian, especially as Butler does not provide details of her own as a model to emulate. However, Butler does write memoirs and biographies of family and historical figures such as the medieval Italian mystic and political campaigner Catherine of Siena, and through these Williams finds insights into Butler's attitudes, spirituality and prayer life.

Josephine Butler was born in 1828 and died in 1906, so her life straddled the Victorian period. However, in her refusal to conform to Victorian gendered and religious categories she stands out. Butler exposes the prevailing power structures, hypocrisy, consumerism and sexual exploitation of Victorian Britain which combined a self-image as a Christian country with the creation of the greatest empire the world has ever known. However, Sarah Williams writes a spiritual history of her subject, narrating

Campaigner for women

Sarah C. Williams, *When Courage Calls: Josephine Butler and the Radical Pursuit of Justice for Women* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2025)

Review by Malcolm Baines

In some ways this is a strange book to be reviewed in the *Journal of Liberal History*. Josephine Butler has a substantial Liberal pedigree – great niece (born a Grey) of the renowned Whig prime minister Earl Grey whose achievements included the Great Reform Act in 1832 and the Abolition of Slavery Act the following year – and someone who lived and worked within the ambit of Victorian Liberalism. Moreover, she was clearly revered by the well-known suffragist, Millicent Fawcett, whose statue adorns Parliament Square, and who was a strong Liberal and later Liberal Unionist supporter. However, as Williams highlights in her introduction, and as is the main theme throughout her book, it is Butler's Christian faith – expressed especially through her prayer life rather than her

political views – that is the mainspring of her social activism. This makes the book rather a strange read for anyone who doesn't share that faith, even though every reader must come away full of admiration for Butler's commitment to the cause that she espoused and her skill and ability as a campaigner.

The partisan reading of Williams's book is also challenged by the fact that the Contagious Diseases Acts which were the main focus of her campaigning zeal were themselves a piece of largely bipartisan legislation. The Acts were introduced from 1864 onwards to try and tackle the impact of diseases sexually transmitted through prostitutes on Britain's armed forces. They used medical checks, combined with restraint of sick women, to protect soldiers and sailors