

(January 22nd, 1917.)

David Lloyd George

BY REV. PROF. J. HUGH MICHAEL, M.A.*

AT a regular luncheon of the Club held on the 22nd of January, Prof. J. Hugh Michael said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—I wonder if you would think it very cowardly if I were to begin by disclaiming all responsibility for my presence here to-day? If you feel disappointed when I have finished you must vent your wrath upon the Chairman—he is the culprit! I have no special qualifications for speaking on Mr. Lloyd George: the only qualifications I possess are, first, that I happen to be a Welshman, second, I have lived longer in one of the Boroughs which he represents than in any other place, and third, I can honestly say that I have never felt the slightest desire to shoot him.

I know you will pardon me if I manifest some Welsh pride during this half-hour. I think Welsh pride is permissible just at present.

For the first time in history a Welshman—and a Welsh-speaking Welshman to boot—has become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and never was the advent of any one to that high office hailed with such joy and expectation.

It would be superfluous to state that Mr. Lloyd George's accession to the Premiership has been greeted with especial delight in the Principality of Wales. Wales has followed his great career with affection as well as interest. With pardonable pride his compatriots regard his elevation to the Premiership as the coping stone upon the most romantic career of modern times; for without the aid of wealth or noble birth, without social influence or academic distinction, he has reached the most commanding position in the Empire. And it is matter of no small gratification to the *Cymry* that one of themselves should take the helm in this great storm. It is peculiarly appropriate that in a war waged on behalf of small nations the smallest of the four nations which constitute the United Kingdom should produce the man who is beyond all doubt the great driving power in the Allied cause.

*Prof. Michael is a native Welshman and so is particularly competent to speak about his great fellow countryman. Prof. Michael has just recently joined the staff of Victoria College.

The delight of his countrymen found expression in numberless congratulatory messages which were showered upon the new Premier. The Mayor of Pwllheli (one of the Boroughs represented by Mr. Lloyd George) conceived the happy notion of sending his congratulations in a telegram couched in pure Welsh. In the exuberance of his patriotic zeal he decided that not even the address should contain one word of English. The message was duly despatched from Pwllheli addressed *Y Prifweinidog, Llundain*, which being interpreted means "The Prime Minister, London." On the Saxon side of Offa's Dyke, however, the Cymric missive came to grief, and eventually found its way back to the sender, marked: "Not known in the Post Office Directory"! Futile also were the efforts of the President of the Toronto St. David's Society to cable the Society's congratulations in Welsh. The post office authorities suspected that the message was a code, and refused to transmit it!

Specially gratifying to the new Prime Minister must have been the resolutions passed by the Welsh Liberal Members of Parliament. The party not only offered its "most cordial congratulations," but also pledged itself "to give its active support to the Government of Mr. Lloyd George in the vigorous prosecution of the war." Nor did the Welsh Radicals in their delight on the accession of one of their number to the highest office in the Empire, and in their determination to stand by him through thick and thin, omit to express their "deepest gratitude to the Right Hon. H. H. Asquith for his great services to the Empire, and to Wales in particular." The pledge of the Welsh members to support the Government in the prosecution of the war is in thorough keeping with the attitude of the Welsh people as a whole. At first Wales was somewhat slow in coming into line, for to no people is war more abhorrent than to the Welsh. "Gallant Little Wales" did not, however, long remain undecided. The uncompromising attitude of Mr. Lloyd George himself helped her to cast off her indecision with the result that before the days of conscription Wales sent to the colors a larger number of recruits in proportion to the population than any other part of the Empire.

Mr. Lloyd George's latest biographer, Mr. Beriah Evans, in his well-informed *Life Romance of Lloyd George* remarks that a certain prominent statesman, when asked how he would account for his marvellous success, replied that in his opinion it was to be attributed to four main causes, namely, courage, oratory, astute use of the press and supreme smartness. This opinion is correct so far as it goes, but these four

items cannot be said to exhaust the list even of main causes. However, it is interesting to note that all four were exemplified in a striking manner immediately upon the formation of the new Government.

The new Premier showed his usual courage. Throughout the crisis he received the support of the Northcliffe Press, but although the proposed appointment of Mr. Balfour as Foreign Secretary was most virulently opposed by the Northcliffe papers, Mr. Lloyd George paid no heed to their thunderings, and included his erstwhile antagonist in his government. Nor is Mr. Balfour the only member of the government whose appointment failed to commend itself to the Northcliffe Press. The story goes that, in view of this opposition, three or four members of the new administration offered to resign their posts if in the opinion of their chief that course would add to the strength of the government. Needless to say they are still in the government. There is no virtue that so readily excites admiration as does courage, and it is chiefly because he never allows his courage to desert him that Mr. Lloyd George has such a powerful hold upon the imagination of the people.

His oratorical powers have also been exemplified since he assumed the responsibilities of his great office. Never did man speak to a larger or more expectant audience—never was a speech fraught with such momentous significance—as when he spoke in the House on December 19th in answer to the peace proposals of Germany. His oratory is not that of the platform only: his eloquence is eminently effective in the Committee or Conference room. He has none of the tricks of the demagogue. He does not attempt by means of wild gesticulation to increase the impressiveness of the spoken word. And where did he acquire his style? The only school he attended was the village school of Llanystumdwy, and there has been no period of his subsequent career that was not brimful of action and incident. The plain fact is that style is a subtle something which cannot be acquired: it must be born with a man. He has a perfect genius for putting things in a concrete and telling form. The Balfour Education Act, for example, was described in one of his speeches in the following succinct statement: "The Parson appoints the Teacher; the public pays him." One might have spoken about the Act for an hour without saying more than is contained in those few words.

I was only a school-boy when I first heard Mr. Lloyd George speak. It was in the Penrhyn Hall at Bangor. The

thing that impressed me most of all on that occasion was his complete mastery of both Welsh and English, and the perfect ease with which he passed backward and forward from one language to the other. For some reason or other a speaker who can manipulate English and Welsh equally well is a *rara avis*. Mr. Lloyd George is one of the few who can address an audience in both languages with the same ease.

It was once my privilege to be a member of a Nonconformist Conference held in Carnarvon to meet Mr. Lloyd George. At that time he was not in very high favor with Welsh Nonconformists. He had just been appointed President of the Board of Trade, and it was feared in Welsh Nonconformist circles that in office the erstwhile fervid Nationalist did not manifest the same enthusiasm on the all-important question of Disestablishment as had hitherto been the case. The temper was one of mistrust of the Government. That was the temper of the delegates at the Conference at Carnarvon. Mr. Lloyd George spoke in his most persuasive manner, and we departed feeling that in regard to Welsh Disestablishment we could place implicit trust in the Government! Years passed before the Anglican Church in Wales was disestablished. The Act is at last upon the Statute Book, to come into force when the war ends. Recently an attempt was made by the opponents of Disestablishment to defer the coming of the Act into operation for six months after the declaration of peace, in the hope that some contingency might arise to bring about its repeal before it actually came into force. Strange as it may seem, Mr. Lloyd George gave his powerful support to the Disestablishment Postponement Bill. He argued that the passing of the Bill would not imperil Disestablishment, whereas it might tend to conciliate opponents. The Welsh members, however, displayed unwonted firmness, and backed as they were by the bulk of the Welsh Nation compelled the withdrawal of the Postponement Bill.

These digressions may, I fear, obscure the fact that we are following the list of four main causes of Mr. Lloyd George's success as given by the statesman quoted by Mr. Beriah Evans. After courage and oratory came "astute use of the press." Mr. Evans himself indorses to the full the statement that Mr. Lloyd George owes much to his tactful attitude to the press and the shrewd use he has made of it. "No public man of the age," he declares, "is more indebted to the press, or knows so well how to use it." He has always taken pains to be accurately reported, and one of the first steps he took after his election to Parliament was to secure proprietary

rights in certain Welsh and English papers in his constituency. These papers did much in the early days of his Parliamentary career to establish his hold upon his own constituents. In keeping with all this was the purchase of the *Pall Mall Gazette* by Sir Henry Dalziel immediately upon the advent of Mr. Lloyd George to the Premiership, the object of the purchase being, of course, to secure that influential journal for the support of the new government. It was unfortunate that on the very first day under the new régime there should appear a cartoon which seems to have given great and just offense—to Liberals in particular. In the next issue there appeared an ample apology for its publication.

Mr. Lloyd George is not himself an easy writer. He has never written much. Writing has always been distasteful to him, and letter-writing in particular. It is said that in his early Parliamentary days—before he could afford to employ a private-secretary—his locker in the House was full of unanswered letters. It was no easy task to obtain a reply from him. Some of his correspondents realized that their only hope lay in enclosing two stamped post-cards in their letter, one having inscribed upon it the word *Yes*, and the other the word *No*, and requesting him to return the one that was appropriate. Even this plan, however, sometimes failed, for on several occasions *both* cards were returned to the sender!

And what shall we say of his "supreme smartness?" He is beyond all doubt one of the cleverest men in his generation. Of this also a striking example has been forthcoming since his accession to the premiership. For some time before Mr. Asquith's resignation Mr. Lloyd George had strenuously advocated the formation of a small war-council, from which the Prime Minister was to be excluded. The Premier, he contended, was too busily engaged with other things to be able to attend the meetings of the war-council. Naturally there was a great deal of surmise as to what Mr. Lloyd George would do when he himself became Premier. No one of course imagined for a moment that he would remain outside the war-council. It seemed inevitable that he should expose himself to the charge of inconsistency. He disarmed criticism, however, by means of a clever and adroit move—he made one of his subordinates Leader of the House! He would thus be free to devote himself to the war-council.

It is a source of no small satisfaction to me that a Methodist has been included in this small war-cabinet. Mr. Arthur Henderson is a true, live Wesleyan Methodist. For years he has been a devoted and trusted statesman of his Church.

It is not my purpose to trace the career of Mr. Lloyd George. His whole life has been one incessant conflict. "He is never happy," said one of him, "except when he is up against a brick wall." He is endowed with an amazingly abundant fund of energy. How else could he have emerged triumphantly out of his many conflicts? When Oxford made him an honorary D.C.L., his energy was specially emphasised in the speech of the Public Orator, who thus described him:

"Vir valde impiger, perfervido Celtorum ingenio ardens, Cambria parva attamen forti in imperium magnum missus." I will not insult you by translating these words.

His energy and the other traits to which reference has already been made do not, however, supply an adequate explanation of his successful career: we must not overlook his unbounded confidence in himself, his unfailing tact and his wonderful magnetism.

His life may be arranged in a series of sharply defined periods. We may divide it first of all into the Pre-Parliamentary and the Parliamentary periods. The former extends from 1863 to 1890. The latter may again be divided into the Pre-Official and the Official periods. His official career before the outbreak of war consisted of a time of comparative peace at the Board of Trade, and a period of storm and contention as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Since the war began he has occupied in succession the offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of Munitions, War Secretary and Prime Minister.

Ardent Welshman as he is, Mr. Lloyd George was not born in Wales. His birthplace was the great city of Manchester, where his father was a schoolmaster. David, however, was but four years of age when his father died, and his widowed mother betook herself to the small village of Llanystwmdwy, near Criccieth in North Wales. There dwelt her brother, Mr. Richard Lloyd, the village shoemaker, and with him she made her home. With splendid and untiring devotion the uncle consecrated himself to the upbringing of the little family thus thrown upon his care. Mr. Lloyd George is never weary of acknowledging the debt which he owes to his uncle, who still hale and strong in spite of his eighty-three years has been spared to see his gifted nephew occupying the highest position in the Empire. No ordinary man was Richard Lloyd: with physical strength and mental acumen he combined moral force and spiritual insight. The home which thus opened its hospitable door to the future Premier was a typical Welsh village home. There was no poverty. Mr. Lloyd George has described the home in his own way by

saying that they scarcely ever had fresh meat, and that the children's greatest luxury was half an egg on Sunday mornings! The lad soon gave evidence that there burned within his breast a spirit of strong antagonism to every form of oppression, which was fanned into flame by his early environment. The land laws were oppressive. Nonconformity was disparaged by the upper classes, and the Welsh language was to a large extent regarded as a badge of subjection and inferiority. Small wonder that even in his boyhood days he was filled with a spirit of revolt, which his uncle did nothing to suppress. We soon find him as a young solicitor refusing to be brow-beaten by haughty magistrates, long accustomed to have their own way in the courts over which they presided. It has been remarked that his office became a Cave of Adullam for the oppressed. He developed into an enthusiastic Nationalist. His love for small nations has always been intense. That was the explanation of his attitude at the time of the South African War; it is also the explanation of his attitude in the present war. It is a matter of history that at the time of the South African War, and immediately afterwards, Liberalism was at a very low ebb in England; it may safely be said that the firm and courageous stand taken by Mr. Lloyd George did as much as, if not more than, anything else to save Liberalism.

He was in Canada at the time of the outbreak of the South African War, having come at the invitation of the Minister of the Interior to study immigration prospects. He had come on the *S.S. Bavarian*, and the organiser of a charity concert on that trip had insight enough to ask Mr. Lloyd George to preside. The speech which he delivered from the chair was so telling that it drew a large collection from the audience—surely a forecast of his Budget days! The passengers had been watching some whales sporting in the ocean that evening, and it is on record that Mr. Lloyd George began his speech by remarking that if the large whales were spouting outside, there was no reason why Little Wales should not spout inside!

The famous Llanfrothen Burial Case made the young solicitor a hero in the principality. He was only twenty-five when he was selected as Liberal candidate for the Carnarvon Boroughs, and in less than two years he was elected to represent that famous constituency in Parliament, and he has continued to be its member to this day. His first majority was only 18! When all the circumstances are considered, perhaps it is surprising that he had a majority at all. His opponent was Mr. (now Sir) Ellis Nanney, the Squire of the village in which Lloyd George was brought up.

I will forbear to enlarge upon his Parliamentary career and his great measures of reform. The question now upon the lips of all is, will he see us through this terrible war? We are encouraged by the thought that he scarcely knows what failure is! And our encouragement is heightened by the evident chagrin with which the German Press has heard of his advent to the premiership. Some of the German papers, it is true, see in the recent crisis only the grave of Liberalism, whilst others, such as the *Berliner Tageblatt*, have given unstinted expression to their recognition of the strength and ability of Mr. Lloyd George. But the prevailing tone of German comment is one of abuse. "The barefooted son of a Welsh teacher," says the *Hamburger Nachrichten*, "who, as a young lawyer, could not find £3 to buy a black robe, has now reached the highest position in Great Britain. He governs as a dictator. What is he going to do? England, and above all the neutrals, will soon see." And the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* says: "The crazy Welshman, Lloyd George, is Prime Minister. The former Coalition Cabinet was, from the English Parliamentary point of view, a monstrosity. Lloyd George's government is far more monstrous." Such comments give us hope.

And after the War? He has qualifications which will make him of inestimable value to the cause of the Allies in the perilous period of settlement—and not least is his understanding of the value of Nationality.

And after the coming of peace—what? Shall we have a Federated Government binding together the various parts of our scattered Empire? Will Mr. Lloyd George be the first Prime Minister to preside over the Cabinet of a united Empire?

For the present we pray that he may be the instrument in the hands of God to bring us safely out of our present distress into a lasting and satisfying peace. And may he long be spared to carry out great measures of social reform in the manipulation of which he has shown himself to be such a master.

Let me conclude this brief sketch of Mr. Lloyd George by reminding you that he is a simple Christian. On Christmas Eve he worshipped at the Castle Street Welsh Baptist Church in London. At the close of the service he made a speech in which he said that he had come through the fog from his home in Surrey because he was anxious to spend the last Sunday evening before Christmas worshipping with his own people. He expressed his confidence in the ultimate triumph of the Allied cause, but declared that there would be much more

suffering and sacrifice before victory would come. He requested the congregation to sing two Welsh hymns. One of them was a great hymn which describes the vision of this life from the Everlasting Hills—when all its perplexities and problems will have been solved. I wish you could understand the Welsh words. The hymn begins:

O fryniau Caersalem ceir gweled
Holl daith yr anialwch i gyd;
Pryd hyn y daw troion yr yrfa
Yn felus i lanw ein bryd.

He spoke of a statue of the Virgin which he had seen on the Continent facing the Germans, with the Christ Child in her arms. "The spirit of Christ," he said, "is facing them to-day." We are confident that the new Premier will see us through this war not so much because of his great ability, not because he is a man of such brilliant parts, but because he is animated by the spirit of Jesus Christ.