

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.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

Balfour

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

Reviewed by **Bob Self**

ARTHUR 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 3rd 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.

REVIEWS

As Prime Minister, Balfour undoubtedly enjoyed some significant successes. He is rightly credited with the creation of the Committee of Imperial Defence (with which he remained associated until his retirement), the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902 and the *Entente Cordiale* two years later. At home, Green also notes the introduction of the first truly national education system; a further costly extension of the Irish land purchase scheme; the first efforts to control immigration and an important acknowledgement of government responsibility for 'unemployment', although rather surprisingly, there is no reference to either the success of the 1904 Licensing Act (which Balfour drafted himself) or his important reforms of parliamentary procedure.

Yet for all that was achieved, the second section inevitably devotes much space to the dismal failure of Balfour's response to Joseph Chamberlain's tariff campaign. Despite Balfour's

claim to have no settled convictions on the fiscal controversy, the author demonstrates that his acceptance of the case for tariffs had remained remarkably consistent since 1885. The explanation for Balfour's failure to translate this intellectual sympathy into practical support is equally convincing – particularly the point that while a committed 'retaliator' who embraced tariffs as the most effective means of forcing protectionist nations to the negotiating table, Balfour consistently rejected the protectionist argument which Chamberlain endorsed (and then extended) after the autumn of 1903. As Green argues, Balfour's position was 'a cogent policy in its own right' rather than a politically convenient 'half-way house'. Unfortunately, when its ambiguity provoked internecine conflict, Balfour's failure to clarify his policy or assert his authority only exacerbated the confusion and bitterness; problems which became even more evident in opposition after 1906.

Balfour's reputation paid a high price for this indecisive leadership. Not only did he fail to preserve party unity or to win any of the three general elections he contested, he even suffered the indignity of losing his seat in 1906 – although contrary to the thrice-repeated claim that he was the only Prime Minister ever to have done so, it should be pointed out that he was not actually Prime Minister at the time, having resigned on 4 December 1905 without a dissolution. Nor does he have the distinction of being the only *ex-Premier* in this position, given the similar fate of Asquith (in 1918 and 1924) and MacDonald (in 1935). Yet for all these failings as Prime Minister and party leader, the final section of the book largely substantiates Beckett's opening assertion by highlighting the breadth of Balfour's often forgotten ministerial achievements after he stepped down as leader

in 1911 – particularly in foreign, imperial and defence matters.

Overall, this volume provides a useful balanced survey of Balfour's political career, well-designed for a non-specialist readership, with valuable explanatory inserts introducing key figures and events. If there is a slight regret, it is that although Balfour was rather a 'cold fish', readers will find few real insights into the personality of the inner man, how others saw him and the broader historiography. In fairness to the author, the length of this volume probably precluded more than passing references to his passion for golf, tennis, philosophy and clever conversation and his devout Anglicanism, but it is still faintly surprising that there is no mention of his interest in spiritualism or his romantic attachment to Gladstone's niece after whose death from typhoid in 1875 he became a confirmed bachelor. As a party politician uneasily straddling the transition from the era of aristocratic government to more democratic polity, Balfour emerges as an intellectually sophisticated politician-philosopher, plagued by indecision, poor judgement and an inability to understand either the new mass politics or even the instincts of the party he led. But for all these defects, Green concludes by implicitly endorsing the biographical verdict of Balfour's niece, Blanche Dugdale, that his achievements as an elder statesman after 1911 more than redeemed his past failures. On this basis, perhaps Lloyd George appears characteristically less than fair when he dismissed Balfour's place in history as of no more enduring significance than the transient whiff of perfume on a pocket handkerchief.

Bob Self is Reader in British Politics at the London Metropolitan University. His latest book is Neville Chamberlain: A Biography (Ashgate, 2006).

THE 20 BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY



E H H GREEN

BALFOUR