

TOPICS OF THE DAY

OF GREAT MEN: A GREAT BLUNDER: MR. WILSON AND MR. LLOYD GEORGE: FRANCE ALIENATED: THE AFTER-PEACE RECORD: ROBERT BURNS.

THE career of Mr. Lloyd George illustrates strikingly the truth of the time-worn adage that nothing succeeds like success; and its converse, that nothing fails like failure. But yesterday, his word might have stood against the world. Now, few "so poor to do him reverence." Yet the man has not changed. What he was, he is, and will be to the end of his allotted time. He has always been great in the possession of unusual gifts. He will continue to be great, historically, because of what he accomplished. Can more be said? Who is prepared to state just what constitutes a great man? Mr. Bonar Law, who so far as one can learn at this distance is great in sincerity and honesty, is credited with having said, in reply to complimentary expressions, "If I am a great man, all great men are frauds." There is the ring of truth in these words. No man really great can possibly feel himself so different from his fellows as to justify him in esteeming himself great or otherwise than commonplace, indebted for success—so called—to some slight variation of circumstances or fortune or special endowments, for which to be thankful but not of which to be personally proud. Success affords no real proof of greatness. So many elements of seeming chance enter into every man's life that he can never feel assured, if he is honest with himself, how much he owes to luck and how much to native abilities. Mr. Lloyd George greatly succeeded during the war. That is not to be questioned or gainsaid. He was obviously the man of the occasion. History will give him his due. Without the occasion, what of the man? In ordinary times would his individual sun ever have shone with extraordinary effulgence, much less in a way to dazzle the world? This is an intricate as well as an interesting question, which will have to be answered individually according to one's ways of seeing and thinking. Napoleon was undoubtedly a great man. He overruled and dominated circumstances. He originated a system of military strategy and tactics which has stood the most searching tests of time and experience. He reorganized and reconstituted anarchic France, and gave her a code of laws which holds the admiration of the civilized world. Has Mr. Lloyd George been

analogously great, even in degree? Has he been great in knowledge, thought, wisdom, great in initiative, great in administration or otherwise than in enthusiasm and power to move his fellow-men by speech, and inspire them, at the right time, to undertake and complete great deeds for their own and their country's good?

AS to Mr. Lloyd George during the war, criticism is forbidden. Gratitude estops it. Had he withdrawn from public life after the Armistice, he would have passed into history as one of its most striking figures. He chose to remain as a politician, and must accept the consequences. The consequences are questionings and very grave doubts, if not positive scepticism. There was, first of all, the ending of the war on the "fourteen" characteristic "points" of Mr. Wilson. Many of those "points" were ill-considered or grossly mistaken, as we now know. Mr. Lloyd George accepted and endorsed them. They were practically impossible in many respects. They gave the Germans an opportunity to protest that they were deceived and betrayed. The main thing is that there was no need of even one "point" at that time. The Germans were hopelessly beaten in the field, and knew it. Another fortnight at most of military firmness and activity would have seen their armies in Belgium and northern France either captured or in desperate rout. Very few more lives on the Allied side would have had to be sacrificed. Germany's undoubted conquerors would have been able to enter Berlin in triumph, and dictate a military peace—the only proper ending of such a war. But that would not have been "peace without victory" according to the Wilson formulary, approved in action by Mr. Lloyd George. So a halt was called. The German armies were allowed to retire, unbroken, with the "honours of war," to boast that they had never been defeated. The Kaiser and the Crown Prince were given the opportunity to escape. The German nation was thrown into confusion and revolution; and Europe was demoralized. The criminals of the war all got away. There was still worse to follow. Instead of the war ending when it really was practically ended by force of arms, on November eleventh, 1918, it was constructively continued until the meeting of the International Conference at Versailles in January, 1919. Two precious months were thus directly lost. Three others were added to them by pottering with Mr. Wilson's League of Nations notion, before effective peace efforts were begun. Those lost months meant a lost war to the Allies and the world. It is greatly to be feared that

they meant a prepared, ultimate, victory for Germany,—a victory which she will yet complete as sure as she is Germany, unless other and wiser counsels than these of Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Wilson prevail henceforward.

IT is known that Mr. Lloyd George presented an admirable and exceptionally able diplomatic paper to the Versailles Conference, setting forth clearly the principles which should govern and prevail in the settlement. There may be doubts as to whether he, personally, prepared that document. It was rejected. He concurred in its rejection, and, without protest, accepted substitutes. He, above all others concerned in the Conference, should have been aware of Mr. Wilson's true position as one of its members. He at least should have comprehended the American Constitution. He should have known that President Wilson was at Paris in disregard of the open and repeatedly expressed wishes of the leading men of the United States, of both political parties. He was there in contravention of established Presidential precedent. His own party, his Cabinet, his press and his public, were opposed to his going. But he went. He went, self-appointed, as a minority representative. He had been unmistakably defeated, a few weeks before, in the biennial Congressional elections. He had no more right to be regarded as a representative of the American people than Mr. Lloyd George would have had to pose as a British representative had he gone to Paris immediately after a vote of want of confidence in him and his Government passed by the House of Commons. Yet Mr. Wilson, under the wing of Mr. Lloyd George, was introduced not only to the British but to the European public as the official and accredited spokesman of the United States. One cannot blame France and Italy for having accepted Mr. Wilson as Britain did. They, admittedly, had not the knowledge of American affairs that Britons, and especially official Britons, are supposed to have. So Mr. Wilson was accepted at his own valuation, allowed to dominate and largely to work his will with the Conference for months. He was permitted to sentimentalize and dogmatize about his League of Nations, to fiddle while Europe rioted, until at last the necessity—not of suppressing but of "fooling" him—was recognized. He was duly "fooled", not however before irreparable mischief had been done. He returned to the United States to be promptly overthrown, and have all his agreements nullified by the political majority against him, and which had been against him before he went away. Was this surprising? Was it to the discredit of the United States, or to

that of the European Governments, and most of all to that of Mr. Lloyd George, who failed to discern his true standing as a member of the Paris Conference? Does it not seem, to thoughtful observers, that Mr. Lloyd George committed an almost unpardonable error, considering his position, special knowledge and responsibilities, in accepting and dealing with Mr. Wilson as he did in connection with the peace negotiations? Was his action other than a gross blunder so far as Britain was concerned? Did it not border on a constructive insult to the United States? Is it not possible, or even probable, that much of the unmistakable American antipathy to intimate, diplomatic relations with European powers, not excepting Great Britain, may be due to this initial Lloyd George blunder?

SUCH was the post-war beginning. After proposing admirable terms of settlement to the Versailles Conference, Mr. Lloyd George agreed to those which, according to himself, were not desirable. He, with Mr. Wilson, prevented France from dictating terms to Germany, which would have compelled lasting if not permanent peace. He withstood the taking possession by France of the left bank of the Rhine, which would have safeguarded her against attacks like that of 1914 and would have obviated the question of "reparations" which is now, and seems destined to continue, vexing the heart of Europe. He, with Mr. Wilson, wholly unaccredited, undertook to guarantee France against future German attack. Mr. Wilson found on his return to Washington that the American people would not implement his purely personal undertakings. His supposed treaty was repudiated. Mr. Lloyd George thereupon, on behalf of Great Britain, denounced the agreement, and France, forbidden what she desired and believed she required, was left without security of any kind against future German aggression, and with only an empty promise of "reparations" for actual damage inflicted wantonly upon her during the war,—a promise which the Germans have utterly failed to fulfil, and which they manifest every intention of evading if not repudiating. Is it surprising that the French Government and people are irritated and distrustful of British diplomacy? Is it any wonder that they joined hands with Italy for their own ends and in frustration of British aims in the near East? Because of Lloyd George unreliableness in foreign affairs, Britain was brought to the very verge of disastrous, solitary war with Turkey, which would probably have arrayed the whole Mohammedan world against her. The persistent policy of Mr. Lloyd George apparently was to isolate France. He was beaten at the game;

and, had it not been for Lord Curzon's negotiations, Britain might have been ruinously isolated. As it was, she had a very narrow escape. She was in no position to "bluff." She had disbanded her army while France had not, and so France continues to be by far the greatest military power in Europe, much greater relatively than was Germany before the war. The British fleet counts for less now than it ever did; the French army for more. These may not be agreeable facts, but they are facts. They are due largely to Mr. Lloyd George, the charming speaker, the most convincing popular orator since Demosthenes and Cicero, but scarcely the wisest statesman since Solon. No one will deny that he "meant well," but with just such intentions as his, based on his own assumed wisdom, the streets of future unhappiness are proverbially paved. British foreign policy never failed more signally than under his direction, since the war.

THEN there was the immediate post-war policy of meddling and muddling in Russia, into which even Canada was dragged. It was undertaken in defiance of the historic lessons of the French Revolution. Synchronously with it, India was systematically lured on to discontent and possible rebellion. Promises were made to Egypt, only to be forgotten or disregarded. Palestine was in effect handed over to the Jews, regardless of its ancient Arab population, who have occupied it longer than Britain has been held by its present people. Nothing but expense has been got out of Mesopotamia; and the expense has been appalling, as it has been, relatively, in Palestine. Persia, after an easily called "bluff", had to be abandoned. Afghanistan was alienated. The whole Mohammedan world was irritated and aroused to hostility; and Britain is the greatest of Mohammedan powers. The Washington Conference proved to be entirely for "the greater glory" of the United States. Mr. Lloyd George did not even attend. He was then too sedulously engaged in further messing Irish affairs. Thereafter he "staged," mainly under his personal direction, the Genoa Conference. It was an egregious "fizzle," and its sequel at the Hague was, if possible, worse. Labour was alternately fondled and rebuffed in domestic affairs. Economy was preached and promised. Extravagance was persistently practised in all departments of government. Worst of all was the matter of Ireland. Promises and threats, alternately made, were alike unfulfilled. One day it was coercion. The next, it was feebly and ineffectively attempted conciliation. The end was practical abandonment of Ulster, and the cutting adrift of the

South. There was imprisonment of rebels to the death, alternating with fraternization and negotiations. If Ireland had been resolutely yet generously handled after the war, it might have been restored to permanent peace. If it had been granted, at once, freedom such as it was given in the end, it might have got speedy control of itself, and been grateful. Now, its people have been embittered and have their hard, uncertain fight still ahead of them. And while little that was serviceable was being done, and much that was necessary being left undone, the public was deluged with a constant stream of "talk", clever talk, brilliant talk, but still nothing but talk. An exceptional gift of public speech is one of the most dangerous possessions with which a man can be endowed. It enables him not merely to fool others, but to fool himself. Because his oratorical powers were of invaluable service to the nation during the war, Mr. Lloyd George actually came to believe that he himself was not only invaluable but indispensable. It was obviously this idea of himself which tempted him to thrust himself directly into Dominion political affairs in a manner as unprecedented as it was outrageous. Through his own diplomatic ineptness and impulsiveness he had got Great Britain into a dangerous and humiliating position in the Near East. In the hope of "bluffing" his way out, he sent broadcast to the world a modern Macedonian cry to the Dominions to "come over and help ME." No explanation as to why or for what purpose they should come was vouchsafed. Mr. Lloyd George needed them for his own reasons. That was all. He has not established a precedent, of course; for most of the things which he has attempted, apart from the war, will probably serve as warnings rather than as guides to future statesmen. But if his action were to be followed, any Dominion Government would be liable at any time to vicious, injurious or fatal interference from any hostile or reckless Home Government. Only a Lloyd George, with such an idea as his of his own personality and its paramountcy, could have issued such an appeal as his, of a few months ago, to the overseas Dominions. It is fondly to be hoped that everybody concerned, with the exception of Mr. Lloyd George himself, has now returned or is on the verge of returning to what President Harding calls "normalcy." Apparently Mr. Lloyd George continues to imagine that the nation cannot survive without him. If he had retired after the Armistice, he would have carried with him unsurpassed credit and personal glory. If he had quietly withdrawn into private life after his recent political defeat, he would have retained much of his fame and all his dignity. But the "orator" in him barred the way, and doomed him to continued "politics."

THE annual, world-wide, Burns Birthday celebration is drawing near, when much that is pitiful will again be uttered about Robert Burns by persons who will probably continue, fatuously, to call him "Bobbie," regardless of so prejudicing him in the eyes of present-day people who know nothing of the conditions and customs of his place and time. Fancy an Englishman speaking of Milton as "Johnnie"! And yet, in true poetry—not of course in trained intellect or literary mechanics—Robert Burns, unlearned but superlatively wise in nature, is as far above John Milton, the classically erudite, as is William Shakespeare, also scholastically untaught. The present writer has no "clannish" feelings for Burns, who is said to have been of Highland or so-called "Celtic" origin although born in Ayr, while he himself is a Lowlander, probably mainly of Danish descent. But there was nothing of "Celtic"—whatever that superannuated term may be supposed to mean—in Burns, his family or his race, except their speech, which, as those who are well-informed now know, signifies little with regard to actual blood. The Highlanders are more than probably as purely Nordic as are the Lowlanders and the English. The people of Great Britain, by all modern scientific tests, are found to be practically homogeneous, of identical original stock. But, of Burns, the poet! He was "taken up" as an intellectual "freak" by fashionable Edinburgh puppets of his day, who were not worthy to undo the latches of his shoes. He has ever since been crudely "patronized" by silly persons as "Bobbie" Burns, mainly, it would appear, because of that. "Bobbie," was not used by the Scottish of his time as a variation of Robert, except to express more or less contempt. It is doubtful if it is otherwise used to this day. To his childhood's nearest and dearest friends, as to some of his Scottish lovers still, he would be "Robbie." By his boon companions he would be called "Rob" or "Rab." He speaks of himself frequently in his verses as "Robin"—probably a family pet name—notably in the song entitled "Robin" in which he celebrates his own birth:—

Our monarch's hindmost year but one,
Was five and twenty days begun,—
'Twas then a blast o' Januar win,
Blew hansel in on Robin.

He was tossed aside by his Edinburgh "patrons" as soon as he ceased to amuse; and he died miserably. Nevertheless he was one of the very few unmistakably great poets of all time. There is nothing in any literature finer than some of his work. He presented, in a few brief verses, a more touchingly as well as artistically beau-

tiful female face and form than Greek sculptor ever carved or conceived, and in as dramatic setting as Shakespeare himself could have imagined. He painted pictures of humanity, surrounded by nature, and of nature itself, such as no artist of Italy or elsewhere has equalled, much less excelled. A poet is not to be judged by the mass of material which he is mistaken enough to print, any more than the value of a diamond-mine is to be gauged by the bulk of rubbish it sends to the surface. It is the gems that count. The finest gems of Burns are often obscured by gross dross, but, even so, they sparkle as if cut by divine hands. Much that he wrote—and the pity of it is that he wrote so much—was mediocre. Some of it was worthless. Not a few of his verses that are ordinarily most highly praised are commonplace. His wit was ever brilliant. His humour was nature's fun. His *Cottar's Saturday Night* is Homeric in its limpid dignity and simplicity. However, it is not his "great poems" that are greatest—not the ones by which he is usually known to Birthday orators and St. Andrew's Day diners, such as *Tam o' Shanter*, with its rollicking laughter and satire, or *Scots Wha Hae*, a mere popular national speech in verse, or *Auld Lang Syne*, a happy song of childish recollections and goodfellowship, or *Man Was Made To Mourn*, a melancholy, boyish, radical rigmarole,—but his too-often overlooked diamonds of supreme ray, which infinitely repay the separation of them from the rough material in which they are frequently imbedded, and sometimes nearly hidden.

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