

carded the very principles in the name of which they sought and obtained the support of the better part of mankind. They betrayed these champions of their cause by acknowledging the old gods, by kneeling to Power and fawning for its favors, by aiming to achieve, not a new sort of statehood, but the piratic political organization of an empire.

It is late in the day, but there is yet time for reformation and retraction. It is still possible for resurgent nationalism to throw its combined weight on the side of conciliation as against violence, friendship as against jealousy, cooperation as against exploitation. There is just time enough for the emancipated nationalities to abandon their quarrels and jointly align themselves beside President Wilson in a common fight against the old European diplomacy. Only thus can they prove that political nationalism is not bankrupt, is not synonymous with power and is not a contradiction of justice and right. Will they yet rise to this momentous opportunity? Is political nationalism capable of such a flight?

ISAAC DON LEVINE.

## The Leadership of the English Liberals

By One of Them

FOR months Liberals in England have been debating who is their leader. The question was put one day at a great Liberal club to a newcomer. "President Wilson," he replied, and the answer was hailed gaily as a neat way out of a growing difficulty. The result of the General Election has made the problem more acute. Mr. George is Prime Minister but he is not the leader of the party; he is the leader of a section, and it is not to be denied that his policy of setting up accredited Coalition candidates against Liberals in the constituencies has broken the official Liberal party, and even, in the opinion of some, has reduced it to the lamentable state of Humpty Dumpty. Mr. Asquith, titular leader of the party, has disappeared with all his train. As is said in journalistic jargon of a reporter who, sent on a special mission, loses all touch with his paper, they have "fallen down a well." The Liberal party has no leader. Nor does anyone know who he will be. There used to be a newspaper in England with a long Answer to Correspondents column which, its critics said, consisted of the three formulas "We do not know," "we cannot say," "consult an expert." But the experts also are ignorant. Some say that Mr. George, summoning the Liberals in the House of Commons as Mr. Asquith did after he was deposed

from office (but not, by the way, when he himself broke the Liberal government and established a Coalition) will have himself elected leader of the party. But, if so, his opponents threaten a split in the constituencies and the formation of a formal opposition party—a result which Mr. George, with his slender Liberal following, outweighed by the great Tory majority, most certainly does not desire. Others suggest that everyone will be content to leave things as they are, and that Mr. Asquith will remain leader, or that a meeting of delegates from the local Liberal federations will be held to confirm him in the office. It is a prospect that leaves many Liberals cold. For the fact is that while they have grave doubts about Mr. George, which he may yet remove, they have lost confidence in Mr. Asquith. Not a little of the enthusiasm with which President Wilson has been greeted by Liberal England is due to the forlorn condition of a great political party seeking a leadership lofty in conception and courageous in execution.

The trouble about Mr. Asquith is that all men make excuses for him. He has been ill advised by his lieutenants, some say. But in politics, as in war, a leader inspires and imposes himself on his lieutenants; in so far as he is led astray he is by so much less a leader. Whatever his defects, say others, he is a "great parliamentarian." True, but Parliament has lost caste these recent days and workers in too many constituencies report that the name of Mr. Asquith is received with bleak indifference. He has unquestionably the gift of dignified and, as they say, of "massive" eloquence, and certainly he would never have perpetrated some of the speeches by which Mr. George has lately saddened his friends. But this gift of words is perilous. There was during the war a debate in the Chamber on the French transport system and one of the deputies declared with bitterness that if words would make wagons move, France would have the finest transport system in the world. Mr. Asquith has given us too many words; they may "dominate" the House of Commons but outside it men are tired of them. He has publicly exalted the virtue of patience. Pitt called patience the greatest of the statesman's virtues and Mr. Asquith has declared his agreement with Pitt. But what a man may pleasantly call patience in himself others may call hesitation, lack of initiative or even lethargy. That is what has happened with Mr. Asquith.

Today Ireland is again seething with discontent and the spirit of rebellion, and Liberals cannot forget—and ought not to forget—that but for Mr. Asquith the Irish question might have been settled. It is well known that when in 1916 Mr. Lloyd George made his effort at conciliation, Nationalist

and Ulster leaders were for the first time in modern history brought to an accord. Then was the time for action, for the master's hand, for the decisive stroke which public opinion would have gladly supported and which would have brought so happy a moral reinforcement to the side of England in the war. Was it patience or some less admirable quality that let the precious days drift by until the irreconcilables organized in Parliament, the press and the Ministry and the golden chance was lost? It is true that the situation, passing from bad to worse, was embittered beyond hope by Mr. George's own attempt, in 1918, to impose conscription on Ireland, but that does not attenuate, rather it deepens, the responsibility of Mr. Asquith. Again, many Liberals do not forget that it was Mr. Asquith who brought to nought the arrangement for state purchase which Mr. George had secured between all the parties to the liquor trade—an achievement almost beyond belief—when he used the intense pressure of war emergencies as a means of handling forces which in peace time would have been beyond control.

Mr. Asquith has great gifts both of mind and of speech, but as a war minister he had a task beyond his powers. Some who admit this say that nevertheless his gifts may fit him for leadership in time of peace. It is not so: the emergencies of peace that confront us are scarcely less urgent or the issues less momentous than those of war. In any case, why should we demand a lower standard in all the qualities of leadership for the normal process in which a people live and die than for the emergency of a few years of war? If the standard of government in war be the higher, we had better raise that of peace up to its level. Or is it only in killing, not in saving life, that efficiency is really fundamental?

But if not Mr. Asquith, who then? If Mr. George will allow us, if he will yet remain a Liberal, there is no one to compete with him. He is, as Mr. Bonar Law recently declared, the friend of the underdog. A son of Wales, he should be the champion of the small, weak peoples in all countries and empires, his own not excepted. He is active and enterprising, pertinacious and supple, especially the last. He makes his way to the end he has in view—sometimes a very necessary end—and we applaud, though we may not always like the means by which he gets there. He has vision and imagination, rare gifts in the politician, and he even “gets things done,” which—most ironical of all!—is apparently an almost miraculous attribute among men who ought to be where they are largely because they possess it, but are usually there for some reason much less creditable.

But undeniably Mr. George has weaknesses. A

champion of freedom in the abstract, he has personally the temperament of a dictator. He was quoted once as having longed in private conversation for a few months of Napoleon's power. The benevolent autocrat does not sort well with Liberalism. Mr. George is impulsive, impatient of opposition. For all his accessibility to other points of view, his conciliatory bearing in private negotiations, his wonderful skill in tactical manoeuvre, his tendency is too often towards the short cut and the strong hand; it was inevitable that such a temperament, restless and masterful, should come into violent conflict with the easy placidities of Mr. Asquith. But there are dangers. Which side of Mr. George's character will come uppermost if the storms break which threaten the immediate future? There is Ireland, for instance, and the underworld of labor? Will it be conciliation or the jackboot, the methods of Liberalism or Tory coercion?

Other things rouse suspicion. A good Liberal cares little about place and power but much about his principles, and on some points we do not quite know where we stand with Mr. George. He tells us that the war has altered things, that we must keep an open mind and so forth. An open mind is an excellent thing, but it is impossible not to observe that apparently it is only the Liberals who are to have it, and that in practice it means an approximation towards the principles of the Tory party who on their side stand pat with minds hermetically sealed. We cannot but remember their old appeals to Liberals in the days before the Flood to put foreign policy and the army and navy “beyond party,” by which was simply meant that the policy of the Tory party should be accepted by Liberals on a “non-party” basis. Again—for irritation will out!—Mr. George has his ear too closely to the ground. He began the recent election campaign as a Premier and ended as a demagogue. From high aspirations in international and domestic policy he came to the level of the “stunt” press. But he forgot that the motives which impel the sensational press are very different from those which should actuate a Prime Minister. The “stunt” press does not propound a policy; it only offers a distraction. It knows the psychology of the mob, its need for relief from the monotony of life and, as the medical men say, for an alternative; it imitates the “movies” with their rapidity and variety of fare. But what a Premier says becomes a policy, and Liberals do not like an electioneering policy lifted from the “stunt” press and appealing to the least worthy motives that actuate a people at such times.

Mr. George, we hope, will put these things behind him and revert to the high plane on which he first made his appeal to Liberal principles. He has

done much and much may be forgiven him. If he can lead the Tory party along the ways of Liberalism we shall rejoice. If they frustrate a Liberal policy and if, as he has already threatened, by way of a plain hint to them, he comes back to the people, there are many Liberals who will hail his leadership. There are, indeed, not a few of us who secretly hope that the Old Guard of the Tories will keep their minds so tightly closed that Mr. George will break with them and that the Liberal party may yet be able with united ranks to fall in behind its brilliant and wayward leader, who is incomparably the greatest political force, for good and for evil, in the England of today.

## To What Green Altar?

WE came motoring down from the summer hills, into the little suburban town, at that miraculous hour after sunset when the trees and the houses stand apart, without their shadows, in the grave clarity of the evening air, withdrawn and very still and strangely seen as if the country side had become a toy in a glass ball and we were figures in it. Indescribable! It baffled you with the vague conviction that there was a line from an old poem that expressed it all magically, if you could only remember. Keats? Were you so old-fashioned that you were trying to quote Keats? "What little town—?" What was it?

The fluttering white dresses and ducks and tennis flannels of the suburbanites were coming "two-and-twoing" down the side streets and gathering into the wider avenue in a sauntering procession, all drawn in the one direction. Suddenly, you remembered that the missing line was from the Ode to a Grecian Urn. And, as usual, it had only the most distant relation to the scene that had recalled it: "What little town by river or seashore . . . is emptied of this folk?" Or was it the procession on the sidewalks that had recalled the ode: "Who are these coming to the sacrifice? To what green altar—?" Was there some strawberry festival tonight?

The electric light near the livery stable answered you. On the wall of the livery barn, the bills were posted for Mary Pickford in *The Little American*. The whole community was flocking to see her—Jersey farmers in their Fords, suburban society women in electric coupés, young sports sitting on their shoulder blades in racers, touring cars full of country-club families, a swarm of townspeople on foot, and all the children in the world hurrying and chattering. There were no pipes, no timbrels, no "wild ecstasy," if you listened only with the "sensual ear"; but you did not need to be a poet to understand that for the children, certainly, a joyous

expectation was piping "to the spirit, ditties of no tone."

On that night, all over our continent, similar processions were streaming into the temples of the movies. You could see these worshippers, in the mind's eye, coming over a million hills, along the streets of a hundred thousand such little towns, eager to laugh, to weep, to be horrified, to love, to envy, to desire, to hate, to suffer, to be revitalized with every sort of emotion, to escape from their smaller selves into the general life of sympathetic imagination, to learn dissatisfaction and be led to aspire, to have adventures and see Beauty and be played upon by all the eloquent appeals of imaginative art. To what green altar? To their own shrine of æstheticism, of poetry and the drama and pictorial art, and the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen.

If education were a process merely of gorging the memory with facts, the movie houses would be little better than the corner saloons which they are superseding. They do not supply any solid mental food. The travelogue and the week's events are on the counter like the free lunch, but the make-believe, like the alcohol, is the desired stimulant, the drug against the worries of reality, the door of escape into the dream. It happens, however, that in making something more than an animal out of a man, the education of the sympathetic emotions is as valuable as any tuition in mathematics or any acquisition of practical knowledge in the common schools. It is by the quickening of imaginative sympathy that the beast is socialized, isn't it? His mind acquires the sensitive antennæ that keep him in friendly touch with his neighbors. He develops the organs of perception that apprehend such intangible realities as justice and right, altruism, fair play, the square deal, and all ideals of social honor.

So you assured yourself, at least. And from that point of view, these crowds of Americans, at the door of the movie theatre, were going to school. They were getting the rudiments of a spiritual education. If the teaching were as crude as  $A-B=Ab$ , it was still teaching. The man who reads anything is by so much superior to the man who reads nothing, isn't he? Let him read only the silliest fiction, he will live more broadly than he who reads none. Let Third Avenue go to any impossible melodrama and it cannot escape the ameliorating touch of imagination. Let America go to the movies and America will be a better place than when it stayed at home.

In this patronizing conviction you joined those who were going to school to Mary Pickford in *The Little American*. And you found that the film was far from being one at which to raise the supercilious eyebrow. There was in it at least one moment