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Right Hon. H. H. Asquith

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RIGHT HON. H. H. ASQUITH.

LIKE another famous politician, Herbert Henry Asquith stands, in Parliament, "on his head."

Lord Rosebery once said, when defending him, that "his brain was not equal to his heart." But he is not really so bad as that. It is, as a matter of fact, purely by virtue of a passionless, faultless brain that he holds his position in the House. He has no doubt a contractile muscular organ in his chest fulfilling the usual functions in his physical organisation; but his career as a politician gives no clue to the fact. He has, in consequence, made no big mistakes; has to look back on no faults with blood in them; and has never been betrayed by his circulation into any unwise heartiness of speech. He is both by taste and training a Puritan, deprecating intellectual excess and fond of middle courses. He has never been unduly obtrusive when following leaders who have adopted unpopular causes, and has never wasted much energy on measures which were not destined to succeed. No one has *wasted* less effort than he; even at Balliol—then in a ferment between dry ecclesiasticism and evolutionary scepticism—he was not to be lured from his quiet middle path. Then, as always, he was aloof and reserved, following his own courses with restless persistence, throwing out no branches, but remaining to the end as bare and unhampered as an arrow.

Mr. Herbert Henry Asquith was born at Morley, in Yorkshire, on September 12th, 1852, the son of Nonconformist and Puritan parents. Contrary to expectation, one learns that he was brilliant at school, finally obtaining two scholarships and entering Balliol College in 1870. There he fell under the influence of Jowett and acquired that distrust of the emotions which the famous master so consistently advocated. At Oxford he repeated his school successes: took a First Class in 1873, and again, 1874, winning the Craven Scholarship and becoming a Fellow of Balliol. Leaving there in 1874, he was called to the Bar and took up railway work. He was, of course, naturally fitted for the law: would have made a great judge had he given himself wholly to law and never entered politics. His defence of Cunningham-Graham over the Trafalgar Square disturbance in 1887, followed by his appearance in the Parnell case, established his reputation as an able lawyer, and drew the attention of politicians also.

He first entered Parliament in 1886, and, to the surprise of everyone, was made Home Secretary in 1892, at an age—politically—when most youthful statesmen are making their early blunders in the obscurity of under-secretaryship. During the stormy years which followed he "laid low," never ventured his reputation on verbal indiscretions, and concentrated himself on the reform of the Home Office. He remained adamant in support of law and order, coolly defended the military suppression of the Featherstone rioters, and "shut the gates of mercy with a clang" in the face of the Irish when they appealed on behalf of the "Dynamitards." His attitude in the Maybrick case, too, made him enemies; he seemed to be physiologically deficient, devoid of all trace of human sympathy.

But, on the other hand, he made the Home Office of value to workers, made useful provision for the lead workers, the Belfast linen hands, the Sheffield grinders, and carried through Parliament a notable Factory Bill.

Everyone knows his later career: his defence of Free Trade, his career as Chancellor, and subsequently Premier. His steady advance has been due to sheer tenacity and hard work—all those patient virtues, in fact, which the hare of the fable lacked. He introduced three Budgets which were too fair for dispute and which seemed to ruffle no one's feathers.

He is the apostle of terseness, and has remarkable gifts of lucidity, for his blood never gets into his eyes. His treatise on the Corrupt Practices Act is a standard book and a miracle of brevity in which the only absolutely unessential words are the printer's imprint.

The political chief fault is that he is a lawyer and treats causes like cases.

Albums of the caricature of "A Great Orator" was made possible through the courtesy of Mr. William Edward Baldwin, President of the Banks-Baldwin Law Publishing Company, Cleveland.



(Right Hon. H. H. Asquith.)

“A Great Orator.”

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