

deracinated and increasing multi-ethnic and multi-cultural liberal democracies of our own day.

Peter C. Erb is Professor of Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier Uni-

versity, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and is presently completing a three-volume critical edition of the correspondence of Henry Edward Manning and William E. Gladstone, 1833–90.

Former politicians remembered

Iain Dale (ed.): *The Politico's Book of the Dead*

(Politico's, 2003)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Our debt to Politico's over recent years is enormous. Since its foundation in the late 1990s, the press has published a steady stream of political analyses, biographies and volumes of memoirs and reminiscences. Now that the company has recently joined forces with Methuen, it is to be hoped that this astonishing publication record will long continue. This recent offering, *The Politico's Book of the Dead*, is the work of the company's guiding light, Iain Dale, who has edited this work with his customary accuracy and distinction. He has previously edited a number of political works (many concerning Baroness Thatcher), is well known as a political commentator and is currently Director of the recently formed Conservative History Group.

In this work no fewer than forty-one writers have contributed to the hundred entries on a motley assortment of political figures. Some are eminent national figures; others are relative unknowns. About three-quarters of the book is devoted to people who have died since 1993. Many of the entries have appeared in print before, some in the highly acclaimed *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (1998) (including the two entries by the present reviewer: E. Clement Davies and Lady Megan Lloyd George) or in its companion volume the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (2001).

Others were originally penned as newspaper obituaries and tributes. Some were written specifically for the present volume. Inevitably, they contain several factual errors, misjudgements and minor misprints.

Equally inevitably, they vary considerably in style, slant, length and detail. By far the longest entry (over ten pages) is reserved for Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson (1916–95). The volume also has a conspicuous up-to-date air. Several of the entries are on individuals who died during the first half of 2003, among them prominent former Liberal MP Richard Wainwright, former Labour Cabinet minister Mrs Renée Short and prime ministerial consort Sir Denis Thatcher. The most recent of all is former Conservative MP Sir Gerald Vaughan, who died on 29 July 2003. The first entry in the book is devoted to the little-known Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), the black MP for the Finsbury Central division during the 1892–95 parliament and the first ever non-white to sit in the Commons – long before the much publicised election of four coloured Labour MPs in the 1987 general election.

It would be easy to cavil at the editor's choice of worthies for inclusion. Former Prime Ministers like Churchill, Attlee and Eden do not feature in this book. Nor do Liberal leaders from a bygone age like Samuel,

Simon and Grimond. Neither Aneurin Bevan nor Jennie Lee are included. Some are included who made their main contribution outside parliament, among them highly distinguished historian and writer Robert Rhodes James, NCB boss Lord Robens (both also former MPs) and trades union leader Moss Evans. Oliver Baldwin is here, but not Stanley. The Welsh are certainly under-represented: only the two entries by the present reviewer relate to Welsh people.

One feature of particular interest is the inclusion of the fictional characters Prime Minister Jim Hacker and his top civil servant sidekick Sir Humphrey Appleby – their obituaries skilfully crafted by their creators in *Yes, Minister*. There is an entry, too, for fictional Labour Prime Minister Harry Perkins, most engagingly written by Chris Mullin, author of *A Very British Coup*.

Strangely, some of the politicians listed as entries in the publishers' information sheet are not featured in the book itself! These include Jo Grimond (hailed as 'maverick Liberal leader'), Sir Gerald Nabarro ('bon viveur and



REVIEWS

multiple Rolls Royce owner') and David Penhaligon ('eccentric Liberal MP'). Doubtless, last-minute editorial revision led to their being excluded from the final published text.

Women figures are generally well represented. These include colourful individuals like Margot Asquith and her equally dynamic stepdaughter Lady Violet Bonham Carter. As noted, Lady Megan is here (but not her father, or her brother Gwilym, Viscount Tenby). Strangely, there is no entry for former cabinet ministers like Eirene White (1909–99) or her lifelong *bête noir*, Labour's famous 'Red Queen' Barbara Castle, later the Baroness Castle of Blackburn (1910–2002). The

editor had, of course, to make his choice.

The volume has an especially eye-catching dustjacket, but has no illustrations or cartoons. Their inclusion would undoubtedly have added to the appeal of the book. But this impressive tome will certainly interest, amuse, enthral and entertain a large number of readers, young and old alike. A wide readership is assured. One anticipates eagerly the appearance of further works from this enterprising publishing house.

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

rural areas, as the qualifications for voting were harmonised with those that already existed for the urban boroughs. Large numbers of agricultural labourers now had the vote for the first time. How would they use it?

'Why should we be beggars with a ballot in our hand?'

In 1885, Liberals won 51 per cent of the 158 constituencies that Lynch defines as 'rural and semi-rural'. In 1906, they won 69 per cent. But these were the only elections at which Liberals won a rural majority. In 1895 they sank as low as 18 per cent. The trend of the rural Liberal vote reflected the national trend and, obviously, national issues, whether home rule in 1886 or the Boer War in 1900, had a significant impact. But were there other factors that had a peculiar influence on rural seats – and could Liberals have exploited them better? These are the questions at the heart of Lynch's analysis.

The major problem she faced is that Liberal Party history has focused on leadership activities and on the limited, mostly urban, archives. Her solution has been to draw on local newspapers, combined in places with the census and directory data usually exploited by social rather than political historians. Victorian journalists thought nothing of taking a full page to record a meeting that political activists would struggle to convince the local paper to report today. A comprehensive analysis of the 158 constituencies by this method would occupy a lifetime rather than the ten years taken from a 'vague proposal for a doctoral thesis' (p. v) to Lynch's published monograph. Her sample has been limited to three constituencies in North Essex, South Oxfordshire and Holmfirth in the West Riding of Yorkshire, but this is sufficient to secure different agricultural and religious circumstances as well as to include a semi-rural area with mining and industry.

'God made the land for the people'

Patricia Lynch: *The Liberal Party in Rural England 1885–1910: Radicalism and Community* (Clarendon Press, 2003)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

In the first half of the twentieth century the Liberal Party moved from winning its greatest victory to near-extinction. In the same period the Labour Party moved from insignificance to the creation of a semi-socialist state in Britain. Predictably, historians have brought these two things together and constructed theories about their inevitability: the Liberal Party was doomed once large numbers of the working class were added to the electoral roll and, if not then, once the country had become adjusted to the mass mobilisation and state direction of industry required to win the Great War. Naturally, Liberals made matters worse for themselves by their misguided policies from Gladstone and home rule onwards, and by engaging in fratricidal quarrels, but ... and here clichés about beach equipment and ocean liners begin to occur. If this is

a parody of a broadly accepted view, it is one that has not been adequately challenged. And while Patricia Lynch does not pretend to offer an alternative thesis for the twentieth century – her book does not venture even as far as the Great War – she does challenge the seeds from which the determinist view grows.

The general election of 1885 was fought under new and unprecedented conditions. Most constituencies now returned a single member, and this feature has been very carefully analysed for the benefits that it conferred on one party over another. The other, and more important, feature was the two-thirds growth in the electorate in England and Wales, which had been enfranchised by the Third Reform Act (50–60 per cent growth in Ireland and Scotland). But this increase was not spread evenly; rather, it was concentrated in

Her solution has been to draw on local newspapers, combined in places with the census and directory data usually exploited by social rather than political historians.