

Volume 5 | Issue 1

1953

The Right Hon. Herbert Henry Asquith, K.C., M.P.

Vanity Fair

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vanity Fair, *The Right Hon. Herbert Henry Asquith, K.C., M.P.*, 5 W. Res. L. Rev. 1 (1953)
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol5/iss1/3>

This Front Matter is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Case Western Reserve Law Review by an authorized administrator of Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

The reproduction in this issue from the Vanity Fair Albums of the caricature of Herbert Asquith, Q. C., was made possible through the courtesy of Mr. William Edward Baldwin, President of the Banks-Baldwin Law Publishing Company, Cleveland.

THE RIGHT HON. HERBERT HENRY ASQUITH, K.C., M.P.

MANNERS makyth man, but brains made Herbert Henry Asquith. He has developed them by use, just as Sandow increases his biceps, and they have lifted him into a Cabinet.

Young Henry Asquith had as unpromising a start for a great political career as a lady novelist ever imagined for her hero. We first see him, a dour little lad, newly from Yorkshire, plodding away at the City of London School. Behind him was neither birth, nor wealth, nor influence. He was alone with his brains, and excellent comrades they were. From school he progressed as a Scholar to Balliol. He was never a very human undergraduate. There were some who, referring to his powers of application, called him a "smug." It was rude of them, but it was so. He became acquainted with Jowett, and acquired the Oxford manner and a first in "Mods." From that time nothing could hold him. He took the "Craven," and a first in "Greats." They made him a fellow of his college, and yet he was not contented. At the Union, of which he was president, he spoke ably and often. Curiously enough, his successes were followed almost step for step by his eldest son Raymond twenty-seven years later.

Henry Asquith attacked the Metropolis with ardour. While he read for the Bar, he worked as assistant master at his old school for two years. He was called, and began to take briefs. He still spoke when he could, and the Y. M. C. A. of Islington wondered at his eloquence. They thought his views rather broad, as all good Y. M. C. A.'s should; but he refused to change them.

Ten years later he had made a name, and was the chosen of East Fife. He entered the House with reserve in his eye and ambition in his soul. He was a solemn, untidy man. "I don't know if the honourable Member is a Nonconformist, but he looks like one," an opponent called across the floor of the House—rather rudely, it must be admitted. But the remark is illuminating. The chosen of East Fife began to grow in public opinion. His defence of Parnell in the Parnell Commission was brilliant. He is said to have kept Mr. Gladstone awake during the whole of an Eighty Club dinner. Obviously he was bound to rise.

In 1892 Mr. Gladstone gave him the moving of the resolution which brought to an end the Government of Lord Salisbury. He hit out almost with the vigour of a Chamberlain, and the G. O. M. made him Home Secretary, amidst the enthusiastic applause of those who had not expected the billet themselves. He was, on the whole, a success. He stood no nonsense from the Fenians, and they hung him in effigy. There were few murderers reprimed in his consulship. Judicious, sound, law-abiding—such is his record. In '95 he was out again, and back to the Bar, a more benignant figure, with longer hair than of old.

In '94 all London came to his second marriage, with Miss Margaret Tennant. They had both been members of the select society, the "Souls." Miss Margaret Tennant chose him from several candidates. "I understand he was the only man who could ask with success," remarked a noble jester on hearing of the match.

Beneath the fence on which Sir H. C. B. sits with the Radical Leadership dangling in his fingers, waits Henry Asquith, looking upward. It will drop some day. After his marriage there were Radicals who thought he had grown to love society too dearly to be the same politician as of yore. His work in the House has interfered with his work in the Law Courts—also the contrary holds good. His effort to think Imperially in the shade of Lord Rosebery has damaged him with the Little England brigade. His Oxford manner has not endeared him to others. But, though he will never arouse enthusiasm and devotion in his followers, he will be the Leader of his party.

There is an amusing little story of a passage of arms in the Law Courts between the political K.C. and Sir Edward Clarke. Voice lozenges were the subject of the case and upon their medicinal value Mr. Asquith had spread himself with becoming eloquence, "Is there not such a thing as cacoethes loquendi—a disease of speaking?" smiled the Judge. "Yes, my Lord," said Sir Edward. "My learned friend and I both suffer from it."

As a speaker he is terse, epigrammatic, sarcastic. His impromptus are best when prepared. He prefers to follow, rather than precede, events. He is unequalled in getting up a political case. Of the few oratorical ships recorded of him is a Cambridge speech, in which he declared in a loud-voiced peroration, that of his party's demands he would abate "not one tit or one tottle." He once rode a cycle of his own make. He has taken to a frock coat since his marriage, and drives a pair of ponies with caution. Also he plays golf, but not well. "Ploughing the sands" is really his effort, though it has been ascribed to others. In the House he is ever alert. He never dozes, and rarely leans back in the attitude of Ministerial repose. His brains are as prominent as ever.



Herbert Asquith, Q. C.

"brains"

Reproduced from the Baldwin collection of more than two thousand "Spys"