



THE LLOYD GEORGE WAR MEMOIRS

J. GRAHAM JONES

National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

The Lloyd George *War Memoirs*, originally published in six volumes between 1933 and 1936, immediately made a major impact which has proved enduring [SUTTIE : Chapter 1, 'Writing the *War Memoirs*, 1931-36', 10-25]. They have been heavily quarried and extensively cited and quoted by political and military historians and biographers ever since as first-hand evidence in relation to the seminal events and key personalities of the First World War. They aroused notably strong reactions when first published in the 1930s both from press critics in their reviews and from the wider reading public at large.¹ The outspoken, vehement attacks on the generals of the Great War aroused particular condemnation, but there were also favourable comments from critics and reviewers on the thoroughness of the underlying research, the detailed documentation and the captivating literary style. The depth of the interest and the spontaneity of the reaction come as little surprise. When the first volume of the *War Memoirs* was published in September 1933, the Great War had come to an end less than fifteen years earlier and was thus still fresh in the minds of the entire adult population. Also, although he had permanently fallen from power in the autumn of 1922, Lloyd George remained an important political figure who had re-emerged to succeed Asquith as the leader of the 're-united' Liberal Party between 1926 and 1931, was always in the forefront of the thoughts of Stanley Baldwin and J. Ramsay MacDonald when they were planning their political machinations, and had come very close to a return to political power at the height of the political and constitutional crisis of August 1931. Small wonder, therefore, that the publication of the *War Memoirs* aroused so much public interest and strongly ambivalent reactions in the 1930s.

Even before he had fallen from power in the autumn of 1922 (as it transpires, forever), Lloyd George had repeatedly striven to convince both himself and those in his immediate circle that he had already hankered for the leisure time in order to research and draft his memoirs of the war years. He had, he told them, many pressing old scores to settle, and indeed he had begun to write on the events surrounding the outbreak of the Great War even *before* his fall from power, curiously convincing himself at this point that he could both continue to serve as Prime Minister and also write his reminiscences at one and the same time. Had both Gladstone and Disraeli not written their memoirs while still remaining in office? And was not Lloyd George's need for the accompanying financial remuneration much more

¹ For a convenient summary of the immediate reactions to the publication of the *War Memoirs*, see EGERTON, especially 78-86.

pressing than theirs? A second motive for turning to the writing of his memoirs at this early stage was that he himself had been harshly criticised in the reminiscences of others and thus felt the urgent need to settle old scores. These included several leading admirals and generals such as John Fisher, John Jellicoe, Ian Hamilton, John French and William Robertson, all of whom had with amazing rapidity published memoirs and diaries vindicating their war records and had either deliberately neglected to refer to Lloyd George's war leadership or else had pilloried it virulently.

Indeed on 12 August 1922 it was announced in the British press that Lloyd George had already signed a contract with Sir William Berry, acting on behalf of Messrs Funk and Wagnall, a firm of publishers in the USA, on the understanding that he was to receive £90,000 (a most substantial sum in 1922, and, at that time, an all-time literary record, double the total sum which the Kaiser had received for his memoirs) as remuneration. It was also agreed that extracts from the memoirs would appear in the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* prior to publication as a monograph, and that Cassell and Co. Ltd. would assume responsibility for subsequent publication in the United Kingdom. Potential sales were at the time described as 'the biggest deal in the history of publishing'.² The reaction of the opposition and the Conservative press in Britain was immediate and condemnatory. As the *Daily Mail* commented, 'As he has not made Germany pay [a reference to the relative failure of reparations], he is going to make Sir William Berry pay' [Cited in OWEN : 700]. Such was the sheer intensity of the protests that on 28 August Lloyd George had little alternative but to issue a public statement:

Mr Lloyd George has decided that the £90,000 which he will receive for his book on the war shall be devoted to charities connected with the relief of suffering caused by the war. He feels unable to take any personal advantage for himself out of the story of the struggle and suffering of the nation'.³

The Prime Minister had undoubtedly been shown in a bad light, and the Asquithian Liberal press crowed with triumph. Even his wife Dame Margaret Lloyd George crowed triumphantly from distant Criccieth, 'I did tell you not to take the money for the book, didn't I? That's a feather in my cap. You can write another book to make money, but not on the war. I could not touch a penny of it'.⁴

In the middle of September Lloyd George was to receive a royalty advance of £5,500 on the understanding that he would deliver the text of the first volume of his memoirs before the end of the year, with the second volume to follow by the end of 1924. But his recent rash undertaking to donate all the profits to charity had robbed him of his enthusiasm for the

² *Evening Standard*, 12 August 1922. See also the *Sunday Times*, 13 August 1922, and the *Empire News*, 13 August 1922, for fuller details of contract arrangements.

³ *Westminster Gazette*, 28 August 1922; the *Sunday Times*, 27 August 1922; and also cited in OWEN : 700.

⁴ Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, London, Lloyd George Papers I/1/2/44, Dame Margaret Lloyd George to Lloyd George, undated [late 1922].

task in hand. The Coalition Liberal government fell from power on 19 October 1922, and within days there were press reports of 'an extraordinary slump in the demand by American newspapers for Mr. Lloyd George's forthcoming *Memoirs*'.⁵ Before the end of November the former Prime Minister had signed a contract with the United Press Associations of America to write regular commentaries on current events for the next two years. Immediate protests from the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, which had bought an interest in the *War Memoirs*, were brushed aside, Lloyd George denying that his journalistic activities would in any way reduce the value of his reminiscences:

I have my living to earn. After seventeen years in office, I have retired a poor man, and it is absolutely imperative that I should turn to writing as a means of livelihood. The proceeds of the book for which you hold the serial rights are, as you know, to be given to charity'.⁶

In mid-December the American correspondent to *The Times*, reporting from New York, informed the British readership of the 'profound sensation' in the city caused by the cancellation of the contract between Lloyd George, the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* over the publication of the *War Memoirs*, and that the US Senate had unanimously resolved to embody in its Congressional Record the history of the dispute between Lloyd George and the two American papers.⁷ Lloyd George returned the advances which he had received, and it was soon announced that the British contracts were to be cancelled too.

Thus did the first attempt to write and publish the Lloyd George *War Memoirs* come to a rather abrupt, abortive end. LG soon turned eagerly to a new career as a journalist which at once brought him immense wealth (he was soon to become the highest paid political journalist of the 1920s) and a new kind of influence and status. His biographer Peter Rowland estimates that, during his first year as a journalist, Lloyd George was to make in excess of £30,000—over and above his salary as an MP. This income enabled him to expand his Churt estate substantially by buying up extra parcels of land and to own properties in central London—initially no. 10 Cheyne Walk on the Chelsea Embankment, and later no. 2 Addison Road. It is likely that he was able to achieve all this without raiding the substantial Lloyd George Political Fund which he had rapaciously squirreled away during his years in office [ROWLAND : 593]. The idea of writing the *War Memoirs*, although never totally abandoned, was subsequently put firmly on the back burner throughout the long 1920s as their author remained something of 'a political dynamo in opposition'.⁸ He still remained an active, energetic and ambitious politician—many believed that one day he might well return to power—and he began to savour writing on current political issues and problems and the immense pecuniary rewards which came in its wake.

⁵ *Sunday Express*, 22 October 1922.

⁶ *New York Times*, 1 December 1922.

⁷ *The Times*, 18 December 1922.

⁸ The phrase is that used in EGERTON : 61.

But preparations for the *Memoirs* did not lapse completely. Major-General E.D. Swinton, already hired as a research assistant, and A.J. Sylvester, Lloyd George's long suffering PPS from 1923, devoted considerable time to the enterprise, recording detailed interviews with Lloyd George's wartime colleagues, arranging for his extensive papers to be put in order and researching contemporary Cabinet records (with the support of Sir Maurice Hankey, and with the permission of the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, an arch-enemy of Lloyd George's). Sylvester recalled his own contribution:

I was so deeply concerned with the shocking mess in which I had found Lloyd George's archives that, in agreement with Sir John Davies, the Secretary of the Lloyd George Fund, I put in hard work on the making of a complete index of all the papers. I brought in Sergeant Hannan, who had been with me at the Peace Conference, and was now with the Government Hospitality Fund, and a Mr. Innes, who worked at the Cabinet Office but who came to me privately and not officially. They came each night and the weekends, and I helped them. They were paid 2s 6d an hour and they worked some six years when, owing to an acute financial situation, work on them had to cease. Fortunately, they were almost finished. These Lloyd George papers had become my 'baby'. My index provided the sole means of telling what Cabinet papers he had, and what he had not; the rest, it will be seen, I researched from the State Departments.

During the whole of this time Lloyd George never asked a single question about his own archives, or even where they were, or how I got my information about Pembroke Dock. From 18 Abingdon Street I had them removed to a strong room in Chancery Lane: then to Thames House: several year later, on Lloyd George's instructions, they were removed to Churt and housed in a wooden shed which he had specially built, and where the mice and damp caused much deterioration, when they were further removed in the war to his super underground air raid shelter at Churt [SYLVESTER : 2-3].

There was even a suggestion in 1924 that Swinton might personally write a scholarly volume outlining Lloyd George's contribution to the war effort, but predictably such an initiative soon proved abortive, Swinton telling his employer:

To continue devilling for your *Memoirs* I am quite willing. But I do not feel competent to attempt a book on your activities during the war, or to take the responsibility for the views and opinions which would be expressed in it. As you know many people are waiting for the appearance of your book with guns and clubs.⁹

⁹ Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, London, Lloyd George Papers G/216, E.D. Swinton to Lloyd George, January 1924.

The following year he was to leave the *War Memoirs* enterprise to take up an academic position as the Chichele Professor of Military History at Oxford [SWINTON : 232-234]. Shortly afterwards Malcolm Thomson was appointed to the Lloyd George secretariat, where he was to work alongside Sylvester and Frances Stevenson. All three made a limited amount of progress on the research for the War Memoirs and ensured that their employer was at all times kept fully informed of what was being published on the First World War in general and his personal war record.

The idea of seriously preparing the War Memoirs was not really revived until the summer of 1929, when Lloyd George (recently re-elected to the House of Commons in the 30 May general election, together with his son Gwilym [Pembrokeshire] and daughter Megan [Anglesey]), took his family for a tour of the old battlefields of France and Italy. Following their recent strenuous electoral exertions, they were certainly in need of a change of scene and a rest, but Lloyd George's main purpose, he told them, was 'to get first-hand knowledge for my *War Memoirs*' for which he had recently received a number of enticing new offers [OWEN : 713]. Lloyd George had a particular penchant for the scenes of well-known battles, and he now savoured to the full his return visits to Mons, Verdun and Passchendaele. But yet another two years were to elapse before he seriously returned to the question of preparing the *War Memoirs*. His sudden very serious illness and resultant surgery in August 1931 meant that, crucially, he was firmly out-of-action (and thus incapable of being offered or of accepting office) at the time of the formation of Ramsay MacDonald's so-called national government. Forced reluctantly to entrust authority to his deputy party leader Sir Herbert Samuel, Lloyd George was to face a period of extreme and unprecedented political isolation. He was re-elected in the Caernarfon Boroughs in the general election of October 1931 as one of a tiny splinter group of just four 'independent' Liberal MPs, all of them members of his own immediate family circle, the only Liberal MPs in fact at this point to sit on the opposition benches at Westminster together with the group of only fifty-two Labour MPs returned to Parliament. There were other factors at work, too, by this time. General Jan Smuts urged Lloyd George to pen his memoirs without delay to put the record straight and counter the claims made in the published recollections of former colleagues like Sir William Robertson, Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and Churchill and in books published about Lord Kitchener, Sir Henry Wilson and Field Marshal Douglas Haig, all of these utilising their subject's private papers and public records. All of these works either attacked Lloyd George's war record or conspicuously failed to give him the credit which he deserved (or at least felt sure in his own mind that he deserved).¹⁰

Partly to facilitate his convalescence from his serious illness, in October 1931 Lloyd George left for an extended vacation at Ceylon, leaving instructions that during his absence Malcolm Thomson and Frances Stevenson should be charged to research the papers which he had accumulated during his key period at the Ministry of Munitions back in

¹⁰ For full details, see SUTTIE : 14-15.

1915-16 [SYLVESTER : 3]. Accompanied on his holiday by Dame Margaret, his youngest daughter Megan and A.J. Sylvester, Lloyd George refreshed his memories of the war years by reading the accounts of Churchill and Liddell Hart, convinced that the time was now ripe for his own memoir writing to commence. More than thirty years later, Sylvester could still recall vividly how his employer had transported to the distant climes of Ceylon 'a huge trunk of every book that had ever been written on the War by anyone of importance. These he read, marked and annotated'.¹¹ Lloyd George's resentment increased because the authors of these works had never even troubled to consult him concerning events in which he had been directly involved, while he himself, he felt with justification, was the best placed of all his political contemporaries to prepare a full account of decision making at the highest level for the whole of the First World War. At almost seventy years of age he turned to what was really his first major literary adventure with an energy, enthusiasm and vigorous tenacity which astounded his staff and family circle as he tackled the huge mass of research materials which confronted him.

Lloyd George was by now engaged in negotiations with several publishers concerning the *War Memoirs* and a number of newspapers relating to the serial rights. It was eventually decided that the *Daily Telegraph* should be awarded the serial rights, and an increased circulation of some 350,000 copies was claimed in consequence. At around this time the publisher Victor Gollancz told Lloyd George that the easiest way ahead was for him to dictate his reminiscences to a trusted member of his staff. A.J. Sylvester recorded the course of events:

Suddenly one morning in 1932 at Brynawelon he came in from the garden and asked me to take a shorthand note. He dictated some 400 words: it was a character sketch of Lord Grey. He returned to London by train the next day and during the journey he dictated to me some 5,000 words. This was the start of his writing of the *War Memoirs*. Even hereafter he wrote everything himself, generally on a pad with a huge lead pencil often with a blunt point, held in the middle of his left hand in his higgledy-piggledy writing which was often undecipherable even for himself.

It only became abundantly apparent to me as time passed why he chose to do this: it was, that he, and he alone, was the fellow who had written, in his own hand, all his *War Memoirs*. Nobody ever helped him. Later quotations from his own remarks will provide evidence of this [SYLVESTER : 8].¹²

¹¹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London, Liddell Hart Papers 1/450, 'Rough notes by A.J. Sylvester : How LG wrote his *War Memoirs*', 6 January 1965.

¹² SYLVESTER, 'How I helped Lloyd George': 8. In his typescript notes, Sylvester went on, 'An unpredictable man was LG. Later he gave a bonus to Frances and Thomson of some £200 each for work said to be done on the book. I got nothing. There was a time during a financial situation in the '30s when as an inducement to others I volunteered to accept a reduction of 10 per cent in my salary, having refused to accept it half in cash and half in the shares of the LG fund, at their depreciated

Sylvester 'thoroughly enjoyed' the protracted tasks of conducting lengthy interviews with Lloyd George's former Cabinet colleagues and political associates and the research which he undertook among governmental archives:

It was open sesame for me. With Hankey's full approval I used the War Cabinet Office as if I were still a member of the staff. ... I worked very hard during long days and nights on this research work, for it all had to be done not instead of my responsibility in running the Private Office and looking after LG personally, but in addition. The research was on a vast scale, for Lloyd George's demands were never ending [SYLVESTER : 10].¹³

Indeed it was mainly Sylvester and Malcolm Thomson who undertook most of the research among the original source materials—the massive archive of Lloyd George's own papers, those of the various government departments and those of other individuals. The actual writing of the *War Memoirs*, however, Lloyd George undertook himself. Although he was still a Member of Parliament, his semi-estranged (but still devoted) wife Dame Margaret undertook most of the constituency work on the ground in the Caernarfon Boroughs, far removed from Churt, assisted to some extent by Sylvester and Lloyd George's younger brother William. Lloyd George must have realised that by now he was firmly out of office with very little prospect of ever returning to the hub of political life. He thus had both the leisure time and the financial and personal motives to devote his still considerable energies and tenacity to his 'inside' story of the First World War. In his 'official biography' of Lloyd George, eventually published in 1948, Malcolm Thomson wrote, 'He could never do anything except with the whole of his energy, and we were hard put to it to keep pace with his output' [THOMSON : 25]. In his celebrated biography Dr Thomas Jones wrote thus:

He did almost all of his writing at Churt, and followed a pattern of work there. His brain was clearest in the early morning, and he began to write, propped up in bed, usually around six o'clock, sometimes earlier, until seven-thirty, when tea and fruit were brought to him. He then bathed and shaved and read the morning papers, and at breakfast-time he would issue 'orders of the day'; what he had written would be typed, and he would work over it until about eleven-thirty when he would perambulate the farm, returning for lunch at one o'clock. He would sleep for the whole afternoon, and after tea would work and visit the farm again. He dined at seven-thirty and went to bed at nine-thirty with a detective story for a sedative. During the day he would have managed to examine innumerable papers, documents,

market price and not their nominal value. LG himself made a vast amount, the publisher Ivor Nicholson & Watson a handsome profit, and the DAILY TELEGRAPH claimed to have increased their circulation by 350,000'.

¹³ See also the comments in THOMSON : 412-413.

and letters flagged for him by his secretaries. If data were lacking on the subject in hand a secretary would be told off to interview the essential witness, if available, with instructions to return with his *ipissima verba*. Such was the normal day during the composition of the *War Memoirs* in the thirties [JONES: 268-269].

Frances Stevenson's detailed diary was heavily quarried as a contemporary record of chronology, events and impressions. The writing of the six volumes of the *War Memoirs*, running to no fewer than one million words, was to take up much of Lloyd George's time from 1932 until 1936 when he turned to his ensuing 'peace memoirs'—*The Truth about the Peace Treaties*—which were eventually published in two further volumes in 1938. The only occasion when Lloyd George allowed himself to become sidetracked from this central task was the election year of 1935, when much of his time and financial resources were devoted to the dramatic launch of his 'New Deal' proposals, unveiled to his constituents at Bangor in January, and the setting up of their linked propaganda body, the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction which, it is believed, were financed by some £400,000 from the replete coffers of the infamous Lloyd George Political Fund. Just before totally launching himself into the *War Memoirs*, however, Lloyd George turned to the drafting of a long memorandum on reparations (intended to be submitted to an international conference at Lausanne in June 1932) which was eventually made available as a brief monograph published by William Heinemann and entitled *The Truth about Reparations and War Debts* which saw the light of day on 21 March 1932. Its theme was a spirited advocacy of an all-round cancellation of war debts to be headed by the USA.¹⁴ None of its contents was especially contentious or controversial, however, and the appearance of the work did not cause very much public comment. Then, in August, the mammoth task of compiling the *War Memoirs* was begun with gusto.

The first volume began rather curiously by recounting a conversation between Lloyd George and Rosebery in 1904 and Lloyd George's meeting with the venerable W.E. Gladstone back in 1892, followed by a brief sketch of Lloyd George's version of the course of international affairs from 1908 until the outbreak of the First World War. The line which Lloyd George took was that he himself and most of his Cabinet colleagues were kept completely in the dark by Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, who was virulently attacked still further in the third chapter of the *Memoirs*. (Ironically Grey's death in September 1933 coincided with the appearance of the first volume of the *Memoirs*.) The second half of the book looked in some detail at the events of 1914 and 1915, quoting liberally from official memoranda and documents, correspondence and the minutes of meetings of the War Council, and reproduced in facsimile form Asquith's letter of thanks to Lloyd George dated 25th May 1915 (as if to prove conclusively that he had actually written it!)

Sylvester had written in his diary for 21 November 1932:

¹⁴ See the review in *The Times*, 21 March 1932.

I started to go through them in the hundreds if not thousands. For months I had been sending shoals of these to Churt from the strong room which I had first in Chancery Lane and then at Thames House. Frankly, he had given me no clear idea what he wanted, and I am damned if I knew quite what I was looking for, and I was puzzled to know what Thomson and Frances had been doing in this ragtime Churt set-up. Lloyd George has an aptitude of sending one on a wild goose chase. Although I worked till a very late hour I made very little impression on the job and felt decidedly anxious about it' [SYLVESTER : 21].

Two days later:

I was at work at 6 a.m. not looking for partiridge [*sic*], but looking for important papers. At 6.45 a.m. he [Lloyd George] came to my bedroom and said, 'You have not given me the papers I asked for last night'. I replied, 'Yes, I have, I left them for you outside your bedroom door this morning at 1 a.m.'.

It transpired that he wanted something entirely different. One never knows when he is in one of these moods whether he is trying to work up a row or what it is, and I was already suspicious of his keeping me down here. He has written over 200,000 words, and he wanted a chapter on National Factories. First Frances has them, then Thomson, then someone else, finally there are pieces of a chapter all over the place in a most disorderly fashion. Anyhow I found what he now wanted.

The way LG works is simply staggering: I have never seen such a damned mess as there is at Churt. Sir William Beveridge's remark when he was at lunch here the other day that Lloyd George is [a] disorderly organiser is absolutely true. God knows what has happened to the index to the Cabinet papers which he brought down here, and the papers are lying all over the place, and in order to find one you have to look through the lot [SYLVESTER : 22-23].

Before the end of the same month, poor Sylvester had been the recipient of 'an unexpected and urgent summons' to return to Churt at once where 'a blazing row' had just taken place between Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson over the price which should be charged for the first two published volumes of the *War Memoirs*. There were further disagreements between the two over the exact combination of advance payments and royalties which they should seek from the publishers [SYLVESTER : 24]. Once the first volume of the book had been completed, Lloyd George moved on without a break to the second volume, which was to take the story down to the political crisis of December 1916.

The text of the first two volumes, completed by the spring of 1933, was then submitted to Sir Maurice Hankey (in his capacity as secretary to the Cabinet) for his comments, while Captain Liddell Hart studied the

chapters devoted to military developments and suggested amendments. Stanley Baldwin, as Lord President of the Council in the national government, also perused the text and responded remarkably amicably:

I read every word—carefully, and with the greatest interest. I think, compared with some of our contemporary historians, you have published little in the way of documents, and I agree with Hankey that there is no publication to which exception could be taken. ... It'll sell, and on its merits, and we shall see 'counter demonstrations'. Thank you so much for letting me see it.

The following day Baldwin wrote privately to Tom Jones describing what he had read as 'restrained' but with 'plenty of backhanders in it', notably the 'nasty chapter' reserved for Grey, and the 'good claw' for Sir Herbert Samuel. Baldwin felt that Lloyd George had been

quite judicious in the use of State papers and again I agree with Hankey that he has used nothing to which exception might be taken. Others have sinned more in that respect. [...] The book will sell all right and lead to a good deal of correspondence, so every-one will be happy!¹⁵

Not everyone responded so agreeably. In the middle of May, Lloyd George's younger brother William was so distressed about the character assassination of Sir Edward Grey in the *War Memoirs* that he wrote to his niece Megan Lloyd George to give vent to his feelings. Informed by his daughter of the full extent of his brother's feelings, Lloyd George wrote to William in an attempt to justify his harsh words about Grey in the book:

He was a calamitous Foreign Secretary both before and during the War. I think he could have averted the War and I am quite convinced he could have saved the Balkans for us and thus shortened the War by two years. By 1916 he was in a blue funk, thoroughly paralysed by the jeopardy into which he had plunged us.¹⁶

Eventually the first two volumes of the long anticipated *War Memoirs* were to see the light of day in September and October 1933 respectively. Baldwin had anticipated that 'counter demonstrations' would soon result. He was not wholly wrong, but on the whole the reception accorded them was amicable and favourable.

The public's keen anticipation of Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* had been further heightened by the publication in May of the same year of Lord Riddell's *War Memoirs, 1914-1918*, reminiscences regarded as

¹⁵ Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, London, Lloyd George Papers G/1/15/2, Stanley Baldwin to Lloyd George, 19 April 1933; Baldwin to Tom Jones, 20 April 1933, cited in JONES (1954): 105.

¹⁶ Lloyd George to William George, 28 May 1933, quoted in GEORGE: 238-239.

outstandingly important because of their author's role as a kind of liaison officer between the government and the press throughout the war years, in close association with Cabinet proceedings, a unique position which had enabled him to preserve 'an exceptionally intimate record of the changing phases of the political and military situation as well as of the leading personalities behind the scenes' from 1914 to 1918.¹⁷ During the same month, as planned, extracts from Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* began to be serialised in the *Daily Telegraph*, hailed as 'the most startling historical document of our times'. When the full first volume followed at the beginning of September, *The Times* reviewer commented justifiably, 'It is fair to say that he has endeavoured to guard against palpable bias, but he has failed whenever his hostility to some individual was deep-rooted'. Lloyd George's portrayals of Kitchener and Grey were rightly considered excessively prejudiced.¹⁸ The following month volume II was condemned as 'something of a miscellany' on the grounds that its two major themes—the achievements of the Ministry of Munitions in 1915-16 and the break-up of the first coalition government—were subordinated to a number of issues of secondary interest.¹⁹

Undeterred, Lloyd George pressed on with the drafting of volumes three and four. At the end of March, Frances Stevenson recorded in her detailed diary the 'great struggle' at Churt to complete the next instalment of the *War Memoirs* to send to Baldwin for his 'sanction':

The usual last-minute alterations, corrections, recriminations, leaving everyone utterly exhausted and extremely bad tempered. [Lloyd George] is incapable of *achieving* anything, without reducing all round him to nervous wrecks. In this way he *distributes* his own nerves in a crisis, and, I believe, saves himself in the process.

Within a month such had been the strain of completing the *Memoirs* that it had left Lloyd George 'very much under the weather' to such an extent that a concerned Frances arranged for him to be examined by Dr Nicholl, their local G.P. at Churt. It was the good doctor's opinion that Lloyd George had indeed 'been doing too much. He has been working too hard at the MS.—too hard, trying to cram into one year what would normally take two years. However, the MS. is now complete, & [Lloyd George] can take it easy'. To relax, he turned to new ideas for developing his extensive orchards at Churt. The very same day—24 April 1934—they received from King George V his comments on a draft chapter of the *War Memoirs* submitted to him for his approval. The King was indeed 'very gratified' with Lloyd George's observations about himself, but requested the deletion of 'certain derogatory references to Ramsay MacDonald', the Prime Minister. The request left Lloyd George 'furious & says he certainly will not do this, & that H. M. has no right to make the request'. The result

¹⁷ *The Times*, 2 May 1933.

¹⁸ *The Times*, 7 September 1933.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 19 October 1933. See also the review by Kingsley Martin in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 21 October 1933.

of the King's 'interference' was that it persuaded Lloyd George to re-shape the passage on MacDonald in the chapter on labour unrest

and strengthen the case against Ramsay [MacDonald] in doing so—make it more hostile & more vehement. He says that he has not refrained in his book from attacking certain people, e.g. Asquith & Kitchener, who were doing their very best according to their own lights to *help* during the war. He is therefore not going to spare one who, like Ramsay, did his best to thwart and hinder every effort to prosecute the war vigorously.

It is evident that Ramsay has been complaining to one or two of his friends including H.M. [King George V] who are now busying themselves to try to get [Lloyd George] to hold his pen. But every fresh appeal that comes only strengthens [Lloyd George]'s determination to publish his denunciations.

Another blow came at the end of June with the news that the French newspaper the *Écho de Paris* had refused to carry a series of extracts from the *War Memoirs* ' & say quite frankly that they do not wish to have them because he is so unpopular. Nor will any other French paper take them. However, he has other friends and other compensations but there is no doubt that it hurts his pride to receive such a snub'.²⁰

The third volume of the *Memoirs* was duly published on 21 September 1934, devoted to the formation of the December 1916 coalition government, and the two Peace Notes, and it then discussed in detail the battle against the German U-boats and the introduction of the convoy system for which Lloyd George took the full credit. He had himself, he claimed proudly, forced the convoy system upon a doubtful Admiralty and was exceptionally harsh in his attacks upon Lord Jellicoe. On the very day of publication Jellicoe gave vent to his indignation in a lengthy press interview.²¹ Within three days a further press interview was published with Lord (formerly Sir Edward) Carson, the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1917, who did not mince his words, condemning Lloyd George's third volume as 'ridiculous rot', so much so that he positively had to force himself to continue reading it—'Just imagine! What the little popinjay says amounts to this: "When I became Prime Minister I found the army without a general and the navy without an admiral and I had to supply the place of both!" '. When Carson was asked for his reaction to Lloyd George's claim that Jellicoe had been reluctant to introduce convoys, his indignation knew no bounds:

'Tis the biggest lie ever told. Why, I myself took the First Sea Lord to have breakfast with the Prime Minister in order to explain the position to him. Jellicoe did not oppose the convoy system, but he required time to organise it ... but the Prime Minister would not listen to

²⁰ STEVENSON : 264, 269 & 276; diary entries for 29 March, 24 April and 27 June 1934.

²¹ *Morning Post*, 21 September 1934.

reason. Almost every day he would be demanding that I make a change at the Admiralty. 'Sack the lot!' was his favourite expression. ... The fault of Mr. Lloyd George is that he thinks he knows everything.²²

The second half of Volume III was devoted to the Rome Conference, the Nivelle offensive and America's belated entry into the war. Yet again the book had been serialised in the *Daily Telegraph* during the months preceding publication. On the day of publication, *The Times* reviewer noted Lloyd George's practice of quoting freely from official documents in his text—'Their inclusion is the more helpful, because Mr. Lloyd George has old scores to pay off and rarely makes a point without a gibe'. The review concluded, 'The whole book is written with tremendous vigour. The pity is that Mr. Lloyd George's memories of his heroic period have now become bitter to him and that his bitterness infects his pen'.²³ The historian Robert Ensor lavished praise on Lloyd George's publication of an array of original documents which would constitute an abundance of most useful source materials for future writers, while in the *Manchester Guardian*, J.L. Hammond wrote admiringly that Volume III of the *War Memoirs* 'resembled its predecessors in the vigour of its writing, its witty and vivid character sketches, its severity in criticism, and its atmosphere of self-defence', in such striking contrast to the lack-lustre reminiscences of the Lord Grey of Fallodon.

An anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* used stronger language. He applauded the veteran statesman for undertaking 'his task with a full sense of historical responsibility' in so far as he had emphasised to the post-war generation (which was now becoming ever more preoccupied with the distinct threat of yet another major conflict) how 'reckless and unintelligent handling' had brought the British people 'almost to the rim of catastrophe'. Especial tribute was again paid to the widespread use of primary source materials 'from which he quotes abundantly and always with impressive effect'. Then the reviewer felt obliged to point up Lloyd George's pursuit of 'another purpose, unavowed but only too apparent'—'It is a piece of self-vindication achieved by blackening the repute of whoever challenged or even doubted the complete soundness of the Prime Minister's views'. Any opposition to the Prime Minister was portrayed as the result of 'deficiencies of will or brains or both; and by his unrestrained gratification of his vendettas Mr. Lloyd George weakens his authority as a guide to historical truth'. In the pages of *The New Statesman and Nation*, Kingsley Martin took a similar line. He readily paid tribute to Lloyd George's 'energy ... quickness of apprehension and a manipulative skill that have never been surpassed by any English politician', and then urged forgiveness for his 'one fault of always being in the right'. The one error of judgement to which Lloyd George had readily owned up within the *War Memoirs* was the appointment of Neville Chamberlain (a sworn enemy of many years'

²² *Morning Post*, 24 September 1934.

²³ *The Times*, 21 September 1934.

standing by this point) to be the Minister of National Service in January 1917. This blunder he attributed to the fact that 'the appointment had to be made in a hurry and on the recommendation of others'.²⁴

A full 6,000 copies of Volume III had become available for sale on publication day, more than double the total of the previous two volumes. Lloyd George, recorded Frances Stevenson, was totally delighted at what he felt to be the 'amazing press', especially the tributes now being paid to 'his literary ability. He has certainly taken infinite trouble over the preparation of this vol. and vol. IV—and I am nearly dead from my labours'.²⁵ Tom Jones, too, in an attempt to persuade Baldwin that Lloyd George should be offered a ministerial position in the National Government, noted that, in the considered opinion of the royal physician Lord Dawson of Penn, the veteran politician still retained 'lots of vitality' as was reflected in his dedication to the writing of the *War Memoirs* which he sometimes began at 5 a.m.²⁶ Interest was stimulated, too, at this point as a result of the imminent publication of a second instalment of Lord Riddell's celebrated *War Diaries*.²⁷

On 26 October there followed Volume IV, which focussed primarily on the conception and conduct of the Passchendaele offensive—the battle which, with the Somme and Verdun, will always rank as the most gigantic, tenacious, grim, futile, and bloody fights ever waged'. This volume contained a blazing attack on the actions and record of Field Marshall Haig. There was also material on the assembly of the Imperial War Cabinet, the battle against the Turks, the Stockholm Conference and Arthur Henderson. In a chapter entitled 'Problems of Labour Unrest' came the vitriolic attack on Ramsay MacDonald which the King had implored Lloyd George to tone down—to no avail.²⁸ As one reviewer wrote, 'There is malice enough in Mr. Lloyd George to make excellent reading, but too much to make satisfying history'.²⁹

As volume IV saw the light of day, Lloyd George was already hard at work on Volume V.³⁰ During the year 1935 he was forced to divide his time between his writing and the activities of the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction which he had established as a propaganda body to publicise and support his 'New Deal' propaganda launched the previous January. Conjecture that he might well now be inclined to seek the leadership of the Liberal Party following the general election in November was harshly repudiated. Volume V of the *War Memoirs* was

²⁴ *The Observer*, 23 September 1934; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 September 1934; *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 September 1934; *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 September 1934.

²⁵ STEVENSON : 278; diary entry for 21 September 1934.

²⁶ JONES (1954) : 122-123, section headed 'Remaking the Government, 27 February 1934', recording a conversation between Tom Jones and Baldwin, close personal friends.

²⁷ See *The Times*, 25 September 1934, 'Books to Come'.

²⁸ *The Times*, 26 September 1934.

²⁹ *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 November 1934.

³⁰ See the entries in STEVENSON : 280-286, covering the period 4 October–1 November 1934.

published on 24 September 1936, devoted to the first three months of 1918 and the establishment of the unity of command. Most of the leading soldiers, with the notable exception of Marshal Foch, were vehemently criticised.³¹ At this point, with one volume remaining, the *Memoirs* already ran to more than 3000 pages. The sheer bulk of the publication impressed readers and reviewers. Much of the text was taken up with the verbatim quotation of documents, but

The text is Lloyd George—almost every line of it impressed with the rich, confident aggressive personality. It is an extraordinary achievement for a man no longer young who took to writing comparatively late in life'.³²

Then in October 1936 came the sixth and final volume containing Lloyd George's personal interpretation of the celebrated Maurice debate of May 1918, his account of how the German forces were driven back and how they suddenly sued for peace—'there was no Hitler on the horizon to rouse in the youth of Germany the spirit of sacrifice for the Fatherland'—and the final conclusion of the Armistice on 11 November. This last volume was, however, something of a damp squib and reactions were relatively muted.³³ Some interest was displayed in Lloyd George's hope expressed in the book that he still planned to publish his reminiscences of the peace conferences in a future series of volumes 'if strength and opportunity avail'.

Many readers tended to agree with Margot Asquith who had told Tom Jones in February, 'I always knew L.G. had won the war, but until I read his *Memoirs* I did not know that he had won it single-handed'.³⁴ Jones himself, who had accompanied Lloyd George on his celebrated visits to Hitler at his famous mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps in September, was most impressed that his old associate, 'fresh from writing volumes 5 and 6 of his *Memoirs*', was consequently 'full of the most detailed knowledge, even in the days of the month in which the important engagements took place'.³⁵ On all sides, once volume VI had appeared, there was considerable admiration for the sheer scale of Lloyd George's achievement. Few would have disagreed with the reviewer who considered it 'amazing that a man commencing author[ship] in his seventieth year should have written a million words, every letter of them stamped with his own personality'.³⁶

On 29 October 1936 an elaborate dinner party was held at the Reform Club in London in anticipation of the publication of the complete *War Memoirs*. Those present included Dr Christopher Addison, Sir Austen Chamberlain, Churchill, Sir Maurice Hankey, Major Gwilym Lloyd

³¹ See the review in *The Times*, 25 September 1936.

³² *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 September 1936.

³³ See the review by Laski in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 5 December 1936, and the review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 November 1936.

³⁴ Tom Jones to Lady Grigg, 9 February 1936, cited in JONES (1954) : 169.

³⁵ JONES (1954) : 243-244; Tom Jones's diary entry for 4 September 1936.

³⁶ *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 November 1936.

George, Captain Liddell Hart, their publisher Ivor Nicholson, A.J. Sylvester and Malcolm Thomson.³⁷ Hankey not only spoke, but also took copious notes of the occasion. All the speakers lavished extravagant praise on Lloyd George and his extraordinary achievement. All six volumes could now be bought for twenty shillings each.

The sales figures were impressive by any standards. By February 1937 volume I had sold 12,707 copies, volume II 10,720, volume III 8,971, volume IV 9,413, volume V 6,607, and volume VI 5,819.³⁸ When volume V was published in September 1936, it was immediately distributed to more than 500 retail outlets throughout the UK and much of the Continent. A cheaper two-volume edition became available in January 1938, now on sale at just 3^s/9^d per volume. Separate de luxe and library editions were also published. In March Dr Abraham Flexner, a leading American academic who was since 1930 the first Director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, wrote to Tom Jones:

I am reading Lloyd George's [*War*] *Memoirs* at every leisure moment. I marvel at his vigour and his imaginative grasp of the vast situation. I think his six volumes could have been cut down to five, or perhaps four, for he is pummelling the professional soldiers so repeatedly that I am beginning to feel sorry for them, but they certainly were stupid unless Lloyd George's account is entirely unfair to them.³⁹

The cheap edition was soon to enjoy most extensive sales. By May sales of each volume exceeded 100,000 copies. By October 1944, volume I had sold 145,146 copies and volume II 141,183 copies. It would seem that those who had read the extracts serialised in the *Daily Telegraph* and those who had read (or at least perused) the volumes represented many hundreds of thousands of individuals. Many had digested Lloyd George's arguments and been struck by his criticisms of his political colleagues and above all the military leaders of World War One. Many were truly shocked by Lloyd George's bitter sentences and his unrestrained, blatant assaults on individuals. Then in October 1938 there appeared volume I of *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, which its author considered a continuation of the *War Memoirs*.⁴⁰

It has been estimated that the British rights in his *War Memoirs* netted Lloyd George some £50,000 (half of which had been paid by the *Daily Telegraph* for serialisation), and the American rights about £12,000. *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* brought him a further £9,000 for the British rights and £2,000 for the American rights. Russian royalties brought him a further £3,000, which meant a total income in the order of £65,000, a relatively modest sum. One of his biographers has noted that Lloyd George was 'either too late, or too early, to make a really big plucking with the *Memoirs*' [OWEN : 725]. But at least he was now able to

³⁷ *The Times*, 30 October 1936.

³⁸ The sales figures are taken from SUTTIE : 12.

³⁹ JONES (1954) : 398; Dr Abraham Flexner to Tom Jones, 21 March 1938.

⁴⁰ See the reviews in *The Times*, 17 October 1938, and by Kingsley Martin in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 October 1938.

keep the money for himself, whereas under the terms of the original 1922 contract he had committed himself into handing over all his profits to various worthy war charities.

Lloyd George gave a copy of the *War Memoirs* to his private secretary Frances Stevenson. Inside it bore an inscription in his handwriting, 'To Frances, without whose sympathetic help and understanding I could not have carried through the burden of the terrible tasks whose story is related in these volumes' [OWEN : 754]. As a historical source, the Lloyd George War Memoirs have certainly stood the test of time primarily because of the mass of documentary evidence which they contain. They were primarily Lloyd George's own personal view of the events of the First World War, a blatant attempt to justify his own actions and to defend his record between 1914 and 1918 against his numerous critics and detractors. They must certainly be used with much caution. They were never intended as works of serious, impartial, unbiased history. They were, first and foremost, a defence of their author's conduct and record in government during the war years and a vindication of his case for prosecuting his many detractors. They tell us much of Lloyd George the man and Lloyd George the politician. Students of the Great War should use them liberally, but certainly use them with great caution.

References

- EGERTON, George W. 'The Lloyd George War Memoirs : A Study in the Politics of Memory'. *Journal of Modern History* 60-1 (March 1988) : 55-94.
- GEORGE, William. *My Brother and I*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1958.
- JONES, Thomas [Tom]. *Lloyd George*. London: Cumberledge, 1951.
- JONES, Thomas [Tom]. *A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950*. Oxford: University Press, 1954.
- OWEN, Frank. *Tempestuous Journey : Lloyd George, his Life and Times*. London: Hutchinson, 1954.
- ROWLAND, Peter. *Lloyd George*. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975.
- STEVENSON, Frances [A.J.P. Taylor (ed.)]. *Lloyd George : A Diary, by Frances Stevenson*. London: Hutchinson, 1971
- SYLVESTER, A.J. National Library of Wales. A.J. Sylvester Papers, file E7, typescript, 'How I helped Lloyd George write his War Memoirs'.
- SUTTIE, Andrew. *Rewriting the First World War : Lloyd George, Politics and Strategy, 1914-1918*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- SWINTON, E.D. *Over my Shoulder : The Autobiography of Major-General Sir Ernest D. Swinton*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1951.
- THOMSON, Malcolm. *David Lloyd George : The Official Biography*. London: Hutchinson, 1948.