# 1918

## 18 January

Sir Horace Plunkett in and out of Downing Street all day. The situation in the Convention is most critical. The question turns on whether or not the proposed Irish Parliament is to control Customs. The Southern Unionists are in agreement with the Nationalists except on this point. If Customs are reserved to Impl. Parliament the S. Unionists will support a H R Constitution on the lines of Lord Midleton's resolution now before the Convention. The Nationalists while they desire that Customs should belong to the Irish Parliament are prepared to waive the claim if they hear from the War Cabinet that in the event of their making this concession the War Cabinet will pledge themselves definitely to give effect immediately by legislation to the 'Midleton Compromise'. The fateful Division is to be taken in the Convention on Thursday or Friday next. Sir Horace has come over in the hope of securing the desired Cabinet pledge.

(The Ulster men in the Convention meantime maintain their accustomed non possumus attitude – making no secret, as Sir H.P. assures us, of their delight at the turn things are taking.)

All day long (and on Saturday, the 19th, too) we argue the knotty question. The view of the Garden Suburb is that it would be wrong and unwise of the Govt. to pledge themselves to any group or groups in the Convention. By so doing, they would, we think, trespass on the independence of the Convention and expose themselves to Ulster charges of having sold them behind their backs. The Ulstermen would rejoice at any excuse for blaming the possible break-down of the Convention on the Govt.

Our suggestion is that the P.M. should write to Sir H.P. inviting the leaders of the Convention to come over to confer with the Cabinet thus avoiding a confused and embarrassing Division. So, too, an opportunity would be given to the Cabinet to bring pressure on all parties *meeting together* and to announce the Govt.'s intentions.

Sir H.P. is in a very poor state of health and shows signs of being overwrought. He returns to Ireland Saturday evening.

[Horace Plunkett was, I think, the best of all friends of Ireland in modern times. He was mainly responsible for establishing Agricultl.

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Co-Operation on Danish lines in Ireland, with great advantage especially to dairy farming.]

## 23 January

Mr. Ebenezer Howard to see me this evening. He is full of a great scheme for a large number of Garden Cities to be built during the Reconstruction period after the War. He wants me to be Chairman or at least a member of a new propagandist Committee he proposes to set up. [. . . ]

Resignation of Sir Edward Carson.

## 24 January

At Downing Street we await with anxious interest news from the Convention. Are they taking the fateful decision or will they accept the P.M.'s suggestion and come over to confer with the War Cabinet before proceeding further?

Following morning we learn that the Convention have decided to accept P.M.'s invitation and that the Division is therefore postponed *sine die*.

## 7 February

Delegation from the Irish Convention in town. Horace Plunkett (with Captain Shaw,[1] one of the Secretaries of the Convention) in and out of the garden building all day long.

H.P. diffuse as ever and despondent about the Convention's chances. What with the exorbitant demands (Fiscal autonomy, the chief of them) of the Nationalists and the stiff obduracy of the Northerners he is out of patience with them all. Bernard with a new archiepiscopal hat is a frequent visitor. Whenever I look into Adams' room I find him cheek by jowl with Conventionists – now it is Waugh,[2] the Labour man, and again it is Wee Joe Devlin and the formidable Bishop of Raphoe,[3] who

[1]Richard James Herbert Shaw (1885–1946): served in the army during the First World War; Assistant Secretary to the Irish Convention 1917; later worked for *The Times*.

[2]Robert Waugh: of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners; representative of the building trades on the Irish Convention.

[3]Patrick Joseph O'Donnell (1856–1927): Roman Catholic Bishop of Raphoe 1888–1922; coadjutor Archbishop of Armagh 1922–1924; Cardinal 1925.

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is the head and front of the fiscal autonomists. Anon Midleton favours us with his presence, or Desart, or John Redmond.

All this time, too, we are busy with the 'Government Record' for 1917 – a State document giving an account of the Lloyd-George Govt.'s stewardship during its first year of office. It is a teasing compilation. Many of the chapters have to be written in several different departments and the proof sheets must be revised again and again by the same departments. When we seem to be getting near the end of our task Ll.-G. rejects the admirable Introduction prepared by Adams and the task has to be taken in hand by Philip Kerr, and the Ministry of Food insist, almost at the eleventh hour, on writing their own chapter again! I am sub-editor, 'reader', foreman and printer's devil all in one.

**9 February**

Very bad news tonight of Vyvyan [Rothermere' s eldest boy] who has been lying ill of his wounds these many weeks at the Lady Northcliffe Hospital. His wounds have been septic all along and now his condition is very serious.

**12 February**

My dear nephew Vyvyan died this day – one of the finest spirits that has fallen in this horrible War. I did not know until Saturday how seriously ill he was.

To see poor Harold.

**15 February**

Vyvyan's funeral – a terrible thing.

**25 February**

Today, I think, or-tomorrow Horace Plunkett and the last of the Conventionists go back to Ireland. They have been with us for *weeks*! There has been no room in the basement of No. 10 or in the Garden Suburb where some members of the delegation from the Convention

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have not been found. Waldorf Astor's little vaulted room is normally, I believe, a butler's pantry. Here, on several occasions, I have found H.P. and Capt. Shaw engaged in earnest colloquy, At other times, or at the same time indeed, the Bp. of Raphoe has been secreted with Adams in his room or Stephen Gwynn has been located temporarily in mine. Now and again Adams has been driven to 'sporting his oak' when engaged in conference with black Northerners or milder Southern Unionists. I think that well-nigh every delegate member of the Convention has been in and out of the Garden Suburb during the last few weeks. H. Plunkett, voluble and seemingly inconstant, has almost lived with us.

Meanwhile the duty of convoying the War Cabinet Record through the Press has fallen more and more on my hands.

## 5 March

Adams reopens with me the question of proposed changes in the Govt. of Ireland. It is Decies (or Londonderry) for the Lord Lieutenancy. What about the Chief Secretaryship? Adams has mentioned my name and so has H Plunkett. P.M. afraid of having his Govt. described as a 'Harmsworth Govt.' with Alfred at the American Mission and Harold at the Air Ministry.

[I was never at any time offered this appointment. C.H. 31 XII 1937]

## 6 March

Death of John Redmond this morning after an operation.

H. Plunkett wires from the Convention to say that the event has had a profound effect on that body.

## 8 March

Requiem Mass in Westminster Cathedral for John Redmond. A splendid ceremony with much impressive if somewhat monotonous music. Cardinal Bourne[4] officiating, now in scarlet biretta and purple vestments with a long train and later in a tall white mitre and a black

[4]Francis Alphonsus Bourne (1861–1935): Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster 1903–1935; Cardinal 1911.

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and gold vestment. The coffin covered with a pall and an Irish flag at the foot of the chancel steps.

The Prime Minister, Bonar Law and Carson present with a great company of members of both Houses.

## 14 March

Spring is with is indeed but there is no corresponding revival of spirit among is in the Garden Suburb. In the double-windowed Cabinet room above the Prime Minister is in daily conference, cheek by jowl, with M. Clemenceau,[5] the French Prime Minister, and the immediate affairs of the Allies are subjects of constant and eager debate. Meanwhile, the cause of the Allies goes heavily. The Germans are in or before Odessa and there is rumour of the Congregation against us on the Western front of an almost unlimited number of German divisions.

## 21 March

The Germans begin today their great offensive on a front of about 55 miles. News this evening that they have taken our first line trenches over perhaps a third of this front.

## 26 March

*This appears to be a retrospective, post-war entry, but it is not clear exactly when it was made.*

Downing Street.

One day about this time I was leaving No. 10 by the garden gate when I met the Prime Minister coming in with Philip Kerr. He had been to the War Office to discuss there the latest phases of our disastrous retreat. He was pinched and very white and merely shook his grey locks at me when I held the door for him and said 'Terrible times, sir.' He replied, 'Terrible times! Yes, but we shall pull through all right.'

[5]Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (1841–1929): Prime Minister of France 1906–1909, 1917–1920.

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This was the only occasion during the War when I saw Ll.-G go white with apprehension. Most other times he, with his high confident spirit, was keeping his colleagues from 'cold feet'.

## 29 March

Downing Street all day. The terrible battle for Amiens, and the problems of Ireland, occupy our thoughts. In regard to Ireland the question is whether to apply Conscription and, if so, whether before or simultaneously with the introduction of legislation for 'settling' Ireland on the lines to be announced as recommended by the Convention.

## 30 March

A brief talk with the Prime Minister about applying Conscription to Ireland. [. . .]

The P.M. is for taking the plunge out of hand: we, in the Garden Suburb, are for Home Rule first or at least simultaneously with Conscription preferably with an appeal for voluntary enlistment before stronger measures are applied.

## 10 April

To town and Downing Street. Not a cheerful face to be seen anywhere. In the House of Commons there is the utmost gloom. Men's heads are bowed and the lines on every face seem to have sensibly deepened. Such weeks as we have passed through! There is not merely anxiety: there is stupefaction and bewilderment at the spectacle of the hurried and confused retreat of our glorious Army – just as if they were so many Italians or Roumanians.

Of angry criticism or recrimination there is not much on the surface.

## 15 April

With Lloyd-George in his car to the H. of C. The little man shows unmistakable signs of wear and tear. I mention to him Northcliffe' s desire for a firm assurance that, if he supports Home Rule with all vigour in his newspapers, he can rely on Ll.-G. going through with it

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to a finish. Ll.-G. most positive on the point, saying that he will resign if he cannot have his way in this matter.

**18 April**

Austen Chamberlain becomes this week a member of the War Cabinet, hugely to Northcliffe's disgust.

**19 April**

Downing Street. Horace Plunkett is in and out constantly and deeply distressed about the Irish situation. Nationalist Ireland – Dillonites, O'Brienites and Sinn Feiners – is in revolt against Conscription and on all hands we hear that so great is their resentment that no interest whatever is being taken in the forthcoming Home Rule proposals. The hierarchy and the priests of the Roman Church are solid against Conscription, too. A pretty kettle of fish!

**25 April**

Harold resigns from the Air Ministry. I am sitting in the House when Bonar Law makes the announcement in reply to a question. It is the first I have heard of it. I hurry to Downing Street to ascertain the facts of the case and find that Harold has sent in his resignation (dated today) and that it has been accepted. (I have not seen Harold for some weeks and do not know what reasons, if any, other than those given in his letter to Ll.-G. are influencing him.) I go to the Savoy Hotel where he is now staying but cannot find him there or obtain any particulars of his movements.

**9 May**

Asquith's vote of censure on the Government, arising from Genl. Maurice's[6] letter to the Press alleging that the recent statements of Lloyd-George and B. Law in regard to the state of the War are

[6]Frederick Barton Maurice (1871–1951): army officer; Director of Military Operations at the War Office 1915–1918; knighted 1918.

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'incorrect'. Ll.-G. in first-rate fighting trim, reduces the Opposition to speechlessness.

This is the first full-dress attack on and vote against a Government since the War began on August 4th 1914. One unhappy result may be the definite splitting of the Liberal party. In effect, however, the split has been a fact for a long time past not on any question of fundamental policy but because so many of the men who surround Asquith loathe Ll.-G. with a deadly loathing.

## 22 May [7]

It is now exactly a year since I became a member of the Prime Minister's Secretariat – waggishly known as the 'Garden Suburb' from the fact that the temporary building that houses us is built in the garden of 10 Downing Street. [. . . ] This is a lath & plaster erection exactly similar on a small one-storeyed scale to those now to be seen in every open space in this Whitehall district. Horse Guards Parade has several such & the pleasant old garden at the back of the Board of Trade is full of them: so also is a great part of the dried-up bed of the lake in St. James's Park where the Ministry of Shipping is in habitation.

What is our function? I find it very difficult to explain: 'Helping Lloyd-George' is the simplest definition: the taking off his shoulders of as much detail work as our several qualities and our strict constitutional limitations permit. [. . . ]

In some quarters outside the Secretariat (which is personal to the P.M. & quite distinct from the War Cabinet Secretariat) is regarded as a dangerous constitutional innovation. Our ministerial heads deplore the supercession of the former omnibus cabinets of twenty members & more by the War Cabinet of five or six supported by mysterious secretariats. True enough we often serve as liaison officers between ministers and ministries at loggerheads but it is an entire mistake to suppose that there is less contact between War cabinet ministers & ministers outside the War cabinet than obtained under the former regime. Departmental ministers are summoned always to Cabinet Councils when affairs relating to their departments are to be discussed. This means that the heads of the war-like Offices – War Office, Admiralty, Foreign Office, Food Control, National Service – are more frequently in consultation with the heads of the Govt than they were

[7] This is one of the longest entries in the diary, and for reasons of space it is not possible to include all of it. CBH appears to have considered it to be of some sensitivity, as he wrote it in a volume separate from that which contained the other entries for 1918.

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or were likely to be under the old dispensation. We have much to do with the latter departments & controls – the dozen & one new minor offices that have sprung up to meet wartime emergencies. Sometimes, as in the case of Belgian Relief, there is no department ultimately responsible but control is scattered among several authorities – in this instance the ministry of Shipping, the Admiralty, the Wheat Executive, the Commission for Relief in Belgium & perhaps two or three others. (I have spent the last few tropical days trying to co-ordinate these various activities. My simple suggestion that the whole matter should be referred to a War cabinet minister has not yet been adopted by Ll.-G. [. . . ]

On the few occasions that I have been present at Cabinet the Wizard has ruled the roost with no appearance of challenge from any quarter. When, too, he has been absent in France or elsewhere it has been interesting to observe from the Cabinet ministers how many decisions have been deferred 'until the Prime Minister returns'. He is in truth the life & soul of the party in no merely conventional meaning of the expression. His vivid personality prevails in the Cabinet room as in the world outside.

An easier chief to work with in some respects it would be difficult to find. He is wholly unaffected & unspoilt by enormous success. I knew him slightly in the dark days of the Boer War when he was certainly the most unpopular man in England. I see no change in his manner now when he is, I suppose, the most popular man in the whole great Alliance. I have often spoken to him more directly than I dare to my brother N. &, whether he has agreed with me or not, he has never resented anything I have said. The experience of Adams & of the other members of the Secretariat has been the same.

[. . . ]

My experience in the Secretariat has been of great service to me in preparing minutes and memoranda. Ll.-G. is notoriously impatient of long-windedness: indeed I have often wondered if he ever reads a long memorandum through. In writing a minute for him I always put the salient facts on the first page, advising him that he will find fuller details in the longer memo if he desires to consult it. One has to be most careful in presenting figures to Ll.-G. he is no more to be trusted with them than a lady-secretary. Sometimes I have doubted whether he knows the difference between 100,000 & 1,000,000 as they are written down, or realizes that an estimate is not the same thing as an accomplished reality. More than once in debate he has been in danger of a charge of positive untruthfulness because of his vagueness about figures & when I have myself provided him with statistics for a speech in the House I have been on tenterhooks as I have watched his Celtic imagination playing on them & developing them. Matchless in

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his handling of broad situations & unique in his darting aim at the very heart of a problem he is *[illegible word: ever?]* intolerant of details & a decimal point or a comma in a big figure seems to have no meaning to him. The House is fully aware of this weakness of his & follows him with ever increasing nervousness when he plunges into arithmetical calculations.

[. . .]

We are permitted to see something of the P.M.'s domestic life. I have heard him talking Welsh to Mrs. Ll.-G over the banister at No. 10 & I have dined with him and his family at the end of a big table in the great oak-panelled dining-room. On one such occasion there were present Ll.-G himself, Mrs. Ll.-G, one of their sons with his pretty new wife & J.T. Davies. It was at one of the most critical moments of the War & the Wizard had a dozen grave anxieties on his mind. These for the moment he had shaken off, & he was full of gaiety & fun. He even broke into a stave of a Welsh folk-song as he moved briskly around the table helping himself & them from the sideboard. On another such occasion there was much merriment over a big store jar of whisky that some ardent admirer had sent him. He was not to be satisfied until we had all tasted it & given our opinion of it.

Or perhaps we are bidden to accompany him on his walks in town or in the country. A messenger comes down saying 'The Prime Minister wants you to go for a walk with him, Sir.' He walks quickly & sturdily with one shoulder down & is of course recognized by everybody. One afternoon we strode off through St. James's park & the Green park to Knightsbridge where eventually we took refuge in a tea shop. Needless to say, every eye was glued on him from the time we entered until we departed. I have, too, a full note of a tramp with him in Richmond Park.

He is an exceedingly pleasant companion – not a conversationist as let one say Lord Rosebery, Mr. Asquith and Mr. Birrell are, but a bright and cheerful talker. A Boswell would be hard put to it to fill a note-book with Lloyd-Georgian obiter dicta of any permanent value. He loves best to talk about party politics & party personalities. No man of our time has more intensely or more successfully devoted the powers of his mind to the problems of the first magnitude to Ll.-G's heart. Every public man of whom I know anything has had an interest secondary to that of the high offices of state that have absorbed the best part of his energies. Did not Lord Rosebery in literature & Balfour in metaphysics & magic. Ll.-G's life-work is high-politics; his hobby or recreation political chit-chat & political manipulation. I know of no other absorbing interests that he gives his mind to.

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## 3 May

Leicester's baronetcy announced today in the Birthday honours.

## 25 May

Lunch with the Belgian Minister at Claridges. Genl. Smuts[8] there, Sir John Field Beale,[9] Chairman of the Wheat Commission, and other Belgian Relief people.

Debate on the situation in Ireland. The Conscription threat has convulsed the country and the H. Rule Committee of the Cabinet has been making no progress.

Much thin-ice skating on the part of Ll.-G. and Shortt [Chief Secy. for Ireland], and a great speech by Carson. Later on, during the dinner-hour indeed, I have a chance and say a few words. House so thin that a count is called in the midst of my remarks – a disconcerting incident! Mem – don't speak during the dinner-hour.

## 4 July

The Fourth of July is celebrated with much enthusiasm in London. The Union Jack and Stars and Stripes flown side by side from the Victoria Tower and from other buildings. A great meeting in the Central Hall, Westminster: speeches by Lord Bryce,[10] Winston, Admiral Sims[11] (US Navy) and General Biddle[12] (U.S. Army).

[8]Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870–1950): General in the Boer Army during the Second Boer War; Lieutenant-General in the British Army during the First World War; member of the British War Cabinet 1917–1918; Prime Minister of South Africa 1919–1924, 1939–1948; British Field Marshal 1941.

[9]John Field Beale (*c.*1874–1935): businessman and wartime civil servant; knighted 1918.

[10]James Bryce (1838–1922): Regius Professor of Civil law at Oxford University 1870–1893; author of *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1888); Lib. candidate for Wick Burghs 1874; Lib. MP for Tower Hamlets 1880–1885; Aberdeen South 1885–1907; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1892–1894; President of the Board of Trade 1894–1895; Chief Secretary for Ireland 1905–1907; Ambassador to the United States 1907–1913; cr. Viscount Bryce 1914.

[11]William Sowden Sims (1858–1936): commander of US naval forces operating in European waters during America's participation in the First World War.

[12]John Biddle (1859–1936): commanded the US army forces in Great Britain 1918–1919.

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**23 July**

Lord Mayor's lunch to Mr. Hoover,[13] the American Food Controller, at the Mansion House.

[One of my duties at Downing Street was to act as liaison officer between Hoover's Relief organization and the British Govt. Hoover had a London Headquarters with which I had to be in constant touch and his London representative Mr. Poland sometimes kept me very busy. He was always clamouring for British ships to convey the food supplies to Belgium and I had to try to wangle these out of the Shipping Controller. The task became more and more difficult as the Germans sank more and more of our ships. (C.H. August 1927)]

**25 July**

Conference about Belgian Relief with General Smuts in his rooms at the Savoy Hotel. Mr. Hoover present. Before America came into the War he was in charge of relief in Belgium and he still takes an intense interest in the problem.

Dinner by our Food Ministry to Hoover at the Carlton Hotel. Admirable speech by Ll.-G. based to some extent on notes prepared by me.

**31 July**

Belgian Relief. A Conference on extra supplies of rice to Rotterdam.

The rest of the day I am busy preparing notes for Ll.-G.'s address to the Manufacturers who are coming tomorrow to ask him about the Govt.'s economic policy after the War.

**3 August**
**Henley.**

Anniversary services to celebrate our entry into the great War. [. . .] Very good news today of Foch's great offensive on the Soissons-Rheims line.

[13]Herbert Clark Hoover (1874–1964): organised famine relief in Europe during and after the First World War; US President 1929–1933.

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**15 August**

The MS of Max Pemberton's[14] life of Northcliffe is sent down for my correction. Most of it sad rubbish, I fear, and much of it absurdly inaccurate. I should like to 'blue-pencil' the whole narrative.[15]

**16 August**

To town to attend Alfred's luncheon to the Dominion and foreign Press representatives now in England, at the *Times* office. Printing House Square is filled by a great marquee and there are about 150 guests including the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia and N. Zealand (Borden,[16] Hughes and Ward[17] ), Lord Reading, the Sheriffs in their robes and chains, and other notabilities. A most interesting occasion and Alfred makes a fine strong War speech.

I look in at Downing Street and return to Henley by the 6.10 train.

**3 September**

Ll.-G. sends for me to draft a reply to a telegram about arms in Ireland which has been received from Shortt, Chief Secretary. I find Ll.-G. in Bonar Law's study at No. 11 – he puffing away at a cigar and Bonar at his inseparable pipe, and the floor littered with papers.

Shortt and French are about to invite the Irish people to make a voluntary delivery of arms to the military authorities.

**4 September**

Pretty slack times in the Garden Suburb: it is very generally so when Parliament is not sitting and the War is going well with us. Our anxieties of last year have been largely relieved – food, labour unrest and the submarine menace. Ship-building is still very backward in

[14]Max Pemberton (1863–1950): journalist and author; director of Northcliffe Newspapers, knighted 1928.

[15]Pemberton subsequently abandoned the project, but revived it after Northcliffe's death: see Max Pemberton, *Lord Northcliffe: A Memoir* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922).

[16]Robert Laird Borden (1854–1937): Prime Minister of Canada 1911–1920; knighted 1914.

[17]Joseph George Ward (1856–1930): Prime Minister of New Zealand 1906–1912, 1928–1930, cr. baronet 1911. CBH was mistaken: Ward was Deputy Prime Minister rather than Prime Minister at the time of this entry.

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spite of the appointment of Lord Pirrie – but Ll.-G. has only at intervals had his mind fully on the subject and our best efforts to goad him to activity have only been partly successful. It is odd that the best 'galvaniser' of our time (except Northcliffe) should have been so slack in this respect. Well for us that the submarine danger should have been so far mastered by the Admiralty and by the splendidly efficient management of tonnage by Maclay,[18] the Shipping Controller. Otherwise – !

## 5 September

Weather bad, with deluges of rain, but the best of news from the Front where the Allies are driving the Huns back to the line from which they advanced on March 21st.

## 12 September

Ll.-G. today to Manchester to receive the Freedom: tomorrow to Salford and on Saturday to Preston and Blackpool for the same purpose.

I am left alone in my glory in the Garden Suburb, Adams and Kerr being on holiday. Some Belgian Relief matters to deal with and the supply of wool to go into with the Ministry of Shipping and Andrew Weir,[19] Surveyor-General of Supply, War Office.

## 13 September

The Prime Minister has an attack of influenza with a sore throat and is obliged to abandon the rest of his Lancashire tour.

## 14 September

In to town by early train – then to Downing Street to see if anything is doing there – and then to Luton for the Allotment Holders' Show.

[18]Joseph Paton Maclay (1857–1951): ship-owner; Minister of Shipping 1916–1921; cr. baronet 1914; cr. Baron Maclay 1922.

[19]Andrew Weir (1865–1955): shipowner; Surveyor-General of Supply 1917–1919; Minister of Munitions 1919–1921; cr. Baron Inverforth 1919.

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Mr. Prothero, President of the Bd. of Agriculture & Fisheries, also present. Lunch (and champagne!) in the Mayor's (Dillingham's) [20] parlour. Then to the Park where the fruit and vegetable show is exhibited in a marquee: wonderful potatoes, cauliflowers, carrots and all kinds of late vegetables – I don't believe the whole farming world combined could beat the Luton allotment-holders in vegetables. Prothero and I address a small damp crowd from the band-stand. Then I go to have high tea with Mr. Edwin Oakley and, at last, home to Montagu Square (another high tea) and then out again to Henley. Such a day!

Before the War there were at Luton 125 acres under allotments and 1,000 holders: now there are 278 acres and 2744 holders.

**16 September**

Ll.-G. still confined to his bed at the Manchester Town Hall – chafing like a caged lion, I hear.

Austrian Govt. issues its invitation to the belligerents for a preliminary discussion about Peace terms.

**17 September**

Sir Horace Plunkett, just back from a visit to France, in and out of the Garden Suburb all day. He is now to a large extent in charge of Irish propaganda – or rather of 'War aims' in Ireland – and has a scheme for enlisting Irish women for auxiliary service with the American army in France. He expects good results on Irish opinion from this.

**18 September**

Ll.-G. now convalescent but still at Manchester.

**19 September**

Downing Street all day. I have been busy the last two days getting information for Ll.-G. about the demand that is being made in Labour

[20] Charles Dillingham (*c.*1860–1925): hat manufacturer; Mayor of Luton 1917–1918.

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circles for a general increase of pay in the Navy and Army. Interviews with Dr. Macnamara (Admiralty) H.W. Forster (War Office) and Col. Leslie Wilson[21] (War Cabinet Secretariat).

## 10 October

Today appears in the papers President Wilson's reply to the German request that he should propose an armistice to the Allies. Wilson asks for a clearer statement as to what the Germans mean.

## 13 October

Downing Street – the only time I have ever been there on a Sunday. In today's papers is the German reply to Wilson accepting or seeming to accept all his conditions. The anxious point is, however, that if the armistice is granted *before* the Germans have given solid proof of their bona fides they may never give it. Clearly, once the War ceased it would be impossible to revive it, no matter how much the Huns defaulted.

It appears that Wilson did not consult the Allies before answering the Germans.

The principal Ministers – or some of them – Bonar Law, Milner, Mr. A.J. Balfour and Lord R. Cecil, are with Ll.-G. at his country home and there is talk of Ll.-G. and others going over to Paris tomorrow to see Clemenceau and Foch.

Northcliffe comes up from Broadstairs and I go to him at the *Times* Office. The peace situation troubles him but he thinks things will be all right in the end. I dine with him at the *Times* Office with Sir Campbell Stuart[22] his principal Secretary.

[21] Leslie Orme Wilson (1876–1955): army officer; Con. candidate for Poplar Jan. 1910; Reading Dec. 1910; Con. MP for Reading 1913–1922; Con. candidate for St. George's, Westminster 1922; Con. MP for South Portsmouth 1922–1923; Parliamentary Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet 1918–1919; Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Shipping 1919–1921; Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury and Unionist Chief Whip 1921–1922; Government Chief Whip 1922–1923; Governor of Bombay 1923–1928; Governor of Queensland 1932–1946; knighted 1923.

[22] Campbell Arthur Stuart (1885–1972): born in Canada; military secretary to Northcliffe's 1917 mission to America; became a key figure in Northcliffe's newspaper empire; knighted 1918.

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**23 October**

On one of these days the P.M. desires me to enquire into the causes of Miss Douglas-Pennant's dismissal from the W.R.A.F.

**29 October**

These are wonderful days. The central alliance is crumbling in every direction. Events succeed one another breathlessly and it is impossible to record them.

**3 November**

The newspapers today record the setting up of four new Republics:

Hungary

Bohemia

Bulgaria (where Ferdy's[23] successor Boris[24] has abdicated after a reign of 29 days)

(?) Austro-Germany

Bosnia and Herzgovinia have elected to join Servia; Croatia and Slavonia are thought to be going the same way; and Fiume is said to have declared for union with Italy.

Meanwhile Turkey is clean out of the War and at Versailles the Allies are settling the terms of armistice for Germany. Northcliffe, fearful lest the jellyfish (as he calls our statesmen) should treat the Germans too tenderly, has gone to Paris to administer ginger if it should be necessary.

What wonderful days & the most wonderful thing is that the English people are as undemonstrative in these weeks of triumph as they were in all the four years of disappointment, disaster and apparent failure.

[23]Ferdinand Maximilian Karl Leopold Maria of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha-Kohárý (1861–1948): Prince Regnant of Bulgaria 1887–1908; proclaimed himself Tsar and ruled as Ferdinand I until his abdication in 1918.

[24]Boris III 'The Unifier' (1894–1943). Although his abdication was reported in *The Times* of 4 November 1918, he in fact reigned until his death.

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**6 November**

Lines and lines of German guns in the Mall two deep in some places. Many of them have been painted all sorts of colours for camouflage purposes.

Prime Minister announces in the House today the terms of the armistice granted to Austria–Hungary and arranged at Versailles. [. . . ]

I have seen infinitely greater excitement in the House when the Opposition have run the Govt. of the day close in the Division lobbies.

**11 November**

My dinner at Dr. Johnson's House to thirteen American editors. [. . . ]

THE ARMISTICE WAS SIGNED AT 5 a.m. TODAY – TODAY CEASE FIRE ORDERED AT 11 a.m.

Big Ben illuminated tonight for the first time for four years.

**13 November**
**Visitors' Chateau, G.H.Q.**

The armistice was signed on Monday and the War is, I suppose, over. I could have wished to come here before the last shot had been fired but long pre-arranged plans bring me here at this time and I am content.

Of the Parliamentary party there are with me Jimmy Rowlands,[25] Sir Bevill Stanier, G.W. Currie,[26] and C. Thomas-Stanford.[27] [. . . ]

Customs formalities are merely perfunctory and we are soon on the road in 3 or 4 motor cars. The streets of Boulogne are full of British and British Colonial soldiers. Then a drive in perfect moonlight of – what? – 35 or 40 miles to the visitors' chateau at Tramecourt.

[25]James Rowlands (d. 1920 at age 69): Lib. MP for East Finsbury 1886–1895; Lib. (then Coalition Lib) MP for Dartford 1906–1910, 1910–1920.

[26]George Welsh Currie (1870–1950): Unionist MP for Leith 1914–1918; later joined the Labour Party.

[27]Charles Thomas-Stanford (1858–1932): Unionist MP for Brighton 1914–1922; cr. baronet 1929.

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## 14 November

About 9 o'clock we leave the chateau in two motor-cars[ . . . ] It is many miles before we come on any signs of the war and then there are trenches and barbed wire in the fields. Aire is our first town and there a good deal of damage has been done as a shattered church and many houses in ruins testify, but it is not until we reach Bailleul that we find absolute desolation. There are few if any buildings in the town that are not tangled heaps of brick, woodwork and twisted iron. Some streets were, as one of our party suggested, more like streets in excavated Pompeii than anything else imaginable.

After Bailleul, Poperinghe which has come off pretty well. There are many damaged houses but restoration in Poperinghe should not prove a very difficult matter.

Then Ypres! Ypres and the Ypres salient have been in all our minds for four years and surely in the history of the world no town of equal size – except Bailleul – has witnessed so complete a destruction or has entailed so much loss and heroic suffering. In Ypres it is only buildings of great bulk and solidity – the Cloth Hall, the Cathedral and the Hospital – that still rear a few high pinnacles above the surrounding desolation. Here and there one recognises the shape of a fine gothic arch or other feature; but there is scarcely a square foot of the still standing ruins that has not been shaled off as if by fire. Four years have done as much for Ypres as four centuries of slow decay might have done. Not Milton even imagined anything so hellish.

## 16 November

To-day our journey is over monotonous roads to Arras and Cambria. The other side of Arras we come on the British Expeditionary Force in being. There are camps and billets (full of men) and dumps everywhere, and everywhere the British and Colonial soldier is lord of all he surveys. On the roads are troops and artillery trains, sometimes with great guns painted green and yellow and black and drawn by 'caterpillars' that wake the dead with their shattering noises. There are A.S.C., R.E., and Hospital trains too and the whole region is alive with military activity. Here and there by the roadside are aerodromes, barbed wire cages for prisoners of war, and stacks of live shells. The fields are pitted with shell-holes, and in many places the trees have been torn and riven by shells. The retreating Hun blew up the road at intervals, and everywhere today we cross R.E. bridges that have been hastily built to replace those mined by the foe. [ . . . ]

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(We members of Parliament learnt yesterday that a General Election has been announced and that we shall be required to begin work early in next week. Well for us that we have snatched this intensely interesting little holiday in advance!)

**23 November**

I am adopted Liberal-Coalition Candidate for S. Beds.

**25 November**

To Downing Street in the morning.

In the afternoon to Luton to begin the campaign of 1918.

**26 November**

Indoors most of the day writing my Address to the Electors and preparing notes for speeches.

**28 November**

I have a bad cold coming on and stay in until the evening when at 8 o'clock I address a meeting in the Tory Club (Chairman, Mr. Hugh Cumberland).[28]

A novel experience for me.

**29 November**

Today first meeting of our joint Liberal & Unionist Associations to set up various Election Committees.

I address a meeting of women Electors in the Town Hall.

[28] Hugh Cumberland (d. 1950 at age 92): auctioneer, surveyor, and Justice of the Peace.

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**30 November**

A message early this morning from Downing Street saying that the P.M. wants to see me urgently.

Ll.-G. discusses with me the reasons for Northcliffe's unfriendly attitude to him and his Govt. I tell him that I have not seen N. for many weeks and can only surmise that the reasons are (1) the fact of Ll.-G.'s not having asked him to go to the Peace Conference and (2) the lack of any statement from Ll.-G. about the personnel of his Govt. in the new parliament.

Ll.-G. low-spirited, I think, about the Election. He seems to wish he had not embarked on it and had left the work of Reconstruction to other hands. He paces up and down the Cabinet room more agitated in his manner than I have seen him during the War save on one or two very critical occasions.

After dinner I ring up N. who is at Elmwood giving him hints on the situation and asking if there is any use in my coming down to Broadstairs to talk things over with him. 'Not the slightest' he says. He tells me to remind Ll.-G. of a conversation between them in Paris when N. urged him to cut adrift from his embarrassing high Tory alliances and to go to the country 'as Ll.-G.' As it is, N. says, Ll.-G. will be tied hand and foot to the Junkers of the Tory 'old gang' party.

**1 December**

Downing Street in the morning. A council of the Allies in the Cabinet Room. I see Foch – a very smart soldierly little figure – Clemenceau, Sonnino[29] and others as they leave.

As I have to leave early in the afternoon for Luton I dictate a letter to Ll.-G. recording my conversation with N.

**4 December**

Nomination day. Mr. George Warren, Mr. Harry Arnold,[30] Cotchin and I attend at the Town Hall and hand in nomination papers and

[29]Sidney Costantino Sonnino (1847–1922): Prime Minister of Italy 1906, 1909–1910; Foreign Minister 1914–1919.

[30]Harry Arnold (b. *c.*1864): timber merchant; Mayor of Luton 1920–1921; Lib. candidate for Luton 1922.

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cheque for £150. I meet my opponent Mr. Willet Ball[31] in the street and shake hands with him. We sympathize with one another over the fatigues of the Election.

## 5 December

At night meetings at Houghton Regis and Dunstable, the latter much interrupted by some young Scotch hecklers from Luton.

## 7 December

At 3 o'clock to attend the opening of the Ivy Leaf Club for Discharged Sailors & Soldiers.

## 9 December

Works meeting at Kents – consisting chiefly of munitions girls (Kents have been making fuses for shells).

Busy all day and evening meetings at: Streatley & Sundon.

At Sundon there are lime-workers and my impression is that the village has gone over body and bones to Labour.

## 10 December

Fine dinner-hour meeting at the Vauxhall Works and after that a big women's meeting at the Town Hall, Dunstable.

On my return to Luton a deputation of women teachers and then a visit from my opponent Mr. Willet Ball and his agent Mr. Madley.[32] They come to complain that our canvassers at Leagrave are saying that Ball neglects his children and is an Atheist. I promise to do everything I can to scotch these libels and I expressly repudiate them at our evening meetings at: Stopsley & Barton (the best village meeting we have had.)

[31] Willet Ball (b. *c.*1874): journalist; editor of *Railway Review* 1917–1922; Lab. candidate for Luton 1922 and 1923.

[32] Unidentified.

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## 12 December

I reserve myself today for the great meeting at the Assembly rooms. [. . . ]

Before the meeting tonight a soldier from Biscot Camp comes to me to voice the grievances of the old Service men at the camp: pay, food, Christmas leave and unnecessary and severe elementary drills. They had intended to 'demonstrate' at our meeting but I tell them I will look into the questions in the morning. I beg them to preserve strict discipline.

A fine meeting with hosts of questions.

## 13 December

After lunch to Biscot Camp to see the Commandant, Col. de la Motte,[33] about the soldiers' grievances. He receives me kindly, takes notes and promises to make immediate enquiries.

## 14 December

Polling Day. We drive round the Constituency – Em, Daff, Cotchin, Earle and I. Our car is decorated with the flags of U.S.A., France and the Union Jack, the old Liberal, colours, primrose and Cambridge blue, forming a background. We lunch happily at the Sugar Loaf, Dunstable, the hostess and maids all wearing Liberal colours. Very few signs of buzz or enthusiasm at this Election. Our Liberal people understand a straight fight between Liberal and Tory but this Coalition business puzzles and disconcerts them. The villages seem staunch in spite of Willet Ball's desperate efforts to capture them and everywhere we hear that the women are polling well – in some places much better than the men. The northern belt of S. Beds having been thrown into the newly-formed Mid Division, our round is a short one and we are back in Luton at tea-time.

Needless to say there is the usual crop of eleventh-hour rumours – that the Labour men are backing themselves 10 to 1 to win, and the rest. On all hands it is agreed that the Poll is a moderate one.

Cotchin's estimate is that about 20,000 or 21,000 votes will be polled and that we shall have a majority of 5,000. Frank[34] says nothing about

[33]Unidentified.

[34]Frank Henry Parsons (b. *c.*1883): worked for the Luton Liberal Association.

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the poll but gives us a majority of 3,500. The Mayor gives us a 2 to 1 majority.

One reason why the Election is so quiet is that the count is not to take place until this day fortnight. So that the soldiers and sailors on Service may be able to return their voting papers.

A message from the soldiers at Biscot camp saying that certain concessions have been made, and thanking me.

## 16 December

To have my hair cut at Douglas's in Bond Street and then to Downing Street. I see Ll.-G. for a few minutes. He asks how I have been getting on and inveighs against the attitude during the Election of the 'Northcliffe press'. (Alfred has been doing his best to queer the Coalition pitch – largely because of his belief that Ll.-G. is more than ever under the thumb of his enemies, the Tory 'Old Gang' – and has been successful, I think, in muddling the issue and taking the fizz out of the Coalition appeal.)

## 26 December

We see President Wilson, on his way from Charing X to Buckingham Palace, from Mr. Roper's[35] flat 90 Piccadilly. The President drives in the first carriage with the King and the Duke of Connaught. He is the guest of honour of course and. takes the salutations of the crowd with wide sweeps of his brand new tall hat – smiling largely the whiles all over his keen intellectual spectacled face. A fine reception and a fine, sunny, misty London winter's day. Overhead some aeroplanes perform all sorts of evolutions.

## 27 December

With Em and the children to the Counting of the votes. It is a dull damp day and the count after a fortnight's interval since the Poll is a spiritless affair. It is held in the council chamber at the Town Hall. Em and the children are admitted (quite irregularly, I think) to the council chamber and sit on the dais. At the other end of the horse-shoe table are Willet Ball and two or three of his principal supporters. We

[35] Possibly E.W. Roper.

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talk together in friendly fashion during the 3 or 4 hours of the count which discloses pretty early in the proceedings that I am in. Half way through I receive an urgent message from the Mayor' s parlour where I find Mr. Impey[36] and others smoking cigars and speculating on the size of the majority. The Town Clerk, too, asks me to his room where he produces a very welcome glass of port. He sends coffee and biscuits in to Em who won't leave the counting-room.

The result is announced about 3.30[ . . . ] and Willet Ball and I make short speeches to a huge crowd outside the Town Hall. [37] After a visit to the Liberal Club where I make another speech we go to Cotchin's for a sort of meat tea and then back to town.

News comes along during the day of sensational defeats of leading Asquithians and pacifist Labour men.

## 30 December

To Downing Street in the morning where the utmost cheerfulness prevails. Long talk with Adams and Philip Kerr about the future of the Secretariat. Adams is going back to his work at Oxford and I have made up my mind to leave whether I get office or no. It is agreed that the Prime Minister ought to have a department of his own and it is understood that Ll.-G. is in favour of continuing the present one.

[36] Henry Impey (b. *c.*1865): Mayor of Luton 1918–1919.

[37] Election result: Cecil Harmsworth (Coalition Liberal) 15,501; Willet Ball (Labour) 5,964. Coalition majority 7,557.

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