

# TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

## 1892—1916

BY  
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*of*  
FALLODON, K.G.



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THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN  
IN INTERVALS OF QUIET AT HOME IN THE COUNTRY DURING  
THE LAST TWO YEARS. THERE MY WIFE READ OVER  
TO ME THAT PORTION OF THE MS. THAT I HAD  
WRITTEN EACH DAY. IN THIS WAY THE FORM  
AND EXPRESSION OF THE ORIGINAL DRAFT  
WERE OFTEN GREATLY IMPROVED BY  
HER SUGGESTION OR CRITICISM.  
WITHOUT HER CONSTANT HELP  
AND ENCOURAGEMENT THE  
WORK WOULD NEVER  
HAVE BEEN DONE.

## INTRODUCTION

IT is of vital importance to the world that there should be a true account of the events that led up to the Great War: without this there can be no right understanding of the causes of the war; and without such understanding nations will not perceive how to avoid the recurrence of another and greater disaster. It has therefore seemed a duty for one who had been long and intimately concerned in pre-war diplomacy to give his narrative of events, his interpretation of them, and the impression produced by them on his own mind. I have therefore had no doubt that this book ought to be written, and the decision to write it needs no excuse or apology.

Whether it should be published now, or reserved for a later time, is open to question.

War has stirred passion, enlisted sympathies, and aroused hatreds; many of the war generation have formed opinions that nothing will modify, and are dominated by predilections or prejudices that have become an inseparable part of their lives. With such people mental digestion ceases to be able to assimilate anything except what nourishes convictions already formed; all else is rejected or resented; and new material or reflections about the war are searched, not for the truth, but for fuel to feed the flame of preconceived opinion. Especially is this likely to be the case in the country into whose soul the iron of adversity and defeat has most deeply entered; and not till a new generation rules will

books about the war be read, not to be refuted or acclaimed, but to be understood.

There is also another consideration that makes against immediate publication. When a writer has taken a prominent part in controversial affairs the reception of all that he says about the past is apt to be coloured by the desire of readers to encourage or to depress the part that he may yet take in present or future controversies. A book of this character, therefore, fails less in its influence if published after the life of the writer, when praise or censure can have no effect upon him.

On the other hand, there is a new generation now growing up whose opinions about the war are yet to be formed; and there are many even of the war generation who are dispassionately and increasingly anxious to discover truth. They ought to have the fullest material at their disposal now, and it is mainly for these that this book is written.

It must not, however, be supposed, because the writer was for so many years, and those the most critical, at the centre of affairs that his account is necessarily authoritative and complete. It is precisely the man at the centre who is often unable to see the wood for the trees. In addition to this it must be remembered that the scope of each individual mind is fragmentary. Try as he may, each one of us can grasp but one aspect of the truth; and this is all that he can convey to others. Probably some historian of the future, more remote than we are from the actual events, will reach an eminence of view about the war to which we cannot yet attain.

Two temptations that impair the value of their work inevitably beset public men who write memoirs.

One is a tendency to reconstruct the past to suit the present views and feelings of the writer ; the other is a natural desire to set his own part in affairs in a pleasing light. It is probably not given to any human being to be superior to these tendencies ; even the effort to avoid them, on one side, may land him in error on another. Someone has said that there may be as much vanity in wearing fustian as smart clothes or uniform, and the writer who determines not to vaunt his own part in affairs may easily fall into the vanity of self-depreciation.

I have, however, made an attempt to avoid these pitfalls, and to describe events as they actually happened, and my own part in them and my feelings about them as these actually were at the time.

This book naturally presents the British view, or, at least, that portion of it which was, and is, my own ; but in it an endeavour has been made to envisage also the international aspect of the war. Indeed, the main purpose and desire has not been to make vindication or condemnation of any country the final word. That would be a barren and unprofitable end. The endeavour has been made to present the facts in such a way as to discover, or help others to discover and draw, conclusions that may avoid another war of the same scope and character.

There is comparatively little mention of persons with whom the writer worked at the Foreign Office. This is not from lack of gratitude to men like Sir Arthur Nicolson and Sir Charles Hardinge, who were in succession the Under-Secretaries and Heads of the Department while I was Secretary of State, and to many others in the Foreign Office. It would require many pages to make adequate mention of them

all, but I do pay an earnest and sincere tribute to their public spirit and able service to the State. It was a privilege as well as a pleasure to work with them.

It has been a great satisfaction, since I left office, to see great knowledge, ability, and unsurpassed devotion to the public service recognized in the promotion of Sir Eyre Crowe<sup>1</sup> to be head of the Foreign Office. To this I may add another pleasure : that of having seen Sir Eric Drummond, who had been closely associated with me during the war, selected, with the approval of high foreign opinion as well as of his own chiefs, to be Secretary-General of the League of Nations.

One other name must be specially mentioned : that of Sir William Tyrrell, who was for many years my chief Private Secretary. The public has little or no means of knowing how much it owes in public service to special gifts or qualities in individual civil servants in high positions in Departments of State. In each case, where such qualities exist, a man renders service, peculiarly his own, besides taking an able part in the conduct of business in the Department. Tyrrell's power of understanding the point of view of foreigners has been of the greatest value in making the British position both more intelligible and more acceptable to them. For nothing so predisposes men to understand as making them feel that they are understood. I had occasion, in office, to know the great value of Tyrrell's public service ; but the thing that I prize is our friendship, that began in the Foreign Office, and has continued uninterrupted and intimate after official ties ceased.

This book has been written under one great disadvantage—the disability of impaired sight. This has

<sup>1</sup> Since these words were written the public service of the country has suffered an irreparable loss in the death of Sir Eyre Crowe.



made it impossible for me to search through masses of documents and to select for myself. It would not have been fair to ask that anyone in the Foreign Office should be diverted from public work to undertake this heavy task, for the book is entirely personal and unofficial.

I therefore asked Mr. J. A. Spender, a friend of many years, to undertake this for me, and the book has had the great advantage of his collaboration. His long experience as a writer on public affairs and his able impartiality of mind have made his help invaluable. From the masses of material at the Foreign Office he would select the documents that seemed to him to be the most salient and typical and to throw the clearest light on policy. These he would send to me with marked passages or comments, to direct attention to special points. From the selection so made I have chosen the documents to be quoted. I am sure that his trained ability and judgment have selected well, that the documents chosen do give a fair and not a tendentious or distorted impression of policy and transactions at the Foreign Office. Masses of other documents in the Foreign Office of course there are: many of them would perhaps be deemed of equal importance with those quoted in this book; but, according to my recollection, and to Mr. Spender's own opinion after much search, there are none that would put British policy in a different light or that would make any new revelation. My grateful thanks are due to the King for gracious permission to have access to documents among His Majesty's papers; and to Lord Curzon,<sup>1</sup> who, as Secretary of State,

<sup>1</sup> The news of Lord Curzon's death came while these sheets were in the press, and to the expression of gratitude must now be added that of great regret at the close of his brilliant life of public service.

gave the permission that I asked for Spender to consult all official records at the Foreign Office belonging to the years when I was there as Under-Secretary or Secretary of State. I am also very grateful to Mr. Gaselee, the librarian at the Foreign Office, and to his Department for the help given to Spender in searching for special documents. All my private papers, with two exceptions, were left at the Foreign Office for safe keeping, and are still there. These were placed by me at Spender's disposal, and from them he has made some selections. What has been said about the fairness of selections from official documents applies also to those made from private papers. But it would be very unfair to the Foreign Office to transact important matters through private channels. If the staff of an Office is to serve the State well they must know what is being done, and the record must be accessible to them in official documents. The private papers, therefore, have no State secrets to reveal. The two exceptions mentioned above, which were not with my papers at the Foreign Office, are a private letter from Lichnowsky and the "House" Memorandum and my covering note upon it; both these are printed in the places in this book to which they are appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

All care has been taken to ensure that nothing of real or great importance should be overlooked and that inaccuracies should not creep in; but in a book

<sup>1</sup> It may perhaps be convenient to explain to the reader who is unacquainted with diplomatic forms that the practice of the Foreign Secretary is to give his record of a conversation with a Foreign Ambassador the form of a despatch to the British Ambassador in the country concerned. Nearly all the conversations recorded in these volumes are in that form. For details of the practice of the Foreign Secretary in this and other matters see Vol. II Chapter XXX.



that extends over so many years and deals with so many complex affairs some mistakes or inaccuracies may occur. Memory may err in some detail, but the main outlines it has traced and the impressions recorded are true.

My sight, which still enables me to write, is not equal to the sustained reading of long tracts of manuscript or even of print. Revision and the correction of proofs have therefore been left in the main to better eyes than mine.

What political value the book has must be left to others to determine. It presents my own views, but its object is much more to stimulate thought than to press that these views should be accepted as conclusive. Those of us who grew to maturity in the nineteenth century acquired our sense of values and formed our first opinions in the latter part of the Victorian age. The general point of view in domestic affairs was already changing rapidly before 1914. The war may be regarded as the division between two epochs in foreign affairs as well. We, who were in foremost places in 1904, belonged to one epoch and have lived on into another. We are now confronted by problems that are new to us, our vision may be rendered unsteady by things that seem disquieting or alarming, because they are strange to us. Control of affairs has already passed in part and must soon pass entirely to younger and fresher minds, who may see further and more clearly, because much that preoccupies us with its strangeness will be to them familiar and intelligible. It is not for us to be confident that, because we know more of the past, we can therefore see more clearly than they into the future. What we can do is to record for them our experience,

and our reflections upon it, in the hope that these may provide some suggestion and impetus to thought that in their fresh minds may be fruitful.

This book is not intended to be a biography, and therefore no account will be given of boyhood, of school or college, or of marriage and home life, except in so far as they had influence upon public life or were affected by it.

In early years public affairs had no interest for me : my recollection is most meagre and trivial.

I remember being asked by my father, at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, on which side I was. My age was then about  $8\frac{1}{4}$  years and I had little feeling in the matter ; but, moved probably by what I had heard of Waterloo, and perhaps also by a liking for a game called " German " as distinct from ordinary dominoes, I replied that I was on the side of the Germans. My father<sup>1</sup> had been in the Rifle Brigade, and had fought in alliance with the French in the Crimea. My answer did not please him ; he reproved me for my preference, and I relapsed into the indifference from which, but for his question, I should never have emerged.

It must have been a few months later that I was called out on to the balcony at Fallodon on a winter evening to see a display of Aurora Borealis. A great part of the sky was not only irradiated with light, but suffused with pink. The recollection of the apparition has always been very positive and distinct to me ; and I have never, in after-years, seen any

<sup>1</sup> Capt. George Henry Grey (afterwards Lieut.-Col. of Northumberland Militia), Equerry to the Prince of Wales 1859-74. See *Life of Edward VII*, vol. i, p. 155.

display of Aurora Borealis that approached this. It may be, therefore, that imagination has enhanced the glory and beauty of it, but it remains in memory as a wonderful vision. I remember my grandfather saying, as we stood on the balcony, that if Paris had not been so distant we might have thought that the Prussians were burning it and that this was causing the illumination of the sky.

In the late summer of 1873 I was taken on a visit to the Highlands. We were returning by train from Inverness. My grandfather and I were alone in the compartment. At one of the stations where the train stopped (Kingussie, probably) my grandfather looked out of the window and I heard a greeting from someone on the platform. A gentleman, who was a stranger to me, was welcomed into the compartment, and thence to Perth an incessant and animated conversation went on, of which I understood nothing and took no heed. At Perth the stranger parted from us, and when he had gone my grandfather told me it was Mr. Gladstone. The information meant nothing to me at the time, but years afterwards my grandfather asked me if I remembered the occasion, and told me what the subject of the talk had been. It was the technical but very embarrassing difficulty in which Mr. Gladstone, then Prime Minister, was placed by having taken a second office without vacating his seat and being re-elected. My grandfather, Sir George Grey,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in Lord Melbourne's second Government (1841); Home Secretary in Lord John Russell's first Government, 1846-52; Colonial Secretary in Lord Aberdeen's Government, 1854-5; Home Secretary in Lord Palmerston's first Government, 1855-8; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and subsequently Home Secretary in Lord Palmerston's second Government, 1859-66.

though no longer in office, had been a colleague of Gladstone's in previous Cabinets ; he had had very great experience as Home Secretary, and had been forty years in the House of Commons, of which he was still a member. He was an authority on parliamentary procedure, and no doubt Gladstone welcomed the opportunity of discussing this particular point with him.

At the end of 1874 my father died. After his marriage he had still continued to live at Fallodon with his parents, and he and my mother had kept house there when my grandparents were absent for the Sessions of Parliament. After his death my mother and all of us remained at Fallodon, my grandfather now taking a father's place with his grandchildren.<sup>1</sup>

I do not remember taking any interest in public events till the news of the murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish in Dublin in 1882. I was then an undergraduate at Balliol, and I joined in the clamour for martial law. This I repeated to my grandfather, who met it with the critical comment, " Martial law is the suspension of all law."

A few months later my grandfather died, and I inherited the house and property at Fallodon. In 1884, after a long spell of what is generally called idleness, but which was in my case very active and strenuous pursuit of pleasure in the form of sport

<sup>1</sup> There were seven of us, four boys and three girls. A *Memoir of Sir George Grey*, written by Dr. Creighton (Bishop of London) was published in 1901 by Longmans, Green & Co. It gives an account, written with intimate knowledge, of a singularly lovable as well as upright character. Whoever reads it will get some impression of how much happiness and benefit we owed to our grandfather's affection and influence. See Appendix A, Vol. II, p. 280.

and games, interest in all manner of serious things came suddenly. I began to read good literature, poetry excited me to enthusiasm, and I read everything serious, however prolix, with interest. I remember being absorbed in the *Life of George Eliot*, when it appeared. The same rush of interest applied itself to public affairs. I read political leading articles and magazines, but at the very outset of this awakening a thing happened that decided the course of life for me.

In 1884 Gladstone's Government proposed an extension of the franchise to the counties on similar terms to those on which a Conservative Government had given it to the boroughs in 1867. The House of Lords rejected the proposal ; there was great indignation in the counties, and a franchise demonstration was arranged at Alnwick, the county town near Falldon.

Nothing was known of my politics, but my family name was notably associated with the Reform Bill of 1832 ; my grandfather had sat from 1848 to 1852 for the district, and had in fact been the last Liberal representative for it. I was asked to take the chair at the demonstration at Alnwick. It seemed to me very unfair that men in the counties generally, and in Northumberland especially, should not have the franchise that had been given to the boroughs so many years before. I was country-bred, and a sense of fair play and strong local feeling enlisted all my sympathies with the demonstration. The invitation was accepted without hesitation ; my speech was short and commonplace enough ; it was my first attempt at a public speech or at any speech on politics, but I got through it, after much previous anxiety, more easily than I expected. The extension of the



franchise was at this moment the dividing line between parties, and thus was decided the party to which I was to belong.

I was chosen as Liberal candidate for the new constituency of the Berwick-on-Tweed Division of Northumberland, which included Alnwick and all the neighbourhood of my home. The new electors, who had long resented their exclusion from the franchise to which they were now admitted, went to the poll in large numbers for the party that had given them the vote. I was thus elected to Parliament in November 1885.

In a very short time there came another turning-point. From 1880 to 1885 Gladstone's Government had been driven to coercive measures to govern Ireland. They had been in bitter conflict with the Irish Home Rule members led by Parnell, whom Gladstone had denounced as marching through rapine to the dismemberment of the Empire. This had not deterred the Conservative Government that succeeded on Gladstone's resignation in the summer of 1885 from entering into friendly relations with Parnell, with whom Lord Carnarvon, a member of the Conservative Cabinet and Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, was known to have had an interview. It was clear that the Conservative Government had not gone so far as to promise a separate Parliament in Dublin, but they had spoken of the advantage of large Local Authorities. Home Rule was in the air. The Conservative Party avowedly received the Irish vote at the General Election held in the autumn of 1885. After that election the number of Irish Home Rule members was more than doubled; there were now eighty-five of them.



Early in 1886 it was known that Gladstone would advocate Home Rule. The opinion that he was right in the conclusion that the old system of governing Ireland had broken down, is now confirmed by after-events. But the curve was a very sharp one, and a very important section of Liberals who had supported him in opposing Irish Home Rulers, could not adjust their course to it. There was a split in the party. For me there was no curve, for I was new to public life and was only making a start. It was open to me, without inconsistency, to be either a Home Ruler or a Unionist.

I have no doubt, taking force of character, energy, and intellectual power combined, that Gladstone was the greatest man in whose presence I have ever been. I had, however, not sufficient experience for this feeling to be as strong on my entrance to public life as it became afterwards and remains now, and Gladstone's new departure in 1886 was not alone decisive for me.

There is, however, a difficulty that besets, and probably always has and will beset, men of independent mind in public life. It is that great men are difficult to follow consistently, while lesser men have not the capacity to lead. Great minds do not travel for long on the average line of thought; the man of average mind, therefore, finds great men difficult to follow.

That a man of Mr. Gladstone's importance should advocate Home Rule was a fact so arresting as to make me feel the necessity for thought: the suddenness of the change puzzled and made me doubt.

Then I came across the articles written by John Morley in the *Pall Mall Gazette* during the Irish coercion period of Gladstone's Government. When read in

sequence they seemed irresistible in their argument that coercion was not, under modern conditions, possible as a permanent system of governing Ireland. The only alternative was Home Rule. I was intellectually convinced : Morley seemed to be clear and consistent in his thought about Ireland.

Parliament met early in 1886 ; the Salisbury Government was turned out ; Gladstone formed a Liberal Government with the avowed purpose of producing a Home Rule Bill. Morley was made Irish Secretary ; on taking office he had to seek re-election in his constituency of Newcastle-on-Tyne. There was a contest ; as member for a neighbouring constituency I was asked to help in it and did so whole-heartedly. Henceforward I was a Liberal Home Ruler.

Of the first six years spent in the House of Commons little need be said. I failed to deliver a maiden speech on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill in 1886. The press of members desiring to speak was so great, and there were so many new members with maiden speeches to make, that I was not called on, though for two days I rose more than once each day. At last I heard that the Speaker had intended to call me, but that the Government Whips had put in a strong plea for a member of the party senior to me, who had not yet succeeded in getting his chance. Probably this was fortunate : the occasion was too big for what I had to say or for my force of delivery as it was then ; I was left with a feeling of relief at having been spared an ordeal, and not at all of disappointment at having missed an opportunity.

But the ordeal was one that had to be faced some time, and the next year I summoned courage to make another attempt, and succeeded in delivering a speech

on the Irish question. The success of it did not approach that of Asquith's maiden speech in the same year, of which it was justly said that the House listened to it as to the speech of a leader. Nevertheless, mine had a modest success, and was immediately followed by an invitation to my wife and myself to dine with Sir William and Lady Harcourt.

In 1888 came the first sign of independence. The Conservative Government were promoting Irish Land Purchase, while opposing Home Rule. Land Purchase had been part of Gladstone's Home Rule policy of 1886, but the Liberal Party generally was not prepared to support it except as part of Home Rule. Some Unionists held that if the Irish land question could be settled by turning tenants into owners, the political agitation for Home Rule would disappear. I did not share this view, but was prepared to abide by the result of Land Purchase. If it did put an end to political agitation by all means let it do so; but, if it did not, we should then have the political question free from the complications of the land question. In any case, it would be a benefit to Britain and to Ireland to have the land question settled. In this Haldane and I found ourselves acting together, and an association and friendship thus began which endured and strengthened as years went on. We each spoke and voted against our party, but the recognized term "cave" was thought too dignified a word to apply to the independent action of only two very junior members of the party. Our effort was described as a "rabbit-hole." With this passing exception I spoke and voted whole-heartedly with the Liberal Home Rule Party. A sense of the unfairness and inequalities of life stirred me and led me to act