

REVIEWS

will accept Emyr Price's emphasis and arguments, but he has certainly produced a volume which is stimulating, thought-provoking and highly original. It will be eagerly received.

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- 1 *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, Vol. XIII, no. IV (2001), 407–08; *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* 61 (2000), pp. 135–38.
- 2 *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (June 2002), p. 205.

David and Frances

John Campbell: *If Love Were All ... The Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (Jonathan Cape, 2006)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Mr John Campbell first earned our eternal gratitude and commendation almost thirty years ago with the publication of the volume *Lloyd George: The Goat in the Wilderness, 1922–1931* (Cape, 1977), an authoritative, pioneering study of LG's so-called 'wilderness years', which has stood the test of time and has never been superseded. Since then he has published substantial, well-received biographies of a host of eminent political figures, among them F. E. Smith (Earl Birkenhead), Roy Jenkins, Aneurin Bevan, Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher. The publication of *If Love Were All* reflects the recent upsurge of interest in Lloyd George. Previously the Lloyd George industry seemed rather to have run out of steam since its conspicuous heyday in the late 1960s and 1970s when works seemed to pour from the presses.

The present offering is probably the most substantial. The main theme of the book is, of course, familiar enough. In 1911, David Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, employed Frances Stevenson,

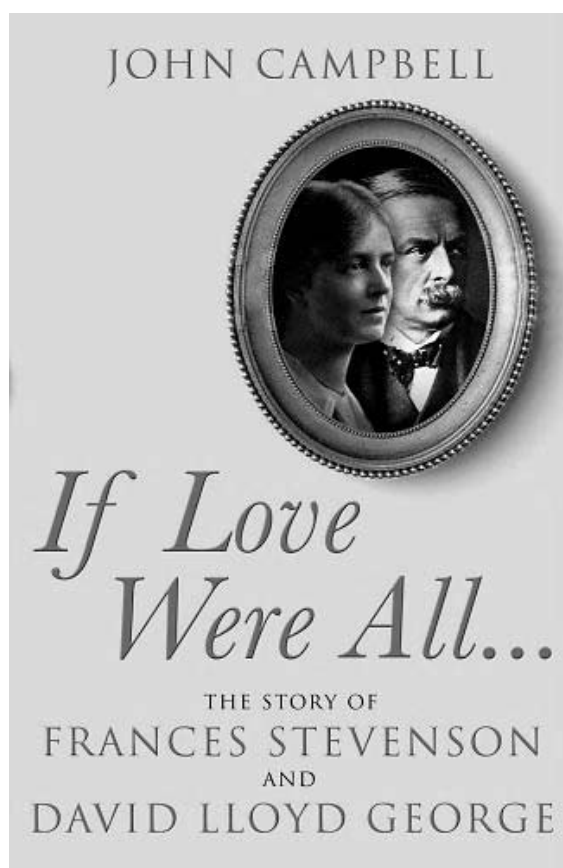
a twenty-two year old recent classics graduate, as a temporary tutor for his youngest daughter Megan, who had received but little formal schooling. Frances was intelligent, organised, highly attractive, feminine and ambitious. She immediately caught the Chancellor's roving eye, was appointed his private secretary in 1912 and the following year became his long-term mistress. As A. J. Sylvester, LG's trusted 'Principal Private Secretary', noted in an interview decades later, 'No one would suspect her of a sexual relationship with anybody. You'd take her to be a prim schoolteacher.' John Campbell shows how the 'restless schoolteacher, following politics only through the newspapers' was dramatically catapulted into a position where she enjoyed regularly 'the company of Cabinet ministers, Prime Ministers, generals and foreign statesmen' at No. 11 and subsequently No. 10 Downing Street (p. 15). From 1913 until 1922 she lived out her life at the hub of British politics.

This bizarre situation continued for more than thirty years – while the press and the media unfailingly observed a

tactful silence. After LG fell from power in the autumn of 1922 (forever, as it happened), he set up home with Frances at a new house called Bron-y-de near Churt in Surrey. Thereafter Frances's long-term role was 'still in public LG's devoted secretary, still in private sharing him with Maggie, the eternal mistress still subordinate to the wife and obliged to make herself scarce whenever Maggie came out of Wales – even when she came to Churt' (pp. 254–55). Eventually, after the death of his wife Dame Margaret in January 1941, he made an honest woman of Frances by marrying her in October 1943. In January 1945 he accepted an earldom and she thus became a countess. Less than three months later he was dead. Not long afterwards Frances left north Wales to return to Surrey where, as the Dowager Countess Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, she outlived him by more than twenty-seven years, eventually dying in December 1972 at the age of 84.

The backbone of Mr Campbell's sources is the private diaries of some of the leading actors involved in this bizarre saga: those of Frances herself at the Parliamentary Archive at the House of Lords, together with those of Lord Hankey at Cambridge, Lord Riddell at London and A. J. Sylvester at Aberystwyth. These are supplemented by the voluminous correspondence between Lloyd George and Frances at the House of Lords and the Lloyd George family correspondence and papers at Aberystwyth. In every case there are existing published volumes containing edited and annotated selections from each of these sources, but John Campbell has in each case used the original source materials himself, meticulously transcribing and re-interpreting with a fresh eye the mass of intricate information they contain. In so doing, he draws attention to the many omissions, transcription errors, misinterpretations and

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misjudgements of the existing published texts. Where the sources are thin, Campbell uses considerable skill and imagination in piecing together the complex, involved course of events, occasionally even making use of an unpublished novel penned by Frances.

Adopting a strictly chronological approach and an unfailingly lively, engaging writing style (which immediately captivates the reader), Mr Campbell has arranged this mass of material into thirty-eight relatively short, easily digestible chapters. While not refraining from exposing the numerous, untold skeletons in the Lloyd George family cupboard, he deals sensitively and tactfully with themes like the fraught relationship between Lloyd George and members of the Stevenson family, or the shock discovery by Megan Lloyd George in 1920 or 1921 that Frances was rather more than her father's secretary and confidant. The latter revelation he attributes to Frances's very prominent role at Chequers – 'the first Prime Minister's

lady to preside there' (p. 193). Other writers have argued, convincingly, that by this time Dame Margaret felt that her youngest daughter was now old enough to be told the whole truth and thus spilled the beans.

The author also sensitively describes the long relationship between Frances and Colonel T. F. Tweed, a member of LG's staff at Liberal Party HQ, and discusses openly the still vexed, contentious question of Jennifer Longford's paternity. Perhaps the most striking revelation in the book is the disclosure of the intimate, highly embarrassing relationship between LG and Roberta, the first wife of his eldest son Richard (pp. 374–75).

The author has made use of a wide range of primary and published source materials in researching and writing this monumental tome. He has, however, shunned the use of journal articles and chapters in published volumes – a decision perhaps inevitable given the massive existing Lloyd George bibliography. Nor has he conducted formal interviews with surviving members of the Lloyd George family such as the present Earl Lloyd-George (b. 1924), Dr W. R. P. George (b. 1912) and Viscount Tenby (b. 1930), all of whom remember well Lloyd George, Dame Margaret and Frances Stevenson and have unique reminiscences of the events described in the latter part of the book. He has, however, undertaken his research and writing with the blessing and full collaboration of Jennifer Longford (Frances's daughter, born in 1929) and Ruth Nixon, Jennifer's daughter and a historian in her own right. He has also made full use of the private papers still in the family's custody, referred to as 'Ruth's box' in the footnote references in the volume.

John Campbell's detailed knowledge of the minutiae of the political history of the period is impressive. Very rarely does he slip up. But it is

surely very wide of the mark boldly to assert (p. 352) that there were 11.3 million unemployed in Britain in 1929. And picture 26, captioned 'LG and Megan in the 1930s', was in fact taken during their North American tour in 1923.

Throughout most of the volume the discussion is very full and extremely detailed. Only from 1941 onwards does the pace noticeably quicken – the war years, the death of Dame Margaret, the second marriage to Frances, the final return to north Wales in September 1944, the (? reluctant) acceptance of an earldom in January 1945 and LG's final pathetic weeks. The last chapter – no. 38, 'Occupation: Widow' – deals with Frances's life after her husband's death in rather less than seven pages and outlines only the major turning points in her long story. The volume contains a large number of fascinating photographs, some well known and published many times before, some completely new and fresh. They add very much to the appeal of the volume.

Occasionally, one felt that the very long quotations, especially from Frances's copious diary entries, and from the voluminous correspondence between Lloyd George and Frances, could sometimes have been abbreviated a little – with advantage for the flow of the narrative which runs to no fewer than 557 pages. As it is, Mr Campbell can rest assured that he has left no stone unturned and that he has written what is surely the last word on one of the greatest love stories of the twentieth century.

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1 In an interview with Mervyn Jones, 1989: Jones, *A Radical Life: the Biography of Megan Lloyd George, 1902–66* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 34.