Lloyd George at Paris, 1938

J. Graham Jones

In September 1936, Lloyd George paid two visits, which were soon to become infamous, to the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler at his mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. Before the end of the same year, and indeed into January 1937, he spent an extended vacation at Jamaica where he remained, increasingly frustrated, as the abdication crisis dramatically unfolded in Great Britain.

Between these events and the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 was a notably crowded period internationally. For Lloyd George personally, two important events took place. The first was the family celebration of their golden wedding at Antibes in the south of France on 24 January, 1938.[1] The second was a brief, but widely reported, visit to Paris in March, 1938, where he conducted a series of important meetings with several prominent French government ministers. These included Monsieur Léon Blum, who was then serving very briefly as Prime Minister of France for the second time; Monsieur Herriot, the President of the French Chamber; and Monsieur Joseph Paul-Boncour, the Foreign Secretary. He also met representatives of the right led by Monsieur Paul Reynaud (who was later to become Prime Minister of France himself), Monsieur Pierre Cot, the Minister of Commerce, representatives of the French trades union movement, and also a few prominent academics, writers and journalists. Lloyd George's main purpose in conducting these interviews was to persuade the French government to lend assistance to the Republican Government in Spain against the forces led by General Franco.[2]

In general, Lloyd George adopted a blatantly schizoid approach to foreign policy issues at this time. On his widely-trumpeted return from Berchtesgaden in the autumn of 1936, totally beguiled, indeed hoodwinked, by the German Chancellor, he had euphorically described the Führer as 'the greatest living German' and 'the George Washington of Germany'.[3] He continued to argue the case for a revision of the Peace of Versailles, 1919, and proclaimed his support for the case of the Sudeten Germans. On the other hand, he was beginning to urge the vital need to end the appeasement policies and to initiate a vigorous programme of rearmament, especially within the British air force. He put in occasional appearances at the House of Commons, and in his speeches did not hesitate to criticize the policies of the national government. His most virulent attacks were reserved personally for Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister. During successive by-election campaigns, Lloyd George enjoyed addressing mass demonstrations, often under the auspices of his own brain-child, the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction, which he had established in

1 J. Graham Jones, 'The Golden Wedding of Lloyd George and Dame Margaret', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 71 (2010), 132-48.

2 A. J. Sylvester, *The Real Lloyd George* (London: Cassell, 1947), p. 233.

3 *Daily Express*, 17 September 1936.

1935. During the Ipswich by-election campaign in February 1938, he attributed 'the deplorable state of international affairs' to 'the feebleness and hesitancies of our Government since 1931' and focussed especially on the chronic decay of British agriculture throughout the long 1930s. Here, he alleged insistently, 'The Government's policy was one of unintelligent and costly fumbling with that vital problem'.[4] During the period 1937–39, secret lists were prepared in Britain of those who were suspected to be likely supporters of the Nazi regime. These lists were constantly being revised as fresh intelligence reports came to hand, the latter frequently contradicting each other. Lloyd George's name appeared on a number of these lists, being especially prominent in 1936–37 as a 'probable' Nazi sympathiser. In 1938, it dropped down to 'possible' when Lloyd George had begun to criticize vehemently the appeasement policies being pursued by the Chamberlain government. In 1939–40, it was presented as follows: 'David Lloyd George, ex-Prime Minister of Great Britain 1916–22. Critic of the Versailles Treaty. Has worked for national Socialist co-operation with England. The only politician with sufficient authority and prestige to act as leader in the event of the downfall of the Chamberlain Government and to maintain order by creating a pro-German administration'. A somewhat naïve footnote added, 'Alternatively might be made Gauleiter of Wales, if — could be persuaded to become head of the British Government'.[5]

Lloyd George's visit to Paris in March, 1938 occurred at a particularly tense time internationally. Only the previous week, as long anticipated, Nazi forces had marched boldly into Vienna and Austria had dramatically found herself absorbed into the German Reich. The Anschluss was finally a reality as Hitler proudly declared the union of Germany and Austria. The British government initially made a rather half-hearted protest, but quickly backed down, recognizing the union as it sensed that the move was highly popular with the majority of public opinion in Austria. Lloyd George did not bat an eyelid. He had been asserting ever since 1935, firstly in private and later from public platforms, that Hitler was sure to annex Austria sooner or later, and that, certainly, no British government could be expected to intervene on behalf of Austria. When L. G.'s Principal Private Secretary, A. J. Sylvester, telephoned him to discover his 'reactions' to the Anschluss, he replied that it was simply 'a natural sequence of events'.[6]

By this time, the plans were well advanced for Lloyd George's imminent visit to Paris – in spite of his on-going health problems. On 14 March, his local GP at Churt had been called out to see him and had apparently asserted that he was 'against L. G. doing so much travelling to town [London] and getting het up, which was bad for him! He had a relaxed throat'. Reflected Sylvester, 'It is L. G.'s custom to get a Dr to do what L. G. wants, not what the Dr thinks'.[7] He elaborated at some length on Lloyd George's state of health and mental outlook:

4 *The Times*, 10 February 1938, p. 9, col. a.
5 Donald McCormick, *The Mask of Merlin: A Critical Study of David Lloyd George* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1963), pp. 279-80.
6 National Library of Wales (NLW), A. J. Sylvester Papers A44, diary entry for 13 March 1938.
7 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A44, diary entry for 14 March 1938.

> Personally, I believe L. G. is fast on the downhill grade. He is the picture of health; he is different. He acts the part of a virile strong man while in the House [of Commons]; he walks quickly on purpose to create an impression, but put him at a difficulty; face him with an important situation and a speech, he funks it. He is full to the brim with an inferiority complex. It is only his cheek and audacity which covers it up when he acts and speaks. Many a time he has told me that people do not credit him with being shy. That shyness is inferiority complex, and in order to get rid of it he starts by blackguarding others and quarrelling and accusing them and thus generates his audacity.
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> I was told that L. G. would decide definitely at 5 p.m. tonight whether he would leave on Wednesday for Paris. The answer came at 7 o'clock when all the offices were closed, saying that Frances and Jennifer were going Wednesday instead of Tuesday and L. G. on Thursday instead of Wednesday. I start arrangements all over again.[8]

At the time, there was some ill-informed and unrealistic speculation that Lloyd George might well return to high office (perhaps even as Chancellor of the Exchequer) yet again within a future Labour government. Unimpressed, L. G. had told Colonel T. F. Tweed, chief-of-staff at Liberal Party headquarters, that 'he would never take office again. Fancy having to be in town every day, running a department, or in the House [of Commons] – it would kill me'. Sylvester noted stoically that this was the first occasion that his employer had 'made an admission of that kind'. Lloyd George was, however, always ready to assist in an advisory role – 'They could always come to see me at Churt!'[9]

Just three days later, Lloyd George travelled from Victoria station to Paris where he stayed at the Crillon Hotel in the very same bedroom as he had occupied during the period of the First World War. He was now accompanied by A. J. Sylvester, his private secretary, and his mistress, Frances Stevenson, with her little daughter Jennifer who was nine years of age. Interviewed at his departure, he had commented, 'Since I have been in political life I have never seen such a mess in foreign affairs. There is no clear direction and no leadership except in the Dictator States. Our policy seems to be one of stubborn muddle. Napoleon knew the strategic advantage of securing Spain in a struggle with Britain, but luckily, the British Ministry of the day realised the dangers in time, but our Ministry seems to be as blind as bats.'[10] It was emphasized in press columns that there was no great political significance in Lloyd George's decision to visit Paris at this juncture. It was noted that he would stay at the French capital for only a few days before then travelling on to the south of France, one of his favourite venues (where he had only recently celebrated his golden wedding anniversary with lavish festivities), in order to attempt to recover from his 'relaxed throat' and press on with his reading and

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 *Western Mail*, 19 March 1938; *The Scotsman*, 18 March 1938.

researches. It was also noted in the press that Winston Churchill was due to visit Paris at the same time, staying at the British Embassy and having discussions with his many friends at the French capital. The city was viewed as a valuable base from which to study military conditions in Europe.[11]

Friday, 18 March was their first full day in Paris. In the morning, Lloyd George laid a wreath on the tomb of General Ferdinand Foch, the French general who had supervised the final allied offensive which had led to Germany's defeat in the First World War. He had died in 1929. At his tomb, Lloyd George (accompanied by General Gaston Billotte, the Military Governor of the city of Paris) had been greeted by senior army officers and representatives of the Invalides before laying the wreath of lilies and carnations – 'indeed the most beautiful and largest I had ever seen'. It bore the inscription, 'To Marshal Foch – David Lloyd George'. L. G. then took Jennifer Stevenson by the hand to see Napoleon's tomb: 'I thought this a most unwise procedure' (noted Sylvester) 'for there were many photographers and cinema people always photographing him.' An animated Lloyd George pointed out Napoleon's death mask, commenting that it was 'a kindly face though the head had shrunken from the size it was in life'. They looked at Napoleon's hat, his sword and the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour. Lloyd George told his young companion that tradition insisted that Napoleon's sword was to be for the man who saved the French nation. After the war it had consequently been presented to General Foch who had worn it proudly at the Armistice ceremonies, but it had later been returned to this its place of honour.

A. J. Sylvester felt very conscious of a certain time warp as they surveyed Napoleon's tomb and then waited at the Invalides for a telephone message to inform them whether they were able to visit the house at Rue Franklin which had been occupied by the former French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau who had also taken a prominent part in the 1919 peace negotiations. He, too, had died in 1929. The caretaker at the property, which was closed at that time, agreed to give Lloyd George and Jennifer a private tour of the house which they clearly savoured, thoroughly perusing each room in turn. As they made their way through the property, 'a very enterprising French photographer' asked Sylvester for the name of L. G.'s young companion – 'I avoided an answer.' The photographer continued to take a large number of snapshots, while Frances Stevenson 'looked on with evident satisfaction. The result may be a sad page for L. G. especially when the family see it'. Later, Lloyd George commented to Jennifer, 'Oh, yes, you will be in the papers all right,' and he was 'obviously very much amused at the idea'. They all found Clemenceau's former home 'tremendously interesting'; 'L. G. did not wish to go upstairs, but deferred to Jennifer's wishes, she insisting on going.' Clemenceau had lived at the property for more than thirty years. Much of it had been preserved as it had been during his lifetime, including his impressive study and his bedroom: 'On a desk in the bedroom was a half page of manuscript written only a day before he died. It was the last stroke of the pen he made.' Clemenceau's old home is preserved even today as a museum to the great man.

Then at 11.30 a.m., Lloyd George and Sylvester went to see M. Joseph Paul-

11 *Evening Standard*, 18 March 1938; *The Scotsman*, 18 March 1938.

Boncour at the Quai d'Orsay. He was currently Foreign Minister of France, a position which he had held on four separate occasions, and he had already served as Prime Minister in 1932–33. He was viewed as one of the prominent moderate French Socialists. As Sylvester wrote in his diary:

> It was thrilling to be in the same rooms as I had been in so many times during the Great War and the Peace Conference. [Charles] Mantoux went in with L. G. to begin with and then afterwards I was called in with the maps. Paul Boncour was accompanied by his son. I commenced taking notes and continued until Boncour said: 'These notes are confidential, of course?' Whereupon L. G. indicated that I should not take any more and I ceased.

L. G. and Paul-Boncour discussed at length for some fifty minutes the urgent situation which had developed in Spain. They also spoke of the Russian proposal for a meeting of the powers excluding the totalitarian states.

> You won't get the British Govt saying to you 'open your frontiers'; but if you were to open your frontiers, and pour your stuff in there, nothing would be said. The British Govt would not intervene at all. They would allow it to be done. The British Govt is a government of the Right. Several of the more intelligent members of the Party like Winston Churchill were pro-Franco at first; now he begins to see the danger and is anti-Mussolini now. In my opinion, they would be rather glad if it were done by France without her saying a word. All the intelligent men on the Govt side are coming round to that way of thinking.

Then after lunch he had a meeting with M. Pierre Cot, the French Minister of Commerce, who had formerly been Air Minister:

> L. G. is a very peculiar man. He soon gets tired even of very good friends and helpers. For instance, this morning he told me to get Mantoux out of his sitting room; he wanted that for himself. He did not want Mantoux for lunch and he did not want him for Pierre Cot. He said Frances could interpret if Pierre Cot could not speak English. So F. stayed in her bedroom which adjoins the sitting room on one side and his bedroom is on the other, and when I took Pierre Cot in I could not get into the sitting room because it was locked and L. G. had to come to unlock it. It was a good thing for he realised that I could not get in to F.'s room either!

At 6.00 p.m., M. Escarate, the Spanish ambassador in London, came to see Lloyd George – 'He was anxious, but said that the Spanish Govt forces had stopped the advance of Franco's forces.' At dinner that evening, Lloyd George reflected on the current international situation and reminisced about the events of the First World

War. He was, as ever, dismissive of Neville Chamberlain – 'he was narrow with a certain amount of courage, but inability to see a new view'. Just before dinner, L. G. showed some elaborate maps of Europe to M. André Géraud, a prominent French journalist who had the pseudonym 'Pertinax':

> 'Make no mistake about it, if the French take the plunge, England and especially the workmen will be behind France. During the [First World] War South Wales was more Socialist than any other part, yet they sent more men to the war on a voluntary basis than any other part of the country. But don't wait for the British to take the initiative'. L. G. said he was anxious to influence those on the Right. Now was the time; 10 days hence may be too late.
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> So many of our people in England are looking where they stood as a possible successor to Neville [Chamberlain]. First of all there was Inskip; he at any rate *looked* solid enough; then there is Sam Hoare who is clinging on to Neville's garments; Eden would have been third and might yet be Prime Minister for he had a considerable following in the country.[12]

Although Lloyd George himself maintained a discreet silence in relation to his discussions with these French ministers of state, newspaper reports inevitably appeared during this Paris visit. In particular, there was a great deal of interest in the identity of Lloyd George's nine-year-old companion. The next morning, arrangements had been made for L. G., Frances Stevenson and Jennifer (but without Sylvester) to visit the Palace of Versailles. It was thought to be Lloyd George's first visit to that distinguished venue since he had signed the peace treaties there with President Woodrow Wilson and Clemenceau a full nineteen years earlier. Excitedly, Lloyd George showed his eager companions the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, indicating to them where each of the world-famous diplomats had sat during the tense peace negotiations and the signing ceremony after the war. The French officials now present at Versailles stood silently, aware that this moment was dramatic for Lloyd George and the people with him. Afterwards, they visited the Trianon Palace Hotel, which had been the venue for numerous all-important meetings back in 1919, and also the home of the Supreme War Council which had been established at Lloyd George's personal instigation. They also visited the chateau of Marie Antoinette and King Louis XIV at Versailles. Then, suddenly:

> It was 11.55. L. G. was due with Prime Minister Blum at the Matignon Hotel at 12. I was just going out of the Crillon with the 3 large maps thinking he had gone straight to his appointment when in he rushed like a madman. Went upstairs, not speaking a word. He had sweated and his underclothes were wet. He changed and arrived for his appointment with M. Blum a quarter of an hour late, at a time when Blum had just formed his ministry and was very pressed, and

12 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A44, diary entry for 18 March 1938; *Daily Mail*, 19 March 1938.

> being late through 'buggaring' [sic] about with Jennifer at Versailles. I thought this difficulty bad taste. I sent a message to Blum excusing him saying that L. G. had only just returned from Versailles.

Lloyd George took three elaborate, large-scale maps of Europe for his meeting with M. Léon Blum, the Prime Minister of France, at the Hotel Matignon. A packed day followed. Later, Lloyd George and Sylvester proceeded to the Restaurant Laperouse, where they were again a full fifteen minutes late, to meet the Deputies of the Right including Reynaud. A sumptuous feast preceded the meeting, potentially 'a very vital talk on the Spanish situation between L. G. and men who did not agree with him for they were on the Right'. Lloyd George constantly pointed to his maps to demonstrate his points. At 3.00 p.m., he met M. Herriot, the President of the French chamber, and at 5.15 p.m. he received M. Léon Jouhaux, the leader of the French trades union movement. Forty-five minutes later, Lloyd George laid a most elaborate wreath (an exact duplicate of the one which he had placed on Marshal Foch's tomb the previous day) on the Grave of the Unknown Warrior at the Arc de Triomphe. It was a moving, impressive act of personal homage for which several thousands of people had assembled. L. G. was received by one of the senior generals in the French army, representatives of the British Legion and of the Societé de Flame whose responsibility it was to keep constantly alive the flame which flickered at the side of the grave. Lloyd George paid solemn homage to the French dead. Ready to leave the poignant scene, he asked Sylvester, 'Is that Jennifer over there? Get hold of her.'

At 7.30 that evening, they left their Parisian hotel for the Gare de Lyon as L. G. and Frances were due to depart for Antibes thirty minutes later. As they proceeded along the platform of the station, Sylvester asked his employer for his impressions of the brief visit to Paris. Lloyd George replied at once that 'he was not very pleased and thought that he ought to have done it before, but he thought that he had stiffened the French in their resolve'. He had been totally nonplussed that M. Herriot, as president of the French chamber, should have politely agreed with L. G.'s viewpoints, and then used the noun 'prudence' – 'Well, when a man uses a word of that kind in the middle of a crisis, I know he does not mean to do anything.'[13]

The British press followed the course of events closely. The *Daily Sketch* recorded that the former prime minister, 'on a sight-seeing tour of Paris', had enjoyed 'the companionship of a small friend, eight year old Miss Gennifer [*sic*]'.[14] The widely-read *Daily Mirror*, newspaper of the left, was more explicit. Lloyd George had been accompanied by 'his little grand-daughter, nine year old Marjorie Stevenson'. According to its reporter, their brief sojourn at the French capital had constituted 'the most exciting history lesson in the world for Marjorie' who had exclaimed, full of excitement, on returning to their hotel, 'I had a splendid time, grand-daddy, and I will remember everything I saw.'[15] These claims, seemingly invented to explain the child's presence, or perhaps to pre-empt further speculation,

13 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A44, diary entry for 19 March 1938.
14 *Daily Sketch*, 19 March 1938: 'L. G. looks at Napoleon'.
15 *Daily Mirror*, 21 March 1938.

were wide of the mark. At the time, it was not generally known that the nine-year-old girl was Frances Stevenson's daughter, whom she claimed to have adopted after the child's missionary parents had been killed in China. Nor was the long-term intimate relationship between Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson by any means common knowledge. To describe the girl as L. G.'s grand-daughter was, therefore, rather odd but not wholly inexplicable as a journalistic attempt to create a story where the facts remained elusive.

After his rather frenzied Parisian adventure, Lloyd George left for Antibes in the south of France. Sylvester, Jennifer, and her nurse Miss Hackett duly returned to Victoria station, London where they were met by two cars sent from Lloyd George's Surrey home at Bron-y-de, Churt. They played 'beetles', a game using dice, on the train to while away the time.[16] Press columnists also noted that the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, whom Lloyd George had met only once since the abdication, were to stay at the same hotel on the Riviera as Lloyd George and Dame Margaret, namely the Grand Hotel, Cap d'Antibes. It was also noted that Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, was at Cap Ferrat and had recently lunched with Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, who had stood down as British Prime Minister only the year before, in May 1937, shortly after the coronation of King George VI.

It was announced in the press that Winston Churchill had decided to postpone his proposed visit to Paris 'until after the Prime Minister's statement on British policy'.[17] There was in general a resentment in British governmental circles at the exchanges between prominent critics of the government at home, Lloyd George and Churchill among them, and French governmental ministers. There seemed to be some link between L. G.'s visit to Paris and Churchill's announcement. There was also believed to be regular contact between the Opposition front bench and Paris. Such exchanges were in no way banned, but in the tense international situation which was daily evolving during the autumn of 1938, it was felt that they were ever likely to embarrass, possibly even undermine, relations between the two governments.

Most of the French national newspapers had recorded bland details of Lloyd George's movements and meetings while in Paris. But *Le Matin*, the city's Independent Unionist organ, published a vehement attack on him:

> Mr Lloyd George's visit to Marshal Foch's tomb is one of those hypocritical gestures in which this well-known wizard excels. There was no man who ran more counter to the ideas and work of Foch when peace came than Mr Lloyd George. There is no man who worked more to raise Germany and lower France; no man who accomplished more pirouettes or about-turns.
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> Having made England vote in 1918 to the cry of 'Hang the Kaiser', Mr Lloyd George came to France in 1920. M. Briand asked him, 'Well, when do we put up the gibbet in London to hang the Kaiser?', and Mr Lloyd George tapped him on the thigh, laughing heartily and said, 'My dear fellow, didn't you understand with your

16 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A44, diary entry for 20 March 1938.
17 *Sunday Times*, 20 March 1938; *The Times*, 22 March 1938, p. 16, col. e.

> great subtlety that it was an electoral gibbet?'
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> There is no assurance that in three months' time Mr Lloyd George will not go to take tea at Berchtesgaden, and that if Herr Hitler questions him about his visit to Foch's tomb, Mr Lloyd George will not slap him on the thigh smilingly and say, 'What, you who are so intuitive, don't you understand that it was an electoral visit, dear sir. It was a question of giving bother to Chamberlain.'
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> The Führer will understand. It is only in France that people do not understand.[18]

Within days, Lloyd George had demanded from Sylvester 'a summary of a violent attack on L. G. which appeared in today's *Le Matin*'. Sylvester found his employer to be 'in a filthy mood' and accusing his devoted PPS 'of getting information merely from the Govt side. I was equally emphatic with him that my net was widely thrown and that I derived information from every side.' 'Have you seen Gwilym and Megan?', demanded Lloyd George. Sylvester explained patiently that Gwilym was at the Grand National ['and I might have added that I wished I were too!'], while Megan had become 'aloof'. 'What is the matter?' asked L. G. 'She is annoyed because of my visit to Paris?' 'That is what I think,' responded Sylvester, adding in his diary entry for that day, 'She is bloody annoyed; and so are the rest of the family. Dame M. only is even decent to me.' Sylvester was asked to convey to Lloyd George the gist of the article in *Le Matin*. L. G. did not relax until 'he was satisfied it was nothing to do with his recent visit to Paris and Jennifer'. He then instructed Sylvester to inform the *News Chronicle* that the '*Le Matin* article was extremely silly and anyhow I do not care to take any notice of an attack in a third-rate paper which has no influence at all with any party in France'.[19]

Four days later, Sylvester recorded in his expansive diary that Megan Lloyd George was 'obviously very offhand with me', continuing, 'Whatever might be the attitude of the rest of the family, Dame M. to whom I have just spoken on the telephone was certainly all right; she was the best of the bunch.' That same day, he had been told by George Lambert, the Liberal National MP for the South Molton division of Devon, that both of L. G.'s sons, Dick and Gwilym, 'were very sick about L. G.'s visit to Paris with Jennifer and had produced cuttings to show that they knew all about it'.[20] On 5 April, Sylvester recorded: 'Dick [Richard Lloyd-George] told me that L. G. had made such a fool of himself when we met at Oddeninos today. He knew that L. G. had taken Jennifer to Paris. There had been a good deal of talk, he said, between members of the family and Gwilym had threatened to write a letter to his Father, but Dick had begged him not to do anything of the kind. Some person had remarked to Olwen, "I did not know you had a niece named Margery Stevenson!"'[21]

Within days, A. J. Sylvester had been informed that Lloyd George, now tired of

18 Cited in the *Birmingham Post*, 21 March 1938. Also summarized in the *Daily Mirror*, 21 March 1938, and in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 March 1938.

19 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A44, diary entry for 25 March 1938.

20 Ibid, diary entry for 29 March 1938.

21 Ibid, diary entry for 5 April 1938.

being in the south of France and of his research and writing, had decided to return home. Sylvester had warned him that both Gwilym and Megan 'obviously had something on their minds'. 'What is it?' demanded L. G. imperiously, prompting Sylvester to respond that 'it was because of Paris. … And what they have read in the papers.' 'I do not care a damn what they think,' retorted Lloyd George 'peevishly'. 'Well, I thought you ought to be warned before you return. … I repeat that neither Gwilym nor Megan have SAID anything to me; I am judging them by their demeanour; but I lunched with Dick and he has prevented some of them making a row.' After L. G. had gone to sleep, Frances Stevenson telephoned Sylvester to warn him that the old man 'was upset by what I [Sylvester] had told him; could I tell her anything further? She emphasised that L. G. must not be upset: but he can upset other people.'[22]

The following day, Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson arrived back at Folkestone where they were met by Dyer, his chauffeur, who drove them at once to Bron-y-de, Churt. 'Thus L. G. slithered back to England unnoticed by the Press.' Sylvester found him in a state of some agitation, 'dreadfully concerned as to what would be the attitude of the family'. Two of the three trustees of the infamous Lloyd George Political Fund, Lord St Davids and Sir John T. Davies, had died within days of each other, leaving Gwilym Lloyd George as the only surviving trustee, and prompting Lloyd George to put forward the names of his three other children – Dick, Olwen and Megan – as additional trustees of the Fund. He undoubtedly hoped that such a move might restore harmony to the ever-fractious family circle and at the same time increase his control over the future administration of the Fund.[23]

By 1938, Lloyd George had been out of office for more than fifteen years, and, certainly from 1935 (possibly even from 1931), it was clear that he had precious little hope of ever securing ministerial office again. Yet his speeches and opinions were generally treated with respect and widely reported in the press and the media. He had become one of Neville Chamberlain's most consistent and voluble critics, and had swung behind the general clamour against the appeasement policies pursued by the so-called national government. Like so many former front-line politicians, he still believed that even now he had an important contribution to make to national debate and was a figure of some consequence. In the spring of 1938, he genuinely felt that he could exert pressure on the French government to support the Republican forces in Spain against General Franco. Indeed, he was clearly given a warm welcome and a respectful hearing by the French Prime Minister, Léon Blum, and other senior governmental ministers in France, as well as by prominent trades union leaders and leading French academics. All of these eagerly agreed to Sylvester's polite requests to meet up with Lloyd George for discussions and a frank exchange of views, and they clearly listened to what he had to say.

A second theme is Lloyd George's readiness to exhibit himself in the company of his mistress Frances Stevenson and her (possibly even his) nine-year-old daughter Jennifer. He revelled in the attention which the press gave to the French visit and was more than happy for them to be photographed together at various

22 Ibid, diary entry for 8 April 1938.
23 Ibid, diary entry for 9 April 1938.

historical venues at Paris and for these photographs to be published in both the continental and the British press. Less than two months earlier, Lloyd George had made an ostentatious display of the celebrations of his golden wedding with the long-suffering Dame Margaret. Now he was, it seemed, prepared to embarrass and humiliate his family, particularly his son Gwilym and his daughter Megan (both of them still independent Liberal MPs representing Welsh constituencies in the House of Commons and both having displayed a conspicuous political loyalty to their ageing father), by parading publicly his secretary and her daughter in this way. In this connection, Lloyd George comes across as something of a petulant attention-seeker and mischief-maker, ever prepared to humiliate his wife and children whose patience with the old man had inevitably grown thin by this time.