

ONE



Businessman-MP and junior minister

1908 – MARCH 1921

Stanley Baldwin was born on 3 August 1867 at Lower Park House, Bewdley, in Worcestershire, the son of a partner in several family iron-manufacturing, worsted-spinning and carpet-making firms. In 1870, on his father Alfred becoming sole proprietor of the sheet-metal firm of E. P. & W. Baldwin, the family moved to the master's house alongside its main works in the small village of Wilden, just outside the home town of the extended Baldwin family, Stourport-on-Severn. An unusual combination of influences from Stanley's family and early life – in religion, culture, business, public service and politics – shaped his distinctive form of political leadership.¹ Both his parents came from earnestly Methodist families, whose forebears included Wesleyan ministers; one of his maternal uncles was a president of the Wesleyan Conference and secretary of its missionary society. After his parents joined the Church of England in the 1860s, they remained devoutly religious and were influenced by ideals of Christian social concern, building a church and church school in Wilden and becoming active in lay churchmanship. Stanley taught in the village Sunday school, and as a Cambridge undergraduate considered ordination and became interested in church politics and church 'missions' to help slum-dwellers. His mother Louisa and her sisters had when young been part of the artistic and literary circles of D. G. Rossetti and William Morris, and Baldwin's uncles included the artists and designers Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Sir Edward Poynter and Lockwood Kipling. Louisa Baldwin and his closest aunt, Edith Macdonald, were themselves published authors, and in early manhood his cousins Philip Burne-Jones, Ambrose Poynter and Rudyard Kipling gave him continuing links with the worlds of art and literature.² For an only son neither these

¹ Williamson, *Baldwin*, chs. 3–4, has a fuller discussion.

² For these family connections see especially A. W. Baldwin, *The Macdonald Sisters* (1960), and more recently Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters. Alice Kipling, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Agnes Poynter and Louisa Baldwin* (2001).

nor the church offered serious career choices, but their perspectives extended his political sensibilities and enriched his public language.

Like his father, Stanley Baldwin had two careers, and like him too he initially regarded them as complementary rather than exclusive. The first was in manufacturing and commerce. In 1888 he entered E. P. & W. Baldwin, already a major producer of tinned and corrugated iron sheets with international markets. During 1890 he spent seven weeks in North America, visiting Quebec, Montreal, Toronto, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans, Washington and Boston. He was partly an avid tourist, meeting artists and academics through introductions from his uncles and aunts;³ but the chief purpose was to visit customers of the firm. On his return to Wilden, the firm's letterbooks show him handling their requests and problems: 'Dear Sirs,/ On receipt of your samples, the writer at once took up the matter of the "Taylor Roofing Tin", and now places before you his opinion on the different finish between the sample lot and subsequent lots.'⁴ He was now a partner, given oversight at the firm's second works at Swindon near Dudley, and as his father became increasingly busy in London later in the 1890s, he took effective charge of the whole firm. The Baldwins were leaders and modernisers in their trade. Stanley became chairman of the Tinned Sheet Association, representing the main manufacturers, subscribed to the industrial and investment press, and joined the British Economic Association (later the Royal Economic Society).⁵ During downturns in trade, the firm's correspondence shows him seeking new markets, appointing new commercial agents, and making personal tours to stimulate fresh business, including a long trip in 1897–8 through Copenhagen, Lübeck, Hamburg, Berlin (where he visited the Reichstag), Dresden, Prague, Brno, Vienna and Cologne. Over the next three years, he managed the conversion of the firm into a limited company – recruiting Rudyard Kipling among the shareholders – and its purchase of two further works. Together, the firm's four works – linked by canals and rivers to the international export outlets at Bristol and Liverpool – employed several hundred men. Alfred Baldwin was now a considerable industrial and City figure, a director of numerous companies and chairman from 1901 of the Metropolitan Bank and from 1905 of the Great Western Railway (GWR). When in

³ The papers of Charles Norton, Emeritus Professor of Art, in the Houghton Library, Harvard, contain letters of recommendation from Lockwood Kipling – 'a nice boy and sincere and unaffected . . . promising in all ways' – and Georgiana Burne-Jones: 'a plain young man, but a good one, and the heart's delight of his parents . . . [he] had to take his place in his father's business . . . because there is no other son to do it. I bet it was a hard thing for him at first, for he likes books, but he saw the justice of it, and applied himself to office work with all his might, and is already so helpful to his father that he will soon be admitted into full partnership': *ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴ To Messrs N. & G. Taylor Co, Philadelphia, 10 Dec. 1890, E. P. & W. Baldwin letterbook, Baldwin WCRO collection 8229/17.

⁵ See letter to the BEA secretary, 11 Feb. 1896, RES/1/3/12, British Library of Political and Economic Science.

Swindon Stock June 30, 1900.

<u>Pig Iron in Yard.</u>						
18 ton	Assault	72/-	/	65	14	0
17 "	Stanton	82/6 77/-	/	65	9	0
5½ "	Lilleshall	82/6	/	22	13	9
6½ "	Madeley Wood	4/11-	/	39	6	6
9½ "	Swedish	5/2/1	/	48	9	9
6 "	mixed pig at furnace	80/-	/	24	0	0
				26	5	13
<u>Slack.</u>	25½ ton in boats	9/-	/	11	9	6
25 cwt.	cote 10/ 18 sack being 9 ^q	5 T. charcoal 2/6 cwt	/	12	11	0
B.T.	cinder 14 ton 17/6	top 125 ton 3/-	/	31	0	0
roll scale	6 tons 2/-	Char. cinder 35 ton 17/6	/	31	4	6
10 ton	gas lime nil	1½ ton basic slag 4/-	/	8	10	0
				15		
Puddled	iron bar 34 cwt.	70/-	/	5	19	0
Scrap	" "	70 " 60/-	/	10	10	0
Puddled	staffs 81 cwt.	21 lbs. 45.	/	20	5	11
Charcoal	lump from scrap	61 cwt. 46	/	18	6	0
Scrap	faggots, puddl. iron t. & b.	57 cwt. 30/-	/	11	8	0
"	all scrap 18½ ton	70/-	/	76	10	0
Best	char. lump from pig + scrap	22½ cwt. 47	/	7	15	9
<u>Bars.</u>	Brynmbs 2.17.2.0	6.15.0.	/	504	8	1
				19		
				523	10	9

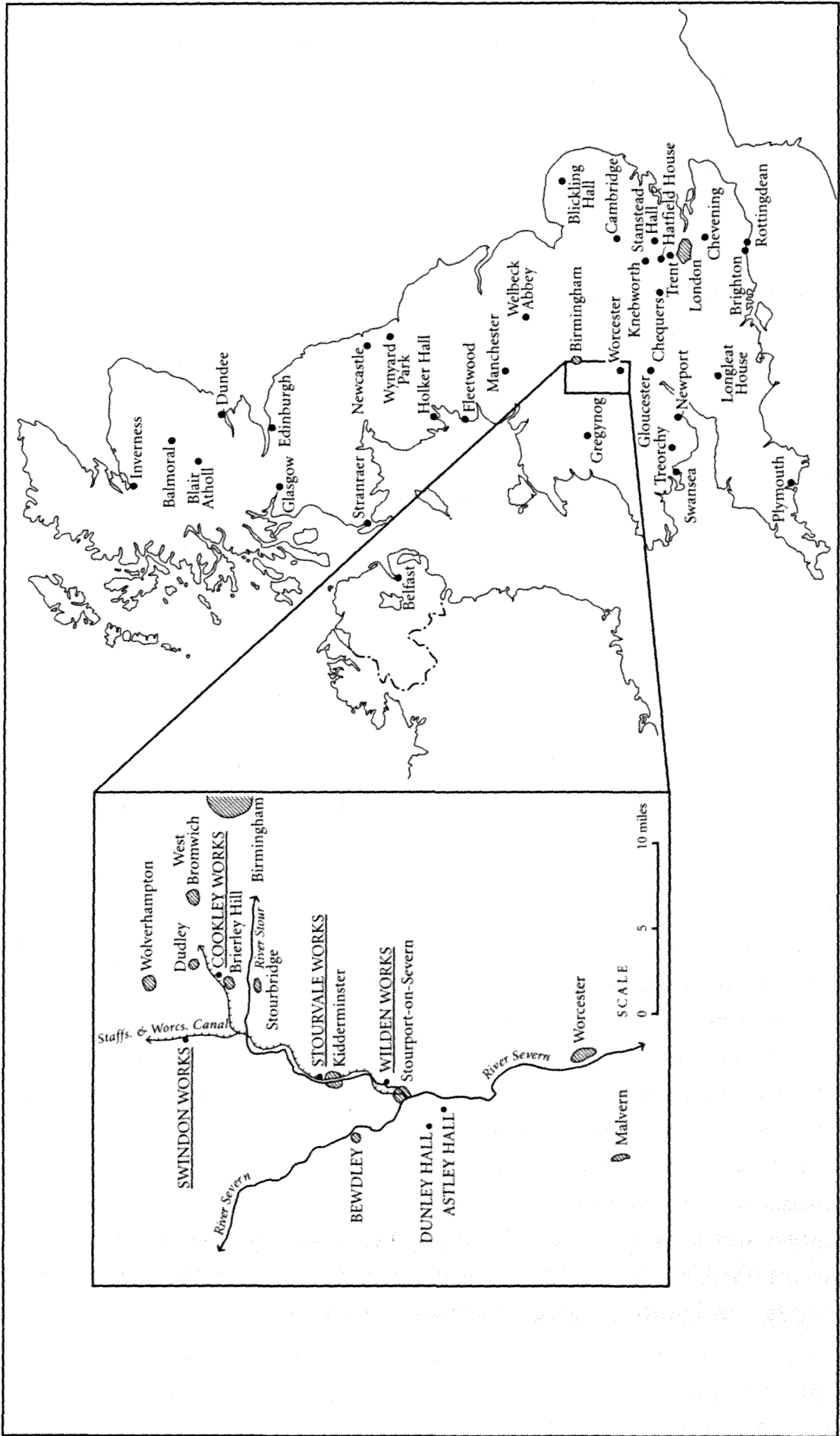
Figure 1 Baldwin as an industrialist: notes in the stock-taking book for Swindon works

1902 he combined his iron, steel, coal and manufacturing interests in the Midlands, Monmouthshire, South Wales and London in a great integrated firm – Baldwins Ltd – Stanley became managing director of its Midlands division. He also began to obtain further company directorships, and as the Baldwins Ltd main office was in the City of London he too began a career there, marked by admission into its traditional form of commercial and social association, a livery company, Goldsmiths.

His second career was in public service and politics. From 1887 to 1892 he was an officer in the Volunteer Force, with a gunnery certificate from Woolwich Arsenal. Later he became a parish councillor, justice of the peace, county councillor and governor of local schools and hospitals. His father had been a local Liberal party organiser but in 1877, committed to a 'national', integrative form of constitutional politics, which he now contrasted to Liberal 'sectionalism', he joined the Conservative party. During the 1880s Alfred became one of the leaders of Worcestershire Conservatism, and in 1892 MP for the West (Bewdley) division of the county. At Cambridge Stanley absorbed the constitutional doctrines of ordered liberty and unionism, and as one of his father's political lieutenants and from 1896 a member of the West Worcestershire Conservative Association's executive, he served a long apprenticeship in local politics. As a Primrose League organiser and patron of friendly societies and workmen's clubs, his familiarity as an industrial employer with the lives of working men and their families was extended. At the 1906 general election he stood as Conservative candidate for the nearby town of Kidderminster. He fought as an opponent of Irish home rule, church disestablishment and secularisation of schools. As his 'positive creed' he offered tariff reform, presented as the means to secure 'more employment for the people' and to protect their wages: 'I have always been interested in whatever tends to the bettering of life for those who have to earn their daily bread.'⁶ He was defeated by the Liberal candidate, and in the following year the family ambition that he would join his father in the Commons was further disappointed when a protégé of Joseph Chamberlain was preferred over him for the nomination as Conservative candidate for Worcester.⁷

In February 1908 Alfred Baldwin died suddenly. A month later Stanley replaced him as MP and became vice-chairman of Baldwins Ltd. He also succeeded his father on several boards of directors, including those of the GWR and Metropolitan Bank. By 1916 he had acquired further directorships – a total of eleven – which with his growing portfolio of shares added substantially to the sum left by his father, £198,346 (almost £12 million in modern prices). Baldwin was a wealthy man. Already, on his marriage in 1892 he had leased a large house near Stourport, Dunley Hall. In 1902 he moved to a Jacobean mansion, Astley Hall, buying the property in 1912 and extending it with a new wing. From 1908 he also rented a substantial London townhouse, 27 Queen's Gate, South Kensington, before buying a still larger and more fashionable house, 93 Eaton Square, Belgravia, in 1912. He was well travelled, in addition to his business trips. From his youth onwards he had long holidays in France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Building on

⁶ Election address, in SB papers 35/2–3. ⁷ See below, p. 313.



Map 1 Baldwin's Britain

his education in the classical languages, he became fluent in French, knew Italian, and during a long 1888 visit to Dresden began to learn German, continuing with a tutor at home. During the Edwardian period he also developed a love of winter holidays in Switzerland, writing to his mother from St Moritz of going ‘up in the mountains, ski-ing up the Val Suvretta and down the Beversthal to the mouth of the Albula tunnel. I don’t know of any environment on this earth that brings me more into tune with unseen things.’⁸

Baldwin’s election as MP for West Worcestershire in March 1908 was unopposed, and he had stood simply as his father’s son, with no reference to policies: ‘I will content myself . . . with saying that my political views are those that were held by my father, and that I stand on the same platform to fight for the cause that was dear to him./ Should you do me the honour of electing me, I shall feel it a great privilege to continue his work to the best of my ability for the welfare of all classes in the Division he loved so well.’⁹ For him, as for his father, entry into Parliament was not the beginning of a political career but an expression of service, status and leadership within county society and the business community. They were natural backbenchers, the businessman equivalent of the old country-gentleman MP. Stanley’s engagement diaries before 1914 record a routine of board and committee meetings at Paddington (for GWR),¹⁰ in the City, in Birmingham and Gloucester; visits to Newport and Wilden (for Baldwins Ltd) and to his constituency; and only occasional attendance in the House of Commons. He participated in the parliamentary lobbying of the British Iron Trade Association and the Railway Companies Association, but made only a few Commons speeches, chiefly on industrial relations or commercial and financial issues. When in March 1909 he won first place in the ballot for private members’ motions, his chosen subject was ‘the question of the investment of British capital in foreign countries’ – a characteristic tariff-reform businessman’s charge that the Liberal government’s increases in direct taxation were driving investment overseas. In May 1909, such was his position in the business world that he was asked to join the petition from City of London bankers and merchants protesting against the tax increases in Lloyd George’s ‘people’s budget’, alongside such leading City names as Rothschild, Baring, Hambro, Goschen and

⁸ 11 February 1914. For glimpses of the Baldwins on holiday with the Kiplings at Engelberg in January 1910, and Stanley’s enthusiasm for skating and skiing, see ‘O Beloved Kids’, *Rudyard Kipling’s Letters to his Children*, ed. E. L. Gilbert (1983), pp. 98–101.

⁹ Election address, 20 Feb. 1908, Bewdley Museum.

¹⁰ A note in GWR records in RAIL 258/248, the National Archives, lists his membership of three subsidiary boards and four committees as well as the main board: he was evidently an executive director.

Schuster.¹¹ Another aspect of his politics was his membership and financial support for the Unionist Social Reform Committee. Nevertheless, before the crises of the First World War Baldwin was not an aspirant minister. His experience of another career (and his knowledge that he had the contacts to return to business), his criticism of ‘professional politicians’, and his sense that politics was about service rather than personal ambition, help to explain the detached attitudes he often brought to party leadership.

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A few documents from Baldwin’s backbench period indicate his perspectives, and contain occasional comments on leading politicians.¹² The first was written during the fierce second general election of 1910.

6 DECEMBER 1910: TO EDITH MACDONALD

SB add. papers

Queen’s Hotel, Birmingham

My dear Edith

I am glad the spirit moved you to send a long line across the void just at this time. Until these infernal elections are over, I shall hardly have a moment to sit down and think.

But it would all be unbearable if it wasn’t one’s rather obvious duty and if one hadn’t the love of friends all around.

And when one of the generation in front of me drops out of the ranks, it acts as a stimulus to me to push on for the time is short so that I may not be ashamed when I meet once more those who fought a good fight while they were with us.

That’s my view.

Always your loving/ Nephew

During 1912 a national miners’ strike forced a stoppage in industries dependent on coal supplies. Baldwin issued the following notice to the employees of the four Midland works of Baldwins Ltd.

¹¹ *The Times*, 15 May 1909; see D. Kynaston, *The City of London*, vol. II: 1890–1914 (1995), pp. 494–6.

¹² Further material is quoted in M&B, ch. 3.

PRIVATE NOTICE

TO EMPLOYEES.

ASTLEY HALL,

March 20th, 1912.

I do not like to see men who have worked for E. P. & W. BALDWIN thrown out of employment through no fault of their own. I therefore hope to make an allowance to every one working for Weekly Wages at the following rates, such allowance to be paid on March 23rd to those who have been without any wages coming on for at least a week.

MEN	10s. 0d.
BOYS under 18 years	5s. 0d.
WOMEN	5s. 0d.
GIRLS under 18 years	2s. 6d.

It is my hope to be able to continue these payments, if necessary, for some weeks.

STANLEY BALDWIN.

Figure 2

By such means Baldwin carried the paternalistic work relations of the earlier family firm into his division of the new large company. After the stoppage ended, the workmen for all four works presented him with an illuminated address of gratitude for his 'thoughtfulness and generosity', and in endorsement of the 'good feeling that exists between you and your men'.

At the end of the 'Marconi scandal' in 1913 he thought Lloyd George's 'prestige is dimmed for many a day to come./ He looked very vicious when brought to

bay and while making his apology.¹³ During the constitutional troubles of 1913–14 Baldwin was all for conciliation. His Commons speech on the Welsh Church disestablishment bill was described by Lloyd George as ‘very fair, temperate and able’; but as Baldwin commented during the Irish ‘Curragh crisis’, he considered Lloyd George and Churchill among the sources of discord.

31 MARCH 1914: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

House of Commons Library

Dearest Mother,

I wonder what you in peaceful Wilden think of this mad world?

Certain it is that never in our lives have we been standing on such a perilous brink.

There is a move among moderate men on both sides to get together on the Irish question and try to arrange some compromise that will make for peace, the one idea being at any cost to save the country either from civil war or from a wild campaign against the army.

Grey is in charge to-day and neither George nor Winston is in the House, with the result that the debate is proceeding in a calmer air, and Grey has said in effect that the Government will consider almost any suggestion from our side.

Ordinarily it would not be for us to suggest. But I hope we may now: things are much too serious for us to fold our hands and wait . . .

Much love from thy/ loving Son

At the outbreak of the First World War, Baldwin extended a patriotic act of his father’s during the Boer War, of paying the friendly society subscriptions of all working men in his constituency and Worcester city who volunteered for the armed services. This commitment eventually amounted to a large sum, but it became the first of numerous philanthropic gifts. As the war effort increased, during 1915 he was drawn into increased parliamentary and departmental work. This included membership of committees on trade relations after the war, War Office expenditure, and war loans for small investors (the origin of the National Savings scheme). He was one of four MPs appointed in May 1915 to sit with two High Court judges on the Home Office Aliens Advisory Committee, interviewing individuals seeking exemption from internment and repatriation as ‘alien enemies’ under the Defence of the Realm Act. By late July they had dealt with

¹³ To Louisa Baldwin, 20 June 1913.

1,200 cases, and the work continued into the following year. 'I had some difficult cases this afternoon . . . one miserable specimen, a bit of rotten human driftwood blown ashore by the gale of the great war. The other cases were redeemed by the witnesses who one after another were straight out of Dickens: Dickensy men who led Dickensy lives.'¹⁴ After the 1916 Easter Rising the committee was given the further task of interrogating Sinn Fein prisoners, meeting regularly in Wormwood Scrubs prison. Baldwin called the tribunal his 'spy committee', and it almost certainly gave him contacts in the secret services. In January 1915 he was a founder member of the Unionist Business Committee, a backbench group formed to scrutinise commercial aspects of the war effort. On behalf of the committee he initiated a debate on 'national organisation', and with other executive committee members participated in deputations to ministers.¹⁵ In September he signed a cross-party open letter calling for conscription, and by mid 1916 had become critical of the Asquith coalition government. His correspondence with Joan Dickinson began in the autumn. She was working as an official with the Red Cross, tracing wounded and missing troops.

17 OCTOBER 1916: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

93 Eaton Square, S.W.

Dear Maid

. . . I had a curious confirmation the other day of an old theory of my own. I have always felt, knowing the Working Man pretty intimately as I ought to, that a good deal of shall we say misunderstanding between classes arises from the fact that they don't speak the same language. That is, words convey different meanings to different classes. A shade of meaning is a thing not understood by Working Men . . . Here is an illustration.

I was talking to one Wardle the other day in the smoking room. He is the present leader of the Labour party.¹⁶ Sitting apart was an unpleasant trio, often seen together, Pringle, Dalziel and Houston.¹⁷ I called Wardle's attention to the group and observed partly to draw him, 'Houston isn't a type that appeals to me' or words to that effect. To which Wardle, edging near to me and lowering his voice 'No: I want to use a word about him

¹⁴ To Joan Dickinson, 25 Oct. 1916.

¹⁵ Minute books in Hewins papers 26, and material in Bull papers 4/11, 12.

¹⁶ George Wardle, acting chairman of the parliamentary Labour party in 1916.

¹⁷ W. M. R. Pringle, a Liberal critic of conscription; Sir Henry Dalziel, a newspaper owner and Liberal supporter of Lloyd George; Robert Houston, a millionaire shipowner and Conservative.

that I don't like to use'. Every word of abuse current in the circles in which Wardle had been brought up rushed through my brain. I held on to the table near, and prepared for the worst. It soon came. 'He has a sinister look.' With great emphasis on the evil word. I told him he had employed the mot juste . . . Wonderful how everything in the heights or the depths can be reached by the English language.

I had the misfortune lately to allude to Prigg and Hongle (meaning Pringle and Hogge¹⁸) before some of my friends. The metathesis was evidently considered a 'succès' for I had the pleasure of hearing it retailed the same evening and attributed to some one else! Such is fame. I kept silence. . .

Much love,/ S.B.

16 NOVEMBER 1916: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

House of Commons Library

Dear Maid,

. . . Poets are always right. I was highly pleased to find that Kipling had come to the same conclusion about the government that I had, and by the same road, after almost as long and anxious a cogitation. We have common puritan blood in us and he said a thing I have so often said and acted on. 'When you have two courses open to you and you thoroughly dislike one of them, that is the one you must choose for it is sure to be the right one'.

How much happier not to be made like that! . . .

Who is to be Food Controller? I think he ought to be anonymous and referred to as Mr X. for he will certainly swing on a lamp post before the war is over . . .

Your father has just entered the room: I shall shew him this letter . . .

Your loving/ S.B.

In early December Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister, and began constructing a new coalition government.

¹⁸ J. M. Hogge, a Liberal who worked closely with Pringle on radical causes.

8 DECEMBER 1916: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

Carlton Club, Pall Mall, S.W.

Very dear Maid

. . . I was at Paddington till half past one at our Board: many of my excellent colleagues were afflicted with a futile loquacity and we wasted such a lot of time. Then I had to bolt to the City for another meeting . . .

I wonder what I shall have to do if Lloyd George mobilises the nation. You will of course be left where you are, but I daresay I shall be put to drive the Chelsea refuse carts, and you will see me attired in a wideawake hat leading my charge down Egerton Terrace. What price a General Election within three months? A hideous but very possible event. I used to enjoy an election in the heyday of an ebullient youth: I hate 'em now . . .

Much love/ S.B.

11 DECEMBER 1916: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

93 Eaton Square, S.W.

Very dear Maid

. . . you feel you would like to chuck it and something tells you you oughtn't to and that it wouldn't be a very brave thing to do. Isn't that so? My dear, you are going through, probably for the first time, what is a common experience with anyone who has tried to do anything in common with other people since the world began! There are two paths in life: one to cuddle up sheltered (Browning has some remarks on this – as on many other things)¹⁹ the other to go out and help in the melee of life. And the light isn't very good and there is a lot of dust about and we get banged on the head by friend as well as foe. You have chosen the better part, but you have just had your first bad bang on the head, and you wonder if the game is worth the candle. It is, a thousand times. Face it and go on, with the same cheerful courage that took you back to work in the middle of your holiday. I always have a double prayer about my work – ability to do it, whatever and wherever it is, and to do it with cheerfulness. Every day for eight years have I asked for those two things. Try it . . .

¹⁹ Browning was one of Baldwin's favourite poets, especially admired for his religious verse.

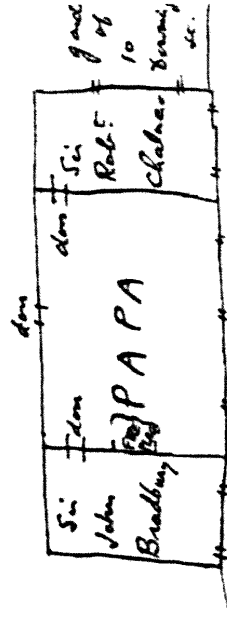
I gave mother and Si
 China last night. They
 seemed very and bright.
 windows looking out on the

Did you yell with delight
 at Rumba on your good
 parading: lovely splendour.

parent? I always told
 you here to believe a word
 they say in the newspaper

about people and how
 perhaps you will believe
 me.

I hardly dare show
 my face in the Club
 to-day.



House for parade

your
 your
 your

House for

Figure 3 From a Baldwin letter to his daughter Lorna, 31 January 1917, indicating the location of his Treasury office: Sir John Bradbury and Sir Robert Chalmers were the department's joint permanent secretaries.

On 21 December 1916 Baldwin was appointed parliamentary private secretary to Bonar Law, the Unionist party leader and now Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. Given wartime pressures on ministerial manpower Baldwin's duties quickly expanded to departmental work. On 29 January 1917 he was made an unpaid Junior Lord of the Treasury in order to deputise for the Financial Secretary, Lever, sent to Washington to manage British war purchases in North America. Baldwin now had a full-time ministerial job, 'in the very centre of the spider's web'.²⁰ Baldwin participated in intensive Treasury work to overcome domestic aspects of the financial crisis, notably organisation of an immense new war loan – to which both he and his mother committed large sums of their own money.

11 FEBRUARY 1917: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

partly in *My Father*, p. 81

Treasury Chambers, Whitehall, S.W.

Dearest Mother,

... I have a big block of new shares to take up, and shall sell most of them as I conveniently can, as I have borrowed £50,000 to put into War Loan. I reckon to clear most of this during the year if I can peddle out my new Baldwins.²¹

You will get this on the morning of the 13th,²² and I shall feel peculiarly conscious of father's presence that day because I shall be making my first appearance on the front bench in charge of a small group of supplementary estimates. He would have been so pleased, and if there be any knowledge with him of what we do, the knowledge that in our several ways we try to do our duty must be a joy to him. I wish I could look in on you on Tuesday, and indeed often, but I am sure I am doing right in undertaking this work here. We both believe there is guidance in these things. I never sought a place, never expected it, and suddenly a way opened and an offer of wider service was made. If one tackles public life in the right spirit, it is unselfish service. (And don't bother about other work – I have none. I am attending no boards at all so long as this government lasts.) If we are returned again, and I am offered a post, then I shall have to decide finally between commerce

²⁰ To Louisa Baldwin, 29 Jan. 1917.

²¹ With the wartime boom in iron and steel production, Baldwins Ltd expanded their capital and Baldwin received a new issue of shares ('Baldwins'). In modern terms this £50,000 would be equivalent to around £1.5 million.

²² The anniversary of Alfred Baldwin's death.

and public life. And if I live, the experience of the next six months should enable me to choose.

My best love to you, particularly on this day . . . / Ever thy loving/ Son

As acting Financial Secretary, Baldwin took charge of financial business affecting not just the Treasury itself but also its dealings with spending departments and Parliament. ‘My peaceful life is a thing of the past: it is all alarms and excursions, and in the House when I am not the butt of that assembly, I am cornered and button-holed by all and sundry’; ‘There is no job which brings you in such close and constant touch with the House as mine.’²³

30 MARCH 1917: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

House of Commons

Dearest Mother

. . . I had my first experience one evening of having to reply to a portion of the debate and got through it all right. There is nothing calculated to keep you awake more than being on the front bench when you have to reply to a succession of foolish speeches! . . .

I have had to give up all my directorships while I am in office: Ld. Churchill has been most kind and assures me that it is the unanimous wish that as soon as I am kicked out I should come back to the Board,²⁴ and . . . he says he won’t fill up my place . . .

Submarines and payments in America are still the two outstanding danger points but otherwise I think all goes well. The next three months are bound to be a particularly anxious time all over Europe on account of the food shortage. After that, the situation should be easier.

Best love & much from thy/ Ever loving/ Son

After the United States’ entry into the war he noted that ‘all London is beflagged in somewhat hysterical fashion with the Stars and Stripes. They tell me that the great service in St. Pauls was very impressive, and the emotional Americans were quite overcome, weeping with a facility denied to us English. Anyway, it will make them very happy over the water./ I can’t say it gives me any pleasure to see American

²³ To Joan Dickinson, 16 Feb. 1917; to Louisa Baldwin, 15 May 1917.

²⁴ Victor, 1st Viscount Churchill, Alfred Baldwin’s successor as chairman of the Great Western Railway. He repeated this offer in January 1918.

flags alongside ours on the Government buildings. The Admiralty will have none of it and preserves its ancient dignity by flying as always its own flag.' He recurred to the point twelve months later: 'There is a Mansion House luncheon to-day to celebrate the entry of America into the war but I declined with thanks because (A) I hate luncheons and (B) I don't feel like celebrating the entry of an ally nearly three years too late.' In May 1917 he commented that 'Russia so far as we can tell will be of no military use this year. If she had only held together and been organised (two impossibilities, I fear) the war would have been over this summer. But you can't have a revolution without loosening discipline through the whole life of the country.'²⁵

On 18 June Baldwin's position was regularised by appointment as Joint Financial Secretary to the Treasury. During the long committee stages of the Finance Bill he worked days of thirteen or fourteen hours, starting with briefings from Treasury, Inland Revenue and Customs officials, followed by discussion with the Commons chairman of committees, then six or seven hours on the front bench handling the debate on the Bill's clauses, and ending with an hour's preparation of the next day's work.²⁶

15 AUGUST 1917: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

House of Commons

Dearest Mother

. . . I am very fully occupied all the week and feel as fit as a fiddle.

. . . It will be a great relief when the House is up. I find I am gradually being put on committees of ministers e.g. I am on a small committee of which Carson is chairman to consider the question of soldiers' & sailors' pay; I sit daily except Saturdays on the Exchange committee. That deals with the Foreign exchanges and consists of the governor and deputy governor of the Bank of England, Felix Schuster, chairman of the Union Bank, Gaspard Farrar of Barings and so on.²⁷ Then I represent the Treasury with one other English representative and two Frenchmen on a committee which watches the financial situation constantly between France and ourselves . . .

²⁵ To Louisa Baldwin, 20 April 1917, 6 April 1918, 15 May 1917.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1917.

²⁷ The London Exchange Committee, a key body in monetary policy established in November 1915, originally consisted solely of bankers. Baldwin was added to its membership after the Governor, Lord Cunliffe, lost a famous row with Law over ultimate control of the national gold reserve.

Henderson made an ass of himself. He is a stupid, conceited man who has bumped into events too big for him²⁸ . . .

Much love from thy/ loving/ Son

Baldwin's correspondence with Joan Dickinson was now in full spate. The following letter indicates their normal length, content and tone, and introduces Davidson, who as Law's private secretary since 1915 had with Baldwin become part of a tightly knit group of friends at the Treasury and 11 Downing Street.²⁹ Joan had visited Astley Hall during the parliamentary recess, and stayed on with Baldwin's family after he returned to London.

28 SEPTEMBER 1917, 10 P.M.: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

The Athenaeum, Pall Mall, S.W. 1

Dear Little Maid,

The sweet briar scented the Treasury this morning and brought before me the Broad Walk [at Astley Hall] with that wonderful valley and line of hills till I could have rushed off to Paddington and leaped into the first train I saw! I loved to hear your adventures since I left and rejoice that you were rewarded with such an evening walk.

Skies like that stand out in one's memory as dinners do in some peoples'.

Do you remember the ten minutes in the stubble field the evening after you arrived when the ends of the world caught fire, blazed and died? It was a real kind thought to write as you did, for I found it hard work buckling to again and Astley was tugging very hard. Yet, bless me, how much of it should I see if I were in France? Shame on me! I rejoice too to think of you there, and your more than deserved holiday, and that Astley is giving you what you need . . .

I am contemplating a walk on Sunday in Buckinghamshire. I think I can combine a dozen miles with a call on an old friend whom I haven't seen for years . . .

I wonder what the two important questions are that you want to discuss? I am always ready with advice as you know! Or perhaps it's not advice you

²⁸ Arthur Henderson, the Labour party leader, had been forced to resign from the War Cabinet for advocating British participation in an international socialist conference, which would include representatives from enemy countries.

²⁹ *Davidson Memoirs*, pp. 78–80, prints short extracts from this period (though on p. 80 the extract from the following letter and an earlier reference to Davidson are incorrectly dated as 1918)

want but only discussion. Davidson and I have been having a talk. He is a remarkably sensible man, because he worries over the same things that I do and we agree wonderfully in the things we should like to do. I think I may say "he has an interesting mind".

Charles Bathurst³⁰ has been doing his best to get me down to Lydney for a long week end but I couldn't just after such a splendid holiday. It tempted me though. But as I often yield to temptations, it's just as well to be firm occasionally, or one will never be able to say no. Can you say no easily? I wish I could. It is a most useful thing.

My poor old Chief rushed off to France yesterday morning to try and get news of his eldest son but he is back already having failed to learn anything.³¹ He is passing through a very terrible time and I am quite powerless to help him which I don't like. I don't really know the inner man of him.

This is a poor return for your delightful letters. But my only quiet time to write is after dinner, and after a long day's work I get so stupid. You shall have a brighter one before you come back. I understand all you say about friendship, but you think far too much of me. That's not fishing. I've told you so often. You say you thank God for our friendship. I want you to be able to say so from your heart when the time comes that you are looking back over your life and long after I shall have passed on.

I am going to walk home now: it is bright moonlight and wild beasts are trooping out of Battersea Park to drink in the river before going to bed . . .

Your loving/ S.B.

4 OCTOBER 1917: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

Treasury Chambers

Dear Maid

. . . No words can describe the peace and beauty of the nights and no words can describe the beastliness of the raids.³² On Monday, the day my wife came up, we spent two hours in our own basement with the servants, and had the full benefit of a bomb dropped just out of the square in South Eaton Place . . .

³⁰ Conservative MP for South Wiltshire 1910–18, when created Lord Bledisloe.

³¹ James Law, serving with the Royal Flying Corps in France, had been reported missing in action; Charles Law, serving in Palestine, had similarly been lost in April.

³² German aircraft had started a series of bombing raids on London.

Sunday evening I spent in the Mackails³³ lower regions with them, two servants, a cat and a refugee policeman.

To-day I made my first appearance at the War Cabinet, which was amusing. But we have been much cheered by the news from the War Office: 'All objectives secured: 2000 prisoners counted by mid-day': so we have had a really successful push. The only fly in the ointment is labour and if we get through without trouble at home – !

... One seems to be all amongst the depressing things here. Never a politician out for his own hand, or a profiteer for his own pocket, or the anarchist workman for chaos and topsy-turvydom, but we know all about it in this office. I can tell you some strange stories some day . . .

I wish you had been here and free last Sunday. I had a solitary tramp in Epping Forest and came back on a 'bus from Chingford. It was very beautiful . . .

During the autumn Baldwin was appointed to further Cabinet committees, on the economic offensive against Germany, trade relations within the Empire, and the Dutch exchange. He himself chaired a conference on Rumanian financial questions, and participated in discussions with the American financial mission. The pressure of work was relentless. 'Here is the close of one of the most tiring, worrying, exhausting weeks I have ever had! . . . from when I have finished breakfast to eleven at night I am hunted like a hart on the mountains. Every hand is against this noble but unhappy office.' He was told that a Liberal MP had said of him "That's the hardest worked man in the House of Commons!" meaning me!! It ain't true, but I preened myself and did the goose-step to the smoking room.³⁴ He also noted the peculiar course of the war: 'If anyone had told us three or four years ago that we should take Bagdad and Jerusalem, but not Ostend, what should we have said?' During early 1918, he attended several political breakfasts hosted by Lord Derby to bring Lloyd George into contact with his junior ministers. These were 'very agreeable meetings and give one a good opportunity of studying that strange little genius who presides over us. He is an extraordinary compound.'³⁵

30 JANUARY 1918: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

House of Commons

Dearest Mother,

... I was at a very interesting breakfast at Ld. Derby's a week ago to meet the P.M. and we sat around the table till nearly eleven. The talk was on Ireland.

³³ Margaret Mackail, a cousin, and her husband, the classical scholar J. W. Mackail.

³⁴ To Joan Dickinson, 3, 14 Nov. 1917. ³⁵ To Louisa Baldwin, 14 Dec. 1917, 4 March 1918.

Events in this war are bringing home to some of us an understanding of the attitude of our rude forefathers to the Church of Rome.

If the hopes of an Irish settlement are broken it will be owing to the Roman bishops i.e. the Vatican. They swing round against Redmond without a word of warning to him just when agreement was in sight, confirming the belief one had had for years that the official church would keep the country disturbed but would never help a settlement by Home Rule for fear of an anti-clerical government. The Vatican influence has been against us in Europe all the time, and in Quebec and Australia it has thrown its' weight against conscription by working in one case on the Catholic French and in the other on the Irish. A plausible theory is that the Vatican hopes by busting the Irish Convention to bring Lloyd George down, thus paving (as they think) the way to an early and German peace.

We have had two raids the last two nights . . . Last night's was the noisiest yet though thank God they were kept out of London. Every gun near us was in full blast and our bedroom windows rattled and one could imagine one felt the walls shaking . . .

I expect the news about German strikes is exaggerated, but there is no doubt they are in a queer state and no man can prophesy from day to day what may happen – anywhere in the world . . .

Division bell ringing so I must be off.

Much love from thy ever loving/ Son

Baldwin's elder son had become unhappy at Eton, and helped by the Kiplings he persuaded his father during 1915 to allow him to leave school and join a cadet battalion. In August 1917 Oliver joined the Irish Guards and prepared for active service. The dangers were all too obvious: Kipling's son and Bonar Law's two eldest sons were now presumed dead.

1 MARCH 1918: TO OLIVER BALDWIN

CUL MS Add. 8795/2

Treasury Chambers

Dearest Son,

I little thought, all those long years ago in St. Ermin's Mansions,³⁶ what your nineteenth birthday would mean.

³⁶ The London home of Baldwin's parents, where Oliver was born.

But now that it is come, and we know that it means that soon you will be carrying a high heart to France with all our hopes and prayers, and it is a very special message of love I send you to-day and say in no conventional sense ‘Many many happy returns of the day!’

. . . I understand you are to choose your present and it is to be of bag-like nature.

Be sure and get just what you want.

Always your loving/ Father

In May the government was threatened with a political crisis when the former director of military operations, General Maurice, claimed in *The Times* that Lloyd George had misled the House of Commons about British military strength before the great German offensive in March. On 9 May Lloyd George successfully defended himself in the Commons.

15 MAY 1918: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

Treasury Chambers

Dearest Mother,

. . . You may be amused to hear of a brief conversation which took place last Thursday morning between your son and the Prime Minister as they walked up Whitehall together. It was the morning of the debate on Gen. Maurice’s letter and I told him that doubtless the humour of the situation had not escaped him. We proceeded thus:

S.B.: ‘You know, Prime Minister, that for ten years we have been trying to catch you deviating by an inch from the strict path of veracity and pin you down. We never succeeded. But now others think they have got you and they will find out this afternoon that they have caught you speaking the truth. They will have the shock of their lives.’

The little man roared with laughter and it evidently pleased him for he went about afterwards telling members of the Cabinet that he had been caught telling the truth!³⁷

He continued: ‘Poor old Bonar: he feels it very much. He doesn’t like being called a liar. I don’t mind it. I have been called a liar all my life. I’ve had more of the rough and tumble of life than he has!’

³⁷ For a report of Lloyd George repeating the phrase almost immediately, see *Crawford Papers* p. 389 (9 May 1918).

I lunched with him to-day to meet the Belgian Prime Minister and Finance Minister, but I hate lunches, they take up too much time and it is difficult to avoid overeating.

We have utilised the west wind the last few days in giving the Hun an awful dose of gas: you may have seen he is urging through the Geneva Red Cross that both sides should give up gas. He is a strange creature . . .

Much love from your ever loving/ Son

25 MAY 1918: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

Treasury Chambers

Dearest Mother,

. . . That bombing of the hospital at Etaples was perhaps the wickedest thing they have done yet. More and more one feels that Kaiserdom has got to be rolled in the dust if it takes a generation to do it, if the world is ever to progress to something better. The Bosche seems to have gone off the rails onto the main line to Hell . . .

Much love from yr ever loving/ Son

On 31 May Oliver Baldwin left to join his regiment in France. On the previous evening his father asked him 'what I should like done in my memory should I not come back. I was much surprised at this, and suggested alms-houses or a working-men's club. He promised it should be done.'³⁸

During this year Baldwin first became involved in an issue which would be an important feature of his leadership – distaste towards the so-called 'press lords', given peerages and government appointments by Lloyd George. Baldwin was especially sensitive about Lord Beaverbrook, made Minister of Information in February, because he had a dubious reputation yet also a well-known friendship with Bonar Law. The appointment provoked criticism in the House of Commons on 19 February 1918 from Austen Chamberlain. Afterwards Baldwin wrote to Chamberlain: 'Thank you for your speech yesterday. You have given expression to what every decent man has been feeling for months.'³⁹ Following later criticism of the Ministry of Information, it fell to Baldwin to defend the department and minister, and Beaverbrook supplied briefing materials for his speech. Immediately

³⁸ Oliver Baldwin, *Questing Beast*, p. 62. In 1921 Baldwin had a club-house built at Stourport, but now in thanksgiving for Oliver's safe return. Oliver donated it to the local ex-servicemen.

³⁹ 20 Feb. 1918, AC 15/7/2.

after the debate on 5 August, Beaverbrook thanked him ‘most warmly’.⁴⁰ But two days later Baldwin discovered a further transgression.

7 AUGUST 1918: TO BEAVERBROOK

Beaverbrook papers E/3/42

Treasury, S.W.

My dear Beaverbrook,

Your department wants to send out to Venezuela and Colombia a man who is or has been connected with the Marconi Co. and they describe him as indispensable.

I know the House of Commons pretty well, and it would be a fatal error to employ anyone connected however remotely with that Co.

The House has for the time being swallowed your business men, but they would throw this particular appointment up. I know the feelings of the silent men as well as of the vocal.

My chief concern is that any error of judgement you make reacts on Bonar pretty quickly, and I am sure that any result of that kind would be as unwelcome to you as it would be to me.⁴¹

Yours sincerely/ Stanley Baldwin

Baldwin had now sensed a decline from the earlier wartime spirit of unity and sacrifice, as when he was ‘depressed’ by the railway union’s attitude during an industrial dispute: ‘I get an obsession that everybody is out for what they can get during the war and it makes me sick.’⁴² Baldwin’s own wealth and income had risen considerably, as war production increased the value and dividends on his various industrial shares. He now increased his donations to good causes, including substantial sums for Wilden Church, Worcestershire hospitals and, sometimes using the pseudonym of ‘Mr Dingle’, to various charities with which Joan Dickinson and her family were associated.⁴³ His reaction to the armistice had a similar ethical quality.

⁴⁰ *HC Debs* 109, cc. 991–1002; correspondence, 1–5 Aug. 1918, Beaverbrook papers E/3/38; Beaverbrook to Baldwin, 6 Aug. 1918, SB papers 175/7–8.

⁴¹ Beaverbrook accepted Baldwin’s advice on the individual mentioned, but replied robustly on the point about Law – an early expression of a Baldwin–Beaverbrook tussle over Law’s reputation which continued long after his death.

⁴² To Joan Dickinson, 28 Nov. 1917.

⁴³ Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 138–9; *Davidson Memoirs*, pp. 94–5, and to Joan Dickinson, 14 Nov 1917, 6 April, 30 Sept. 1918.

2 OCTOBER 1918: TO AN UNKNOWN CORRESPONDENT

printed in Baldwin's obituary, *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 20 Dec. 1947

My dear – ,

I am slowly getting rid of my war profits and I want you to be good enough to convey £5,000 to the Worcestershire Prisoner of War Fund in such a way as will effectually conceal my identity.⁴⁴ You can give it in a lump sum from ANONYMOUS or split it up. But I rely on your discretion.

These new issues of Baldwins have brought in a wicked amount of money which could never have come to me except for the war, and I know you at any rate will sympathise with my point of view.

Yours ever,/ S.B.

11 NOVEMBER 1918: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

House of Commons

Dearest Mother,

The strain of the last few days has been great and I think a good many people are nearer tears than shouting to-day. Old Bill Crooks⁴⁵ came up to me and taking both of my hands in his big paws said tremulously 'This is a great day'. To which I replied 'Yes, but I feel very like crying myself' to which he replied 'I've 'ad my cry this morning!'

It is getting dark now and drizzling which is not a bad thing. There has been no horseplay yet in the streets: plenty of flags and shouting and bugles blowing the 'All Clear' . . .

It is curious to hear Big Ben strike again. The clocks were stopped striking years ago: and after lunch I heard bells pealing over Southwark way as I walked on the terrace.

St. Margaret's was very full for a short service we had. Two hymns, lesson, a few prayers, Te Deum, God Save the King.

My brain is reeling at it all. I find three impressions strongest: thankfulness that the slaughter is stopped, the thought of the millions of dead, and the vision of Europe in ruins. And now to work! pick up the bits.

Much love from your/ most loving/ Son

⁴⁴ £5,000 is about £122,000 in modern terms.

⁴⁵ William Crooks, Labour MP for Woolwich 1903–21, with whom Baldwin had become friendly before the war.

Baldwin was returned unopposed at the December 1918 general election. During the January 1919 government reconstruction he knew he had insufficient ministerial experience to be promoted, and was content to remain in his current post, with Austen Chamberlain as Chancellor.⁴⁶ He did, however, become sole Financial Secretary in May.

One of Baldwin's wartime Treasury colleagues had been Keynes, then an acting principal clerk. Writing to him ('My dear Keynes') on a Treasury matter in the following year, Baldwin observed that 'I believe you have conferred anonymous fame on me for if I am not the "Conservative friend" alluded to . . . [in] your immortal work, I should like to know who he is!' The reference was indeed to Baldwin's own phrase, itself immortal. As Keynes later described the circumstances: 'I was sitting in Chalmers' room in the Treasury having tea on the first day of the new Parliament after the Coupon Election. Baldwin, who . . . had the adjoining room, poked his nose through the door, as I can see him now, to us at tea. I asked him – "What do they look like?"' Baldwin then gave the celebrated reply published by Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*: 'They are a lot of hard-faced men', he said, 'who look as if they had done very well out of the war.'⁴⁷

In January 1919 Joan Dickinson and Davidson became engaged to be married, giving Baldwin great pleasure. Davidson was offered a place on the Prince of Wales' staff, and was uncertain whether to accept. Baldwin unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to accept, in a note which reveals much about his own attitudes to public service. The Davidson marriage was in April 1919.

28 JANUARY 1919: TO DAVIDSON

Lady Davidson papers⁴⁸

A few Comforting Thoughts in Times of Difficulty

It takes me out of the dust of conflict Yes, but I can choke just as well in
a Court.

⁴⁶ To Louisa Baldwin, 9 Jan. 1919, in *My Father*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ To Keynes, 31 Dec. 1920, Keynes papers L/20/149; J.M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), p. 91, same pagination in *The Collected Writings of J. M. Keynes* (1971–89), vol. 11, with circumstances described in vol. xxvii, p. 163. Baldwin had found the reference, belatedly, in a popular 1920 edition. He wrote similarly to Louisa Baldwin, 12 Feb. 1919 (*My Father*, p. 82): 'The prevailing type is a rather successful-looking business kind which is not very attractive.'

⁴⁸ See also *Davidson Memoirs*, p. 95, and M&B, p. 71, though both mistakenly take this note to refer to possibilities in Baldwin's own career. Davidson remained Austen Chamberlain's private secretary, until elected Unionist MP for Hemel Hempstead in November 1920. He then became parliamentary private secretary to Law 1920–1, Baldwin 1921–2, and again Law, as Prime Minister, 1922–3.

What about my Soul?

That's all right. The essence of such service is unselfishness. My first thought has to be of others, of the relationship of Crown and people: there will be no room to think of money or of my own career. For this relief much thanks. That's all to the good.

What good shall I do?

A d—d sight more than I should do as a member of Parliament or fifty Parliaments. That is self-evident.

I shall lose the 'common touch'

Not if I see SB. Anything commoner than him I have yet to meet.

I shall probably lose some friends

Yes, but I shall make others.

I am not sure that I want it . . .

'When in doubt, choose the path you like least.'

I shall make a Lady of my wife – in time.

9 APRIL 1919: TO JOAN DICKINSON

Lady Davidson papers

Just a year ago we were sitting together on a hill beyond Tring, looking out over a vast landscape and listening to a solitary lark who was near bursting his little throat as he was singing into the face of the sun. May the lark be singing to-morrow⁴⁹ to welcome you and your man as you step out hand in hand into your new life – and may this song in your hearts never cease! A little invisible cloud of my love and prayers will accompany you but it won't get in the way and you will be quite unconscious of it and it will be near you both.

. . . God bless you everywhere and always, and give you long life with your John and bring you nearer as the years pass. Love each other with all your hearts.

⁴⁹ I.e. her wedding day. *Davidson Memoirs*, p. 82, has Baldwin's equivalent letter to Davidson.

Baldwin's 1919 letters give only glancing references to his work during the difficult post-war reconstruction. He helped prepare budgets and conduct the Finance Bill, and received many deputations. He was a member of the Cabinet's home affairs and finance committees. He played a leading part in reimposing Treasury control and retrenchment on other departments. In the autumn he chaired a committee of chief finance officers of the spending ministries, whose report established a new system of financial accountability. His letters contain occasional nervous comments on industrial relations: 'I am thankful the P.M. is in Paris and is leaving all these strike questions to those at home. The new minister of Labour is a capital man and a friend of mine . . . His name is Robert Horne . . . and [he] is full of sanity and courage'; 'The labour element so far is quiet and decorous. But these are very early days'; 'We are all very thankful at having avoided a police strike so far but it is a very rough road we are driving on at present.'⁵⁰ In May he summarised his fears and hopes: 'I still feel we are all dancing on a pie-crust, but every day is a day to the good and if we can pull through the first year after peace we shall get along.'⁵¹

The circumstances of the famous next letter, published as the Versailles peace treaties were about to be signed, were recalled in 1930 by Brumwell of *The Times* editorial staff: 'Baldwin imparted his decision and entrusted his letter to J. C. C. Davidson . . . and asked him to secure publication in *The Times*. Davidson being a friend of mine put the letter into my own hands with a full explanation of the circumstances and with a request that the name of the writer should go no further. I explained that it would be necessary for me to let the Editor into the secret, but promised that it should not be revealed to anyone else. My promise was faithfully kept in Printing House Square, and disclosure came ultimately after many months from another source.' The letter, which Baldwin signed with the initials of his ministerial office, was accompanied by a favourable leading article from the editor, Wickham Steed. Later, in May 1925, Steed publicised its authorship by republishing the letter, 'with Baldwin's knowledge and consent', in an article about him.⁵² The printed *Times* version made small changes to Baldwin's text, which is the one printed here.

⁵⁰ To Louisa Baldwin, 31 Jan., 12 Feb., 3 June 1919.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21 May 1919.

⁵² Brumwell reported in Dawson to Steed, 21 Oct. 1930, and see Steed (whose recollection was slightly different) to Dawson, 17, 22 Oct. 1930, W. Steed papers 74120/224–9; W. Steed, 'Mr Stanley Baldwin', *Review of Reviews*, May–June 1925. The first widely publicised identification of the author was in an 'appreciation' of Baldwin by 'a close personal friend' in *The Morning Post*, 23 May 1923, later reprinted as a Conservative party pamphlet. Davidson seems the most likely source: Williamson, *Baldwin*, p. 140.

JUNE 1919: AS 'F.S.T.' TO THE EDITOR OF *THE TIMES*,
PUBLISHED 24 JUNE

handwritten original, SB add. papers

Sir, It is now a truism to say that in August 1914 the nation was face to face with the greatest crisis in her history. She was saved by the free will offerings of her people. The best of her men rushed to the colours: the best of her women left their homes to spend and be spent: the best of her older men worked as they had never worked before, to a common end and with a sense of unity and fellowship as new as it was exhilarating. It may be that in four and a half years the ideals of many became dim, but the spiritual impetus of those early days carried the country through to the end.

To-day on the eve of peace we are faced with another crisis, less obvious but not less searching. The whole country is exhausted. By a natural reaction not unlike that which led to the excesses of the Restoration after the reign of the Puritans, all classes are in danger of being submerged by a wave of extravagance and materialism. It is so easy to live on borrowed money: so difficult to realise that you are doing so. It is so easy to play: so hard to learn that you cannot play for long without work. A fool's paradise is only the ante-room to a fool's hell.

How can the nation be made to understand the gravity of the financial situation? that love of country is better than love of money?

This can only be done by example, and the wealthy classes have to-day an opportunity of service which can never recur.

They know the danger of the present debt: they know the weight of it in the years to come. They know the practical difficulties of a universal statutory capital levy. Let them impose upon themselves, each as he is able, a voluntary levy. It should be possible to pay to the Exchequer within 12 months such a sum as would save the taxpayers 50 millions a year.

I have been considering this matter for nearly two years but my mind moves slowly; I dislike publicity, and I hoped that some one else might lead the way. I have made as accurate an estimate as I am able of the value of my own estate and have arrived at a total of about £580,000. I have decided to realise twenty percent of that amount or say £120,000 which will purchase £150,000 of the new war loan,⁵³ and present it to the government for cancellation.

⁵³ £580,000 in modern prices is over £15 million, and £120,000 over £3 million.

I give this portion of my estate as a thankoffering, in the firm conviction that never again shall we have such a chance of giving our country that form of help which is so vital at the present time.

Yours etc./ F.S.T.

24 JUNE 1919: TO DAVIDSON

Lady Davidson papers; *Davidson Memoirs*, p. 94

Treasury Chambers

My dear old David,

You and I and Miss Watson⁵⁴ have done it with a vengeance! I don't know what you said to the Times man, but when I opened the paper in bed (*ut mea mos est*⁵⁵) wondering whether my letter would find a place at all – well, I dived under the bed clothes and went pink all over – as pink as you!

I feel like a criminal in momentary fear of detection. BUT – remember this, *mon chou*. Next time you get a letter from me and feel inclined to belittle my style, remember that the leading journal of the world calls it NOBLE. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

To-morrow night I hope to dine with the Child⁵⁶ and I will be a delightful mixture of grandfather and step-brother and bless you for all your kindness to me.

F.S.T. (Ferdinando Smike-Thompson)

31 AUGUST 1919: TO JOAN DAVIDSON

Lady Davidson papers

Astley Hall

Little Maid

. . . Yesterday was a day from Heaven. A light N.W. wind, that had swept the atmosphere into a translucent clarity: that bright pale blue sky you know, with horizontal layers of woolly cloud lying one behind the other like a

⁵⁴ Edith Watson, private secretary to Bonar Law 1916–21, later to Austen Chamberlain 1921–2, then to each Prime Minister from Law to Churchill, retiring in 1945.

⁵⁵ 'As is my custom.'

⁵⁶ Joan Davidson.

succession of drop scenes in a theatre lying all around but some distance above the horizon: the heavy dew of earliest autumn on everything. So I got up betimes and was out on the Broad Walk by half past eight. It was so clear that even at that time in the morning I could see the Cotswolds from the Old Hill. Wherefore, in the afternoon, what did I do but take myself to my beloved Woodbury! Not a soul about, and I sat for half an hour at the top on one of the most perfect evenings I have ever seen. The city of Worcester seemed at my feet: every cranny on the Malverns shewed up. Bredon you could pat on the head, and behind it the very fields on the Cotswolds were visible, and that glorious rampart stood out like the Alps from Lombardy until they were cut off abruptly by the intervening Malverns. . . .

The peace of God is on the landscape and in my heart . . .

Now for a little music!

Your loving/ S.B.

From 26 September to 5 October there was a railwaymen's strike.

7 OCTOBER 1919: TO LOUISA BALDWIN

Treasury

Dearest Mother,

And how have you kept during this last thrilling week? The strike caught us all scattered: you at Wilden, wife and Betty at Astley, Di in Sussex, Little at Eton, Lorna in Hertfordshire and Olly in Paris!

I think it has been a great victory over the wild men, and in one feature at least no other country could compete. You have had in some ways the biggest strike we have ever had, with masses of other men thrown out of work, and there has been practically no violence or sabotage. Nothing beyond what the blackguard part of the community would do any time it had the chance and the spare time.

On Saturday it looked pretty black.

All Europe was watching, and if we had had any kind of an upset here, you would have had Italy alight and perhaps France as well. I hope it will have a steadying effect in both those countries . . .

Ever thy loving/ Son

As a young child Baldwin had been given a clockwork pig, inscribed ‘For a good boy, love from Mummy and Daddy’, a toy that long remained in the family and was probably the source of Baldwin’s humorous liking for pigs, and indeed for pork pies and hams (comic letters of thanks to friends, colleagues and ambassadors for the gift of these survive). The joke was not just shared within his family and among friends. After commenting publicly just before he became Prime Minister in May 1923 of looking forward to a retirement in which to read books and keep pigs, it became part of the imagery associated with him.

30 DECEMBER 1919: TO JOAN DAVIDSON

Lady Davidson papers

Astley Hall

Your pig smiles at me as I write, and by him a primitive pig of wood, given me by Mr Kipling,⁵⁷ and bearing an autograph poem on his side:

Some to Women, some to Wine –
Some to Wealth or Power incline,
Proper people cherish Swine.

Cattle from the Argentine –
Poultry tough as office twine –
Give no pleasure when we dine:

But, from nose-tip unto Chine,
Via every intesTINE
Nothing is amiss in swine

Roast, or smoked or soaked in brine
(We have proved it, Cousin mine)
Every part of him is fine.

So, till Income Tax decline,
Or Truth exists across the Rhine,
Or GEORGE⁵⁸ can speak it, praise we Swine
Common, honest, decent SWINE.

⁵⁷ Evidently both items were jocular Christmas gifts. The Kipling family had spent Christmas at Astley Hall. The text and a facsimile of part of this letter were printed in *The Kipling Journal*, March 1986, pp. 42–4.

⁵⁸ I. e. Lloyd George.

Isn't that sweet? he went into Harrods, and said 'I want a Pig'. And they: 'We have one at four guineas'. 'That' said the Poet 'is no good to me. My limit is half-a-crown'. So he bought one made by a wounded warrior . . .

21 MARCH 1920: TO WINDHAM BALDWIN

SB add. papers

Travellers' Club, Pall Mall, S.W.1⁵⁹

Very dearest Little,

Many many happy returns to you and a happy year before you!

I wish we could spend your birthday together, but I shall be stuck in the House of Commons all day and you stuck at school, and there we are.

Never mind, I hope to be at Astley to welcome you and have a few days then with you and we will have some wonderful games of chess and I will give you a birthday present.

I like to hear of all your ante finals: what fun if you win something. But never mind if you don't: do your best and it'll be all right.

I went on a lovely walk to-day near Guildford . . . I saw one or two jolly little sulphur coloured butterflies, and the birds were shouting with joy. Lots of plum blossom, and the hedges on the low ground coming out gallantly.

I had a cheery postcard from Olly a day or two ago from a place called Bari Saada on the edge of the [Algerian] desert. But in this weather I don't feel I care to change England for anything. I am so looking forward to having a week at home and hope to be there in a fortnight.

Do you feel mortal old being sixteen? it seems a great age. I am sure you are much nicer than I was at sixteen.

Always God bless you./ Much fine love from/ Your loving old/ Father

The Davidsons went to Argentina for two months on family business. As most of Baldwin's family and servants were at Astley, he briefly stayed in the Davidsons' convenient Westminster house.

⁵⁹ Baldwin had just been elected to what became his favourite club. He described it as 'a really peaceful club where no one talks to you unless you want it', reputedly where a member lay dead for three days before anyone noticed: to Phyllis Broome, 20 March 1920, Lorna Howard papers. A qualification for membership was to have travelled 500 or more miles by direct line out of Britain.

18 APRIL 1920: TO THE DAVIDSONS

Lady Davidson papers

10 Barton Street, Westminster

Dearest couple

I think this must be to both of you, for I am writing late at night alone in the little drawing room . . . by candlelight with a rather smoky wood fire slowly burning. The quiet can be felt, and except for an occasional hurrying footfall and the quarterly chiming of the clocks there is silence . . .

. . . Bonar is at Windsor with Isabel.⁶⁰ He tried to get out of it though he cheered up when I told him I would try and get Barnett to go as his valet to play chess with him in the evenings. He has had a horrid week in the Goat's absence⁶¹ owing to the hunger strikers in Mountjoy prison. He took even my breath away at Questions. Tuesday he announced that in no circumstances would they be released: on Wednesday they were released: on Thursday he was asked 'What led to the change of policy?' To which he, looking like an inspired infant with round surprised eyes 'There is no change of policy!', and he believed it. The only possible explanation is that there was no policy and ∴ there could be no change.

. . . Mond has bought five short horn cows and has gone into the country to look at them. There seems to be something almost indecent in subjecting an English cow to inspection by Mond. All this at lunch on Friday to which George Stanley listened in silence but when the olive coloured oriental said that he was a farmer, George guffawed (I am sorry no other word will do) till he nearly choked.⁶²

. . . George Gibbs has lost his wife and Jack Gilmour has married his deceased wife's sister.⁶³ Some people call such a marriage a cosy arrangement: it always seems to me to border on the stuffy. Besides the sister is so very patently a second string. Moreover – no, enough . . .

⁶⁰ Isabel Law, accompanying her father in fulfilling the King's summons to stay at Windsor Castle.

⁶¹ Lloyd George, now at the San Remo Conference. The sobriquet 'the Goat', a comment on his nimbleness, was coined by the Treasury permanent secretary (and prolific inventor of *mots*), Sir Robert Chalmers.

⁶² Sir Alfred Mond, industrialist of German-Jewish extraction and Coalition Liberal First Commissioner of Works 1916–21; George Stanley, Unionist whip 1919–21.

⁶³ Both were Unionist MPs and whips. After being made illegal in 1835, the issue of marriage to a deceased wife's sister had been a perennial Victorian controversy. The practice was allowed by legislation in 1907.

27 MAY 1920: TO DAVIDSON

Lady Davidson papers

North End House, Rottingdean

... By the time you get this you will be nearing home and I think you ought to have a line to put you in touch with affairs again. The Coalition has taken new life and is in a much stronger position than when you left.

That is partly owing to the fact that we have won every bye-election easily, Runciman being badly beaten in Clyde's old seat when Clyde was made Lord Justice General.⁶⁴

Then Asquith has been a great disappointment to the Wee Frees:⁶⁵ his few speeches have really been in support of our front bench except an ineffective speech on Home Rule and his attack has no bite. Bonar has done excellently, the Goat having been away all the time. He has been resting ever since he returned from San Remo on imperative orders from his doctor . . .

Austen did well too in his Budget on which so far we have spent six days. Horne is doing well at the Board of Trade: Addison still muddles on:⁶⁶ no particular mark has been made by any new men, nor have any of the older hands done anything out of the common.

The split between the Coalition Liberals and the Wee Frees is widened, owing to a conference at Leamington where the Coalition ministers, including Macnamara, Hewart, Addison and Kellaway were howled down. This has made them exceedingly bitter.

The advent of an Honours List is bringing many urgent callers to no. 11 and I could not help connecting a forty minutes visit from Inverforth with that event!⁶⁷ The P.M. advised Niemeyer not to take a C.B. till next list on account of his name but he spoke of him warmly and said he was the best

⁶⁴ Walter Runciman, Liberal Cabinet minister 1908–16, defeated as an Asquithian Liberal in 1918 and again in the North Edinburgh by-election, April 1920; James Clyde, Unionist MP, Lord Advocate 1916–20, thereafter as Lord Clyde a senior Scottish judge.

⁶⁵ Asquith, defeated at the 1918 election, had won the Paisley by-election in February 1920 and resumed the parliamentary leadership of the Independent Liberals ('Wee Frees').

⁶⁶ Christopher Addison, Liberal MP and first Minister of Health 1919–21, suffered prolonged criticism because he was responsible for a high-spending department, particularly for housing.

⁶⁷ Lord Inverforth, shipowner and Minister of Munitions 1919–21.

of the lot sent up. This was told to our good little Hun who was pleased and he is content to wait.⁶⁸

By the way, you nearly lost me! Between ourselves, Bonar took my breath away the other day by saying to me ‘Would you like to go to S. Africa?’ To which I ‘No, I don’t think so. In what capacity?’ ‘To succeed Buxton.’ ‘Are you joking?’ quoth I. ‘No’ said he. ‘Well’ said I ‘there are plenty of men would do that job as well as or better than I: I think I am more use at home.’ ‘Would you like Australia?’ said he. ‘Not a bit’, said I. ‘Well’ quoth he ‘I thought you wouldn’t look at it!’⁶⁹ And some further and rather amusing conversation brought the matter to a close. It’s an odd world. You would have been surprised, though, wouldn’t you?

I saw Ld. Churchill the other day and he told me two sweet little stories of F.E.⁷⁰ Victor Churchill you know is not extraordinarily happy in his domestic relationships, and speaking to F.E. during the passage of the Divorce Bill he asked him how he would be affected, ‘for’ said he to F.E., ‘I don’t want to appear in the Divorce Court. It isn’t as if my name were Smith!’ To which the Ld. Chancellor: ‘May I suggest that for the purpose of illustration you should use the name of Brown or Robinson?’

Then Churchill went on to say how he admired F.E.’s replies on committee stage, to which F.E. ‘Oh, that’s nothing: I never have had any difficulty in finding a reply to anything. But yesterday my small daughter said something to me to which I had no answer. I had been in court all day and got home tired at seven o’clock and threw myself into an armchair and had a cigar and a big whiskey. She put her head in at the door and looked at me solemnly and said ‘Drinking again, daddy?’

. . . I . . . am alone in this beautiful house that I have known and loved so well since I was a boy of fourteen. Nothing has been disturbed, and I am writing at my aunt’s table in the old studio which she used as her living and

⁶⁸ Otto Niemeyer, a senior Treasury official, English-born but of German extraction; he obtained his CB in 1921 and a knighthood in 1924.

⁶⁹ Lord Athlone, brother of Queen Mary, became High Commissioner in South Africa. A Conservative MP and junior minister, H. W. Forster (made Lord Forster) replaced Munro-Ferguson (Lord Novar, 1920) as Governor-General of Australia. Baldwin, telling his mother (20 May) that he had ‘refused being considered’ for the posts, commented: ‘Not in my line but it is a compliment.’

⁷⁰ Lord Birkenhead, the Lord Chancellor, as amusing as he was sensitive about his plebeian family name of Smith. He was a notoriously hard drinker.

working room since my uncle's death. It is extraordinarily peaceful and full of lovely memories⁷¹ . . .

There was occasional newspaper speculation that Baldwin might be made Speaker of the House of Commons. 'It is funny how that odd rumour of the Speakership keeps cropping up . . . / I don't know whether there is anything in it, and if I were offered it, I haven't an idea what I should do./ Sufficient unto the day. It would postpone for years those days of cultured leisure (with pigs) to which we both look forward in our dreams.'⁷² Few letters of interest survive for the next twelve months. Those to the Davidsons contain numerous descriptions of country walks, and one notable comment: 'Countryfolk are my own folk: in London I am a stranger: in the country at home.'⁷³

31 AUGUST 1920: TO DAVIDSON

Astley Hall

Dear old David,

. . . I am alone, writing letters with one eye, and the other on the hills which look miles away with the afternoon sun streaming on them through an easterly haze . . . Contact with my native soil for a week is making a new and I trust more agreeable man of me.

I am going out beyond Witley on Thursday to preside at some Country Sports, and on Saturday and Saturday week I am to receive deputations from Friendly Societies who are making me a presentation: goodness knows what for, but it pleases their kind hearts.⁷⁴ At any rate a sight of their ugly faces and the sound of my ancestral tongue will do me good.

. . . The country is alive with the sound of reaping machines by day and owls by night. And over all a mellow September sun. The amazing beauty of it all fills me with fresh wonder every year . . .

For many months the Baldwins suffered anxiety about their elder son. After being demobilised in 1919 Oliver became increasingly restless. During 1920 he announced

⁷¹ Philip Burne-Jones had offered Baldwin the use of his parents' home, following the death of his mother and pending the sale of the house.

⁷² To Geoffrey Fry, 29 Aug. 1920, Fry papers. ⁷³ To Joan Dickinson, Michaelmas Day 1920.

⁷⁴ In fact, a series of presentations to thank him for his payment of the membership subscriptions of volunteers for the armed forces during the war.

that he was going to Armenia, the scene of a war with both Turkey and Russian Bolsheviks. The Baldwins heard nothing for four months, until in February 1921 a message came from Erivan, saying he had been imprisoned but was now paroled.⁷⁵ While serving as a colonel in the Armenian army he had been captured by the invading Bolsheviks. Later, while trying to leave the country, he was imprisoned by the Turks. He returned to London in July 1921.

1 MARCH 1921: TO JOAN DAVIDSON

Lady Davidson papers

House of Commons

Little Maid,

. . . Those primroses last night made my heart ache and started again that dreary string of useless questions. ‘What good do you think you are doing in London? Why don’t you live among your own people? Why be called a Waster⁷⁶ when you might be making daisy chains?’

And to these there is no answer.

The wood smoke in the early morning, the corncrake on the hot afternoons of early summer, the owl in the twilight, the flight of rooks towards the setting sun in a December afternoon: the alder buds before the spring, the ash buds in March, the bluebell in May, poppies in the chalkland in July, the cloud shadows racing over the ripe corn in the downs, beechwoods in the autumn –

all these things go on, and we dodge taxis, and read the Daily Mail, and chat with Bottomley,⁷⁷ and answer silly questions.

Idiot! Some one has to help to clear up the mess? very well then, get to work and don’t chatter. I won’t . . .

⁷⁵ See Walker, *Oliver Baldwin*, chs. 4–5.

⁷⁶ The government was being accused of excessive public spending, particularly by an ‘Anti-Waste League’.

⁷⁷ Horatio Bottomley, Independent MP until expelled in August 1922 for fraud; owner of the populist magazine *John Bull* and, like *The Daily Mail*, a generator of vulgarity and critic of government ‘waste’.