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## 5 Writing the Anglo-Boer War: Leo Amery, Frederick Maurice and the History of the South African War

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## Chapter 5

# Writing the Anglo-Boer War: Leo Amery, Frederick Maurice and the History of the South African War

*I*N the introduction to his magisterial 1979 overview of the Boer War, Thomas Pakenham noted that the history of the conflict for the past seventy years had been dominated by two contemporary works; *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, edited by Leo Amery, and Sir Frederick Maurice's (official) *History of the War in South Africa*.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, until Pakenham's study, little serious research into the conflict had been undertaken. Although there had been brief revivals of interest in the 1930s, with Ian Hamilton's *Anti-Commando* and J. F. C. Fuller's *The Last of the Gentlemen's Wars*, and in the late 1950s, with such populist works as Edgar Holt's *The Boer War* and Rayne Kruger's *Goodbye Dolly Gray: The Story of the Boer War*, these books had deviated little from the line established by Amery and Maurice.<sup>2</sup> Pakenham was not alone in dismissing the glut of war-related memoirs and histories released in the first decade of the twentieth century as a 'barrage' from which the 'Long Toms' of Amery and Maurice stood apart.<sup>3</sup> An anonymous 'British Officer', commissioned to survey 'The Literature of the South African War' for the *American Historical Review* in 1907, was equally contemptuous of 'popular books, which profess to lay before their readers history, red-hot from its making like a baker's rolls'. 'These works', he argued:

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<sup>1</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Hamilton and Victor Sampson, *Anti-Commando* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931); J. F. C. Fuller, *The Last of the Gentlemen's Wars: A Subaltern's Journal of the War in South Africa, 1899–1902* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937); Edgar Holt, *The Boer War* (London: Putnam, 1958); Rayne Kruger, *Goodbye Dolly Gray: The Story of the Boer War* (London: Cassell, 1959).

<sup>3</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. xv.

no doubt answer their publishers' purpose. They have a considerable although purely ephemeral sale, and in the case of a national struggle fan a healthy spirit of patriotism. But it must be confessed that they have no pretension to be included in the historian's library. Their text is for the most part compiled by the scissors and paste process from the columns of newspapers. Their illustrations are strangely dissimilar to the realities of modern war, and are often palpably the work of artists who have never been under fire, and whose acquaintance with battlefields is limited to a study of Napoleonic pictures and of melodrama as presented by the suburban stage. It is unnecessary therefore to trouble the readers of this review by enumerating works of this class given birth to by the South African War. Their brief day has passed and, save to satisfy curiosity, it would be [a] waste of time to dip into their pages.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, both *The Times History* and the official history were immediately recognised as works of lasting significance. First off the presses was *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, published in seven volumes between 1900 and 1909. For the reviewer in the *Observer*, the publication of the final two volumes represented the 'completion of a great historical work of permanent national importance' that would 'always remain the standard history of the war'. The *Globe* was equally fulsome in its praise, asserting that, 'From its first inception *The Times History of the War in South Africa* has been a national undertaking, and it fills a place in our literature from which no rival can dislodge it', while the *Daily Mail* viewed the seven volumes as 'a national work of the first importance'.<sup>5</sup> Such acclaim was by no means exceptional and was a reflection of not only the quality of the work but also *The Times*' position as a national institution. Although increased competition had resulted in circulation figures dropping from a peak of approximately 65,000 in the 1870s to an average of 35,000 by the end of the nineteenth century, the paper still retained a disproportionate influence in British political and cultural life. Leading politicians used its letters columns to debate key policy issues while its rivals, although often critical, invariably took their lead from the paper's editorials.<sup>6</sup> Using Stephen Koss's criteria that the stature of a journal should be measured by 'the gratitude it received from those whom it praised, the resentment it incurred from those whom it censured, and, above all, ... by the number of lesser journals that duplicated its contents', then *The Times* was still Britain's pre-eminent newspaper.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A British Officer, 'The Literature of the South African War, 1899–1902', *American Historical Review*, 12 (1907), pp. 313.

<sup>5</sup> Churchill College Archives (ChCA), Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/9, Reviews – *The Times History of the War*.

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Beaumont, 'The Times at War, 1899–1902', in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 67–68.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 9.

Indeed, the extent of *The Times*' power was fully recognised by Sir Frederick Maurice. Embroiled in a long-running dispute over pay and conditions with the Treasury in 1903, he set out, in a memorandum to the War Office, what the consequences would be of denying him the staffing and funding enjoyed by Amery. Without adequate resources, he warned, *The Times History* would become 'the one authoritative History in England' with the result that, 'its influence upon the electorate and both indirectly through them and directly by itself on the House of Commons will make it very hard not to adopt a view of the short service system and of other matters involved in the proposals embodied in the plan of army reform set forth by that newspaper'.<sup>8</sup>

Just as eagerly anticipated by both the general public and the country's political leaders was the official history of the war, published in four volumes between 1906 and 1910. The scope and, consequently, the appeal of official histories had widened considerably in the half-century since the Crimean War. Originally restricted to little more than the compilation of artillery and engineering records, the remit of the official historian had been extended in 1873, when the newly formed Intelligence Branch had assumed responsibility for the histories' production, to include a broad overview of the various small wars in which Britain was engaged.<sup>9</sup> By 1901, the public's fascination with the war in South Africa was such that there was 'a clamour from publishers' to secure the rights over the official history, with the eventual winners, Hurst and Blackett, predicting sales in excess of 10,000.<sup>10</sup> Interest was no less keen at Westminster and Pall Mall. In a letter to Leopold Amery, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles à Court, the British military attaché at Brussels and The Hague, hinted at the excitement that publication of the official history was expected to arouse within the political and military elite when, only half-jokingly, he suggested that the recently appointed official historian, Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, would 'have to go about armed to the teeth for the rest of his days'.<sup>11</sup>

In an addendum to his survey of South African war literature, the anonymous British officer referred to in the opening paragraph of this chapter had a chance to assess the importance of the recently released first volume of the official history. It would, he felt, in combination with *The Times History*, dominate the record of the war. While Amery's vision of the war would 'live for many generations ... amongst amateurs', professional readers would, he was certain,

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<sup>8</sup> TNA, WO32/4756 Memorandum from Sir Frederick Maurice to the War Office, 24 April 1903.

<sup>9</sup> Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815–1940* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 184–185.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, WO32/4755, Memorandum from Major G. L. Gretton to the Sir E. W. D. Ward, 21 March 1903.

<sup>11</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/11, Colonel Charles à Court to Amery, 7 October 1900.

turn to Maurice for an ‘accurate and final record of that campaign’.<sup>12</sup> In holding sway over the written memory of the conflict, *The Times History* and the official history played vital roles in the construction of a publicly accepted version of the past. To uncover just how this collective narrative developed, it is important to examine the production processes of these two histories. In the same way that the apparently consensual vision of the past enshrined in war memorials was cast during the memorialisation process, so the works of Amery and Maurice were shaped by the external pressures of finance and political intrigue. Indeed, for one reviewer in the *Standard* the parallel is particularly apt, for Amery’s volumes were, he insisted, more than a mere history of the war, they were and would remain ‘a lasting monument’.<sup>13</sup> This chapter will, therefore, investigate the evolution and impact of these two key written memory sites, exploring both their preparation and reception.

Recalling his work during the South African War as a *Times*’ correspondent, Leopold Amery claimed that the idea for a history sprang from a throwaway line in a letter he sent from Cape Town in December 1900 to the paper’s manager, Moberly Bell. Replying to a ‘pitiful wail’ from Bell about excessive journalistic expenditure, Amery suggested, ‘as a pure jest’, a ‘history of the South African War in sixty volumes’. It was, he continued, ‘to his complete surprise’ that the proposal was taken seriously.<sup>14</sup> Although Amery’s diary suggests he pressed the matter with rather more urgency, it was undoubtedly the case that serendipity played a part in committing him to a task which was, in his own estimation, to occupy five of the next nine years of his life.<sup>15</sup> Having spent a year as a history fellow at All Souls, Oxford, Amery joined *The Times* in early 1899 as an assistant to Sir Valentine Chirol, the paper’s foreign editor. On 26 August he was despatched to Cape Town to cover what was expected to be a peaceful settlement to the growing diplomatic crisis and, as tensions increased, travelled to Pretoria to report on the Boer view of negotiations. Expelled from the Transvaal on the outbreak of hostilities, he found himself in the right place at the right time and was directed by Bell to assemble a team of correspondents to cover hostilities.<sup>16</sup>

The war caught *The Times* at a critical point in its evolution. Still regarded by the British public as the most authoritative broadsheet, its precarious financial position made it increasingly difficult to live up to this mantle. With an operating profit for newspaper sales in 1896 of £29,955 transformed into a loss of £18,498 by 1900, and with the need to maintain an expensive network

<sup>12</sup> A British Officer, ‘The Literature of the South African War’, p. 320.

<sup>13</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/9, Reviews – *The Times History of the War*.

<sup>14</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds), *The Leo Amery Diaries, Volume 1: 1896–1929* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), pp. 31–33; Amery, *Political Life*, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> Beaumont, ‘*The Times* at War’, pp. 67–70; Amery, *Political Life*, pp. 55–90.

of correspondents in South Africa adding to the financial strain, Bell turned towards the one buoyant branch of the business, the book publishing section, for salvation. Both *The Times Atlas* and *The Times* edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* had brought in substantial profits in the two years before the war in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Amery's proposal, facetious or otherwise, for a serialised history was enthusiastically adopted by Bell who, within the space of three months, had acquired a publisher, Sampson Low, and fleshed out details on price, format, number of volumes and publication dates.<sup>18</sup> All these negotiations taking place, of course, while the war was still in its early stages.

For Amery and Bell then the initial impetus for the production of *The Times History* was profit. To maximise potential earnings, both recognised it was vital to seize the moment and publish 'while public interest was at its height'.<sup>19</sup> Both were also acutely aware that they did not have the field to themselves. In January 1900, Amery, using Valentine Chirol as an intermediary, urged Bell to commit to publishing a history 'soon to prevent all the correspondents writing huge books of their own', while the following month the roles were reversed with Bell imploring Amery 'to get on with it as soon as possible as I hear Winston Churchill and others are going to bring [a history] out in parts'.<sup>20</sup> The need to rush into print before the market became saturated or interest waned shaped the format that the enterprise was to take. The prelude to hostilities, which it was assumed would take up much of the first volume, was to be little more than a rehash of the hugely successful pamphlet on Great Britain and the Boer Republics by Flora Shaw, the paper's colonial editor, while the military operations were to be covered by simply editing the reports from the paper's war correspondents to form a coherent narrative.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the populist nature of the publication that Bell envisaged can be discerned by his rejection of Samson Low's choice for editor of Sir Herbert Maxwell, whose biography of Wellington, Bell claimed, was 'a cure for insomnia', and by his, albeit flippant, suggestion that they might go in for alliterative chapter titles along the lines of: 'Buller's Blunders, Gatacre's Gaffes, Methuen's Madness, White's Wobblings, Rhodes' Roars, Kruger's Krimes [sic]'.<sup>22</sup> A subsequent proposal that the history 'should

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<sup>17</sup> *The History of The Times: The Twentieth Century Test, 1884–1912* (London: *The Times*, 1947), pp. 433–457.

<sup>18</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery 12 January 1900; 19 January 1900; 1 February 1900; 9 February 1900; 16 February 1900; 26 February 1900; 15 March 1900; 20 March 1900; 23 March 1900.

<sup>19</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Amery to Chirol, 23 January 1900 quoted in Barnes and Nicholson, *Diaries*, p. 33; ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 26 February 1900.

<sup>21</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 19 January 1900; 16 February 1900; 7 March 1900; Amery, *Political Life*, p. 151.

<sup>22</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 12 January 1900; 19 January 1900.

mention as many officers as possible especially when they are killed', was, Bell freely admitted, made from a purely 'mercenary motive'.<sup>23</sup>

As work progressed, however, Amery's attitude to the enterprise radically shifted. Swamped by official despatches and operational reports from serving officers, he became increasingly convinced that if the history was to alert the public to the deficiencies in the army's performance that the early months of the war had brought into high relief it would need to be both comprehensive and meticulously accurate. As he explained to General Sir George White, when asking him to review an early draft of Volume II, he 'was very anxious indeed to make *The Times History* a really accurate and impartial work, and nothing could distress me more than if through imperfect information I allowed a garbled version of events or an unfair criticism to be incorporated in it'.<sup>24</sup> Bell was having a similar though by no means so profound change of heart. In a letter to Amery in the spring of 1900 he reluctantly accepted that, as 'histories of the war now abound', they should 'try to make ours The [sic] History of the War'.<sup>25</sup> However, he had far from given up hope of turning a handsome profit. Although still adamant, in a letter sent to Amery in the summer of 1900, that he did 'not want to sacrifice the worth of the book to undue haste', he nonetheless could not restrain himself from adding the caveat that an early publication was still vital if public interest was to be caught before events in South Africa became overshadowed by the deepening crisis in China.<sup>26</sup>

With Volume I completed in draft form by May 1900 and published by December, Bell became increasingly anxious that subsequent volumes, dealing with the military events, should follow in swift succession. No doubt adding to his impatience was Sampson Low's rash pledge in their advertising circular for Volume I that future volumes would be issued at an interval of six weeks with the set complete by May 1901. Even Bell recognised that it would be impossible to keep to this schedule, but with no sign of Volume II by the beginning of 1901, and with some subscribers to the whole set now demanding their money back, mounting frustration drove him to inform Amery that he was 'inclined to cut my losses'. At issue was Amery's decision to abandon a populist approach. In Bell's view, in attempting to produce the definitive account of the conflict, Amery was 'trying to write a history in 1901 which can never be written until 1911'.<sup>27</sup> Although Bell's trust in the project was briefly rekindled, in May 1902, by the positive critical reception for Volume II, the correspondence between Bell and Amery charts an increasingly fractious relationship as continuing delays

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<sup>23</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 27 March 1900.

<sup>24</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, pp. 151–152; British Library, Field Marshal Sir George White papers, Mss Eur F108/66, Amery to White, 22 February 1901.

<sup>25</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 26 April 1900.

<sup>26</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 7 June 1900.

<sup>27</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 20 January 1901.

saw any chance of profit disappear completely.<sup>28</sup> In February 1909, with the concluding volume yet to be published, Bell finally ran out of patience. Insisting that ‘the matter had become a public disgrace’, Bell concluded a stinging letter to Amery with a heartfelt personal rebuke; ‘Because I have hitherto tried to treat the matter jocularly you have chosen to treat all our representations with contempt and absolutely to neglect fulfilling an engagement for which you have been very liberally paid.’<sup>29</sup>

The root cause of what, in Bell’s view, was an unnecessarily extended production period was Amery’s switch from a populist to a self-confessed propagandist approach and his concomitant belief that if the project was to have any impact then it would have to be scrupulously accurate.<sup>30</sup> To achieve the required veracity the manuscript went through an elaborate process of drafting, reviewing and editing. The scope of the task was such that a number of the *Times*’ war correspondents were charged with preparing draft chapters. Thus, the early operations in Natal were covered by Lionel James, Lord Methuen’s advance on Kimberley by Perceval Landon, Stormberg by Major A. W. A. Pollock and Colenso by Bron Herbert.<sup>31</sup> By far the most useful of the former *Times*’ correspondents was Lionel James. A professionally trained journalist, not only did he contribute much of the final copy on the siege of Ladysmith and Roberts’s subsequent advance on Pretoria but he also acted as assistant editor on the first three volumes of the history. Outside experts were also invited to contribute, although the results were occasionally disappointing. A chapter on the British army at the outbreak of hostilities by the future Secretary of State for War, Hugh Arnold-Foster, was dismissed as consisting of ‘mainly figures and statistics’, while Unionist MP J. Parker Smith’s submission was deemed ‘too verbose’.<sup>32</sup> Spenser Wilkinson, lead writer on the *Morning Post* and soon to be elected as the first Chichele Professor of Military History at Oxford, and Major-General Robert Baden-Powell, the hero of Mafeking, were both rejected as potential contributors. Wilkinson, whom Bell had suggested might cover ‘the patriotic government in England’, on the grounds that he was liable to ‘gush’ and Baden-Powell because they ‘would be running the risk of a chapter that would be undiluted Baden-Powell’.<sup>33</sup>

Amery, nonetheless, retained tight editorial control. He cross-checked all work with a mass of official and unofficial material before having it sent out

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<sup>28</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 28 August 1902; 17 April 1903.

<sup>29</sup> Bell to Amery, 13 February 1909, quoted in Barnes and Nicholson, *Diaries*, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 157.

<sup>32</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 11 May 1900; 22 June 1900.

<sup>33</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 22 June 1900; 20 June 1900.



to a variety of experts and protagonists for comment; 'in some cases to over one hundred correspondents'. Suggestions for revisions were then collated with Amery assuming sole responsibility for the production of the final manuscript.<sup>34</sup> Not only was this a lengthy process but it was also one which, inevitably, led to professional tension. Perceval Landon, who had served as a war correspondent for *The Times* between September 1899 and April 1900, found the experience of working for Amery 'a difficult and unpleasant one'. Piqued to find that his account of the battle of Magersfontein had been substantially reworked, he complained, in a letter to Amery in February 1901, that he 'had not expected such a complete "Ameryisation" of the words and phrases used by me'.<sup>35</sup> Although much more latitude was given to Basil Williams, Erskine Childers and Ian MacAlistir who were, respectively, appointed to act as editors on the final three volumes dealing with Roberts's operations after the fall of Bloemfontein, the guerrilla war under Kitchener and various technical aspects of the war, conflict could still arise.<sup>36</sup> Largely in agreement in their reading of military operations during the conflict's long drawn-out endgame, Amery and Childers clashed violently over their interpretation of the post-war reconstruction programme under Lord Milner, the High Commissioner for Southern Africa and first governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony. Amery, who held 'a great personal affection as well as admiration' for Milner, having nearly joined his staff in the summer of 1901, was appalled by what he felt was an overly critical final chapter from Childers on British policy following the Peace of Vereeniging.<sup>37</sup> His decision to rewrite the piece from scratch resulted in a breakdown in relations between the two, with Childers insisting that he should be allowed to use the preface to the volume to disassociate himself completely from the views expressed.<sup>38</sup>

In his autobiography Amery explained why he had attached so much weight to Childers's final chapter. It was in this political epilogue, he argued, that 'the key to the whole work' lay, for the war in South Africa was more than just a 'military story', it was 'a great historical and political event and a turning-point in the history of the Commonwealth'.<sup>39</sup> During the war, Amery had been one of only a few British correspondents who had had any sympathy for the

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<sup>34</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 158.

<sup>35</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/11, Landon to Amery, 15 February 1901.

<sup>36</sup> In fact ill-health forced MacAlistir to resign as editor leaving the volume to be completed by Amery, Lionel James and Charles à Court. ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 2/5/6, MacAlistir to Bell, 22 June 1907; Amery, *Political Life*, p. 334.

<sup>37</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/11, Childers to Amery, 19 June 1905; Amery, *Political Life*, pp. 150–151.

<sup>38</sup> *Times History of the War*, Vol. V, pp. xii–xiii; Andrew Boyle, *The Riddle of Erskine Childers* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), pp. 127–133.

<sup>39</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 334.

Boers, admiring what he called their 'force and passion'.<sup>40</sup> However, this regard had remained firmly constrained by his conservative political outlook and, throughout the crisis in South Africa, he had maintained that the only way 'to break the power of Krugerism' was through recourse to arms.<sup>41</sup> It was almost inevitable, therefore, that *The Times History* would reflect Amery's imperialistic certainty. The reviewer in the *Manchester Courier* regarded the complete work as 'a great lesson in imperialism, its ideals and its duties, which should appeal most strongly to all political thinkers'.<sup>42</sup> Although, unsurprisingly, taking issue with Amery's 'general outlook', the eminent historian and Liberal politician, H. A. L. Fisher, writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, was equally certain that this was 'history with a mission'. 'Its aim', Fisher asserted, was 'to defend Imperialism in the past, to make Imperialists in the present, and by displaying not only the virtues but also the faults of British organisation to strengthen the Empire against the perils of the future'.<sup>43</sup>

The propagation of Britain's imperial mission may have provided the overarching rationale for *The Times History*, but it was the means by which this was to be achieved that most excited Amery. It was, he claimed in later life, the innumerable eye-witness accounts he received in preparation for the writing of Volumes II and III that not only reinforced his belief in the inadequacy of Britain's military preparedness but also convinced him that 'the story of the war could be made the best instrument for preaching Army Reform'.<sup>44</sup> Certainly no attempt was made to mask the unashamedly propagandist nature of the history. The preface to Volume II, which covered the first three months of hostilities up to Buller's defeat at Colenso, made explicit the underlying moral that readers should draw from this dark period in British military history:

The description [of British and Boer military systems] may, I hope, help the reader ... to see underlying the story the real and deeper causes of success and failure, to trace the influence of national characteristics and national organisation for war in the seemingly fortuitous sequence of events, and in the often almost incomprehensible actions of generals and politicians. It is in the realisation of those more deeply rooted causes of our past failures, quite as much as in the indiscriminate adoption of methods found useful in the South African veld, that lie the best hopes of the reforms required to insure the safety and the full development of the British Empire.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 114; Beaumont, 'The Times at War', p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 7 July 1909.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 July 1909.

<sup>44</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 152.

<sup>45</sup> *Times History of the War*, Vol. II, pp. v–vi.

It would certainly appear that the ‘unflinching frankness’ of *The Times History’s* criticism had the desired effect on Field Marshal Lord Roberts, the commander-in-chief of the forces.<sup>46</sup> Amery recalled how Roberts, having read the account of the battle of Colenso in the concluding chapter of Volume II, felt compelled to write to Ian Hamilton to tell him that, ‘It is enough to make a dead man turn in his grave, and the worst of it is that every word of it is true’.<sup>47</sup> Increasingly convinced that national service was the only solution to the nation’s military deficiencies, Roberts subsequently provided substantial assistance with the preparation of Volume III of the history, which advanced the narrative up to the fall of Bloemfontein, offering unfettered access to his war diaries, returning detailed commentaries on draft chapters and inviting both Amery and Lionel James to Englemere, his palatial house in Virginia Water, to use his papers.<sup>48</sup> Lord Kitchener, Roberts’s successor as chief of staff in South Africa, was equally approving of Amery’s approach and objectives. Before leaving South Africa in June 1902, he informed Amery that the Colenso chapter was not at all ‘too severe and that it is necessary to speak out if you wish to reform the army’.<sup>49</sup>

Roberts and Kitchener were by no means the only ones to voice approval of the reformist agenda that underpinned Volumes II and III of the history. Published in 1902 and 1905 respectively, the two volumes were accorded, for the most part, a favourable critical reception. Review after review pointed to the works as object lessons in past military failings and blueprints for future army reform. Writing for *The Times Literary Supplement*, Sir George Goldie, fresh from service on the Esher Commission, was adamant that Volume III raised ‘matters of vital importance to our continued existence as an Imperial or even independent people’. Contending that the opening chapters examining the effects of Black Week were of such consequence that they warranted a separate review, he concluded by suggesting that Amery’s closing words ‘should be posted on every church and chapel door throughout the country: “National military training is the bed-rock on which alone we can hope to carry through the great struggles which the future may have in store for us.”’<sup>50</sup> Herbert Maxwell, in the *Bookman*, was equally sure that ‘the chief lesson’ of Volume III, the ‘necessity for the youth of the nation being trained to arms’, was ‘vital to the security and endurance of the Empire’.<sup>51</sup> The reviewer in the *Graphic* was insistent that the ‘wholesome and disagreeable truths’ which the volume contained would leave

<sup>46</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 152.

<sup>47</sup> News International Archive, Moberly Bell papers, Bell Letter Book 23, Amery to Bell, 19 June 1902.

<sup>48</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/11, Roberts to Amery, 1 January 1903; 29 November 1903.

<sup>49</sup> News International Archive, Moberly Bell papers, Bell Letter Book 23, Amery to Bell, 19 June 1902.

<sup>50</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 June 1905.

<sup>51</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 5/4, Reviews, *Bookman*, July 1905.

no one in 'any doubt as to whether the British Army is what it ought to be', while the *Spectator*, in a belated review of Volume II, worried that:

unless the bulk of the population realise to the full the true import of this writing on the wall – that, as the late Colonel Henderson put it, 'adequate military knowledge should be part of the intellectual equipment of every educated man,' and, above all, that our Army and our Army system are what the nation choose to make them – nothing can save us from irretrievable disaster and ruin.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, for the *Spectator*, the only glimmer of hope lay in the growing public acceptance of Amery's position. It was both 'significant' and 'hopeful', posited the paper's reviewer, that the 'sternly uncompromising criticisms and ruthless dissection of facts and motives, which ten years ago would probably have resulted in sending its authors to Coventry, should have been received by military and non-military reviewers alike with an almost unanimous chorus of agreement and approval'.<sup>53</sup>

There were, however, dissenting voices. Amery received a number of complaints from senior army officers who felt that their treatment in the pages of the history had been unduly harsh. Most notable of these was Sir Redvers Buller who, battling to save an already tarnished military reputation, was particularly aggrieved by Amery's damning indictment of his command during the opening stages of the war.<sup>54</sup> At the root of Buller's complaint was his belief that *The Times History's* interpretation of his abortive campaign to relieve Ladysmith was based on a garbled version of official telegrams which a banning order from the War Office, put in place at the time of his dismissal from the Aldershot command in October 1901, prohibited him from effectively challenging.<sup>55</sup> In an effort to set the record straight, he campaigned both publicly, through the press, and privately, through a protracted correspondence with the War Office, for the full publication of the relevant despatches.<sup>56</sup> Concerned that Buller intended to pursue the matter through the courts, the War Office decided, in June 1902, to place all the contested material in the hands of Parliament and

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<sup>52</sup> *Graphic*, 24 June 1905; *Spectator*, 24 June 1905.

<sup>53</sup> *Spectator*, 24 June 1905. Amery was of the same opinion. He felt that critics of *The Times History* had been much less vocal since the publication of the findings of the Esher and Norfolk Commissions, which had made public many of the shortcomings of the army's performance in South Africa. Amery, *Political Life*, p. 219.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Beckett views Amery's trenchant condemnation of Buller as a particular flaw of *The Times History*. See Ian F. W. Beckett, 'The Historiography of Small Wars: Early Historians and the South African War', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 2: 2 (1991), p. 287.

<sup>55</sup> Amery had, in fact, been at the forefront of the campaign to have Buller removed. See Amery, *Political Life*, pp. 152–157.

<sup>56</sup> *The Times*, 28 May 1902; TNA, CAB 37/61, papers on alleged libel on Sir Redvers Buller in *The Times History*.

the dispute fizzled out the following month when the full text of the telegrams was published in *The Times*.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, that the whole issue was never considered a threat to the historical integrity of *The Times History*, or for that matter to its financial viability, can be discerned from the publisher's 'jubilant' assertion, on being informed that Buller might sue for libel, that a court case would 'be a splendid advertisement'.<sup>58</sup>

Criticism, although largely overshadowed by acclaim, also surfaced in press reviews. Unsurprisingly, the influential Liberal paper, the *Westminster Gazette*, was unimpressed by the opening volume of *The Times History*, seeing in it no more than 'a restatement of the causes of the war and of events which led up to it from the point of view which *The Times* has adopted during the last five years'.<sup>59</sup> Undoubtedly more aggravating for Amery than such political sniping was the allegation in one popular daily that his criticisms of the army's performance in South Africa were unpatriotic. Under the banner headline, 'Unwarrantable!', the *Daily Mirror* expressed outrage at what it perceived to be an 'amazing attack', in Volume III, on the 'physical and moral endurance' of British soldiers at Spion Kop. It was, fulminated the paper's reviewer, not only an opinion which would 'arouse universal indignation' but also a clear sign of the declining standards of *The Times* generally.<sup>60</sup> This was followed up three days later by an angry letter to the *Mirror's* editor from a retired major-general, who, insisting that 'the British soldier cannot be excelled by those of any nation', dismissed Amery's views as 'perfect nonsense and not worth contradicting'.<sup>61</sup>

However, such outright condemnation was rare. More often than not, when critics found fault, it was with Amery's analysis of specific technical aspects of military operations rather than his broader conclusions. Typical was the verdict of the distinguished American naval theoretician, Captain T. Mahan, in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Although taking issue with the claim in Volume II that the war had 'finally established the unqualified supremacy of firearms over any form of the more primitive weapons', he nonetheless concluded on a note of harmony, agreeing that, in highlighting Britain's military and political unpreparedness for war, 'Mr. Amery correctly sees the leading lesson of these hostilities'.<sup>62</sup> In a similar vein, the reservations that both *The Regiment* and the *Army and Navy Gazette* had about the third volume's critical assessment

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<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 8 July 1902.

<sup>58</sup> ChCA, Leopold Amery papers, AMEL 1/1/6, Bell to Amery, 5 May 1902.

<sup>59</sup> *Westminster Gazette*, 12 December 1900.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 27 May 1905.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 30 May 1905.

<sup>62</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23 May 1902.

of the role of volunteers were all but lost in what were otherwise wholehearted endorsements of the *History's* standpoint.<sup>63</sup>

Debates over the finer points of operational tactics may have animated Mahan and other military specialists but they were of only marginal significance for the general public and popular press. Reviewers for the new mass circulation papers, with little time or space for detailed critiques, seized on the controversial tone of *The Times History* as a means of engaging the interest of their readers. Typical were the *Evening News* and the *Daily Mail*, two of the country's best-selling dailies. Aware of a good story when they saw one, both papers employed eye-catching headlines to bolster their reviews of Volume III; the *Evening News* opting for, 'The Army and the Nation: Sensational Indictment' while the *Daily Mail* settled on the not dissimilar, 'Sensational Indictment of Army Methods'.<sup>64</sup> Volume II, as Amery was to concede in the first instalment of his autobiography, *My Political Life*, had been subjected to equally superficial treatment at the hands of the mass dailies. 'Reviewers were', he noted, 'laudatory, but very few of them showed any real appreciation of the extent of the new light thrown on the actual operations as a whole. Most of them, indeed, were more concerned with such high lights [sic] as my criticism of Buller's conduct at Colenso'.<sup>65</sup> This process of critical distillation, a process that monumental narratives such as *The Times History* are inevitably subjected to, may have disappointed Amery but it undoubtedly played an important part in shaping the public memory of the war in South Africa in the years following the conflict. As our anonymous 'British Officer' disapprovingly observed in the *American Historical Review*, the British public, who 'revel in ... pungency', were bound to be attracted by 'the sting and virulence of its irresponsible criticism'.<sup>66</sup>

The officially produced *History of the War in South Africa*, by contrast, contained little that was designed to enflame public passions. However, this is not to say that its genesis was any less protracted or its impact on the public's vision of the war any less important. The decision to produce an official account of the conflict was taken in the autumn of 1900 when Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, Roberts's former director of intelligence in South Africa, was appointed to the task. Having already established a first-class reputation as a military writer, Henderson was anxious that the project's appeal should not be restricted to the narrow confines of the military and governmental cognoscenti. His suggestion that a more populist approach could result in a not insubstantial financial return for the government persuaded the Secretary of State for War, St John Brodrick, to waive the War Office's right to arrange publication and in

<sup>63</sup> *The Regiment: An Illustrated Military Journal for Everybody*, No. 488 (May 1905), p. 34; *Army and Navy Gazette: Journal of the Militia and Volunteer Forces*, 27 May 1905, p. 411.

<sup>64</sup> *Evening News*, 31 May 1905; *Daily Mail*, 31 May 1905.

<sup>65</sup> Amery, *Political Life*, p. 160.

<sup>66</sup> A British Soldier, 'Literature of the South African War', p. 321.

June 1901 a contract for a seven volume history was signed between Henderson and the commercial publishers, Hurst and Blackett.<sup>67</sup> The terms of the contract stipulated that the work would not only contain ‘commentaries on the strategy, tactics and organisation’ of the army but that, by ensuring the ‘political history’ of the conflict was fully treated, ‘every effort [would] be made to make it picturesque and popular’.<sup>68</sup>

On Henderson’s death in March 1903, Major-General Sir John Frederick Maurice, the author of the official history of the 1882 Egyptian campaign, was brought out of retirement to assume responsibility for the project. Although ready to concede that Henderson’s work, which dealt with the political backdrop to the war, was ‘certainly not in the ordinary form of official history’, Maurice was nonetheless keen that the scheme should not revert to the more traditional ‘blue book’ approach.<sup>69</sup> ‘A dry statistical record of the war will no doubt be useful for future reference’, he informed Field Marshal Lord Roberts shortly after his appointment, ‘but it will be read by hardly anyone, and is certainly not the form of history which the public everywhere has been led to expect and for which those who had relations engaged in the war have been looking’.<sup>70</sup> Trained from an early age for an academic career, Maurice eschewed some of the more ‘partisan expressions’ of Henderson, arguing instead that the task of the historian was ‘solely to get at the facts ... and to allow inferences to be drawn from the success or failure that attended the action taken’.<sup>71</sup> Yet, his insistence that it was not the official historian’s ‘business to pronounce private opinions’ was not meant to challenge the terms of the original contract with Hurst and Blackett that the work should appeal to the general public and should include a full examination of the preparations for, and political context of, the war.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout Henderson’s time overseeing the official history, the government had little interest in the project beyond a mild concern that the work should be completed in good time and on budget. Initially, the only change that Maurice’s appointment brought about was to exacerbate this concern. Arguing that at the current rate of progress the history would take a further twenty-eight years to

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<sup>67</sup> TNA, WO32/4759, Note from Major G. L. Gretton to Sir Edward Ward, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for War, 21 March 1903.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, WO32/4759, Memorandum on ‘Proposed Official History of the South African War in 1901’, 2 January 1903. Indeed, just how popular Hurst and Blackett anticipated the history would be can be seen in the remarkably generous contract they drew up with Henderson. Terms of a £300 advance on each volume and 30 per cent royalties were, noted Henderson’s aide, Major G. L. Gretton, ‘almost unprecedented’. TNA, WO32/4759, Gretton to Ward, 21 March 1903.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Maurice to Roberts, 20 October 1903.

<sup>70</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Maurice to Roberts, 20 October 1903.

<sup>71</sup> Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, pp. 174–176; TNA, WO32/4758, Maurice to Sir Edward Ward, 28 September 1903.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Maurice to Ward, 28 September 1903.

write and stretch to fourteen volumes, Maurice insisted, in a memorandum sent to the War Office a month after his appointment, that he would require a staff of twenty-one officers at a cost of £10,000 per annum, plus his own salary of £800 per annum, if the work was to be completed within the three year period to which Henderson had originally agreed.<sup>73</sup> Anxious to see 'the volumes brought out as rapidly as they could be before interest has gone back', St John Brodrick attempted unsuccessfully to persuade a reluctant Treasury to accede to Maurice's requests.<sup>74</sup> After protracted negotiations the best Brodrick could procure was a staffing budget of £6,000 per annum for three years in addition to Maurice's salary of £800 per annum.<sup>75</sup> Although the Treasury's insistence on savings is hardly surprising at a time of army spending cuts, the decision to restrict the official history's funding was not simply a financial one. Both the Treasury and Brodrick were uncertain that any study of the conflict in South Africa warranted such an extravagant deployment of resources as those demanded by Maurice. The Treasury initially suggested that if it was impossible to complete the history on the original budget granted to Henderson then the best solution would be simply 'to omit the less important details', while Brodrick intimated to Maurice that he was unlikely to receive the support he wanted 'because, though a great war for us, it is hardly a Franco-Prussian war in its lessons – especially after the first twelve months'.<sup>76</sup>

The death of Henderson and subsequent dispute over Maurice's terms and conditions of employment had the effect of galvanising Brodrick's interest in the project and towards the end of September 1903 he ordered a detailed review of the completed chapters to be undertaken. The results did not make happy reading. The anonymous War Office reader was not only doubtful about the literary merits of Henderson's work but also its suitability as a government publication. Noting that the third chapter covering the diplomacy in the immediate lead up to the war 'bristles with controversial matter', he concluded by suggesting that it would be more fitting if an official history were to 'begin with the declaration of war and end with the declaration of peace'.<sup>77</sup> This was a view that was shared at the highest levels of government. Alerted to the controversial nature of Henderson's work by the Secretary of State for

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<sup>73</sup> TNA, WO32/4756, Memorandum from Maurice to the War Office, 24 April 1903.

<sup>74</sup> King's College, LHCMA, Maurice Mss, 2/3/79, St John Brodrick to Maurice, 8 May 1903.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, WO32/4761, Financial Secretary to the Treasury to War Office, 23 July 1903.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, WO32/4757, Memorandum from the Treasury to the War Office, 8 July 1903; King's College, LHCMA, Maurice Mss, 2/3/79, Brodrick to Maurice, 8 May 1903. In a later memorandum, Brodrick identified the aspects of the war that he felt deserved 'special treatment'. These were: '1) The Natal Campaign, October 1899 to February 1900; 2) Stormberg; 3) Lord Methuen's battles; 4) Kimberley; 5) March on Bloemfontein'. TNA, WO32/4757, Memorandum, Brodrick to Treasury, 13 July 1903.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Memorandum, unsigned to Brodrick, 7 October 1903.



Foreign Affairs, Lord Lansdowne, the cabinet informed the War Office that ‘a dry narrative of the actual events of the war would be preferable to a political history’.<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, Hugh Arnold-Foster, who by this time had succeeded Brodrick as Secretary of State for War, acceded to the cabinet’s recommendation and instructed Maurice to start work afresh, producing ‘strictly an official account of the war, written as nearly as circumstances will allow upon the lines of the German Official History of the War of 1870’.<sup>79</sup>

Although Maurice agreed to tone down ‘all expressions of party proclivities’ and to reduce the political context to a bare minimum, his revised manuscript proved to be no more acceptable to the authorities than Henderson’s original.<sup>80</sup> Of particular concern, as exemplified by the following extract from the new introduction which Maurice submitted for review in October 1904, were passages which passed judgement on the former Boer leadership:

The war, which these volumes record, was in nothing more remarkable than in this, that it was a contest most unwillingly waged by a great peace-loving empire against small states which, at the time when the war began, had come under the dominion of an autocracy based on an oligarchy. For many years the one purpose of the autocrat and his agents had been to organise the whole people for war. That preparation had only one object, the expulsion of British authority and the substitution for it of the autocracy as supreme throughout South Africa.<sup>81</sup>

For General Sir Neville Lyttleton, the newly appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff, such views had no place in an official publication. Having read the proofs of the re-worked first three chapters, he informed Maurice that by stating ‘officially to the Boers that they fought and died not for their Republic but for the personal autocracy of Mr Kruger’, he was highly likely ‘to give offence to our new fellow subjects in South Africa’. Lyttleton concluded by insisting that political expediency had to take priority over literary merit:

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<sup>78</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Brodrick to Sir Edward Ward, 25 September 1903.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Memorandum, Arnold-Foster to Maurice, 17 November 1903. Indeed, the strength of the War Office’s objections to Henderson’s work can be gauged by the lengths they went to in order to have publication suppressed. Maurice, Henderson’s executors and his typist were all contacted to ensure that they did not possess copies of the manuscript and legal advice taken to confirm that anyone pirating the work could be prosecuted. Furthermore, a request by the publishers, Hurst and Blackett, to produce an edition of the first three chapters with all reference to the official history removed was denied. TNA, WO32/4758, War Office memorandum, 4 March 1904. Despite these precautions, some copies of the original manuscript did survive and Henderson’s chapter on the state of the British army in 1899 appeared in a posthumous collection of his essays, *The Science War*. See Beckett, ‘The Historiography of Small Wars’, pp. 289–290.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, WO32/4758, Maurice to Sir Edward Ward, 28 September 1903.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Beckett, ‘The Historiography of Small Wars’, p. 290.

The political history contained in the official history of the war should be made as concise as possible and should be limited to a colourless narrative of events and conditions and that all expressions that might be regarded as of His Majesty's Government on controversial points should be omitted. He is particularly moved to make this suggestion by his desire that nothing, which can be avoided, should be done to impede the reconciliation of races in South Africa.<sup>82</sup>

Hugh Arnold-Foster and Lord Lansdowne were equally perturbed by Maurice's efforts. While Arnold-Foster dismissed the work as little more than a 'political romance', Lord Lansdowne was concerned that the multiplicity of 'irrelevant' passages would be 'taken hold of, particularly if the book comes out under the auspices of a government department'.<sup>83</sup> Despite support from a characteristically bullish Joseph Chamberlain, the former Secretary of State for the Colonies, for whom the authorities were 'so fearful of offending our enemies that they are unable to defend ourselves', Maurice was left with no option but to remove all the offending sections and restrict himself solely to an examination of the military operations.<sup>84</sup> His only consolation was the inclusion of a partial disclaimer in the preface to Volume I in which he explained that the absence of any political commentary was the result of the government's belief that it would be 'undesirable to discuss here any question that had been at issue between them and the rulers of the two republics, or any points that had been in dispute at home, and to confine this history to the military context'.<sup>85</sup>

When Volume I was eventually published in June 1906 the press reception was, according to Andrew Green in his study of the official history of the Great War, favourable but not enthusiastic.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, the anonymous British officer, surveying the literature of the South African war for the *American Historical Review*, although impressed by Maurice's industry was, nonetheless, doubtful that the work would be a commercial success. Arguing that Maurice's 'impartial narrative' was worthy but lacking in popular appeal, he reasoned that the British public, overcome by an apathetic cynicism towards all military questions, was:

unlikely ... to study a book like the official *History* which fails to afford the attraction of the impalement of unsuccessful generals. By the soldier, however, who desires to master his profession, the official *History of the War in South Africa* will be found a mine in which true ore can be dug. To the

<sup>82</sup> TNA, WO32/4760, General Sir Neville Lyttleton to Maurice, 16 January 1905.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, WO32/4760, Arnold-Foster to Lansdowne, 23 December 1904; Lansdowne to Arnold-Foster, 22 December 1904.

<sup>84</sup> King's College, LHCMA, Maurice Mss, 2/3/97, Chamberlain to Maurice, 6 February 1905.

<sup>85</sup> Maurice, *History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. I, Preface and p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Green, *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories, 1915–1916* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 7.

impartial historical student it presents evidence which may be accepted as above suspicion.<sup>87</sup>

The sales figures would appear to support this verdict. Only 4,500 sets of the history were sold with the project as a whole making a loss of over £30,000.<sup>88</sup>

For many reviewers, of much greater interest than the actual content of the official history was its controversial genesis. Indeed, press interest in the chequered beginnings of the history pre-dated the publication of the first volume. In March 1906, the *Spectator* concluded its review of *The Official Account of the South African War* by the Historical Section of the German General Staff, by noting that, 'It has been rumoured that the preliminary chapters of [the official history], as prepared by Colonel Henderson, showed the ungarbled truth to be so unpalatable that the late government absolutely forbade their publication and went so far as to have the entire manuscript burned'.<sup>89</sup> Despite a letter of correction, carefully concocted by the War Office in collaboration with the editor of the *Spectator*, Lytton Strachey, appearing three months later, speculation about government interference continued to dominate the press coverage.<sup>90</sup> Typical was the notice which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* in July 1906. The opening paragraph indicated that the history had failed to live up to expectations, observing that it was originally:

to have been a work conceived in the great style, one which was not only to illustrate the great principles of the art of war by the example of our failures and successes against the Boers, but also to bring out the place of that campaign in the history of the political development of the British Empire, and the national, as well as purely military, lessons which that campaign could furnish to statesmen as well as citizens.<sup>91</sup>

The remainder of the piece then moved on to a detailed examination of the obstacles that had prevented such lofty ambitions being fulfilled. Chief among these, so the reviewer argued, was 'the action of the War Office authorities'.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, criticism of this nature gained such currency that Maurice felt obliged to open Volume II with a rebuttal. A 'Note to the Reader', dismissing the 'fiction that has gone abroad that the official history has been much "sub-edited" in the interest of Departments concerned', insisted that 'the only subject on which

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<sup>87</sup> A British Officer, 'Literature of the South African War', p. 321.

<sup>88</sup> Beckett, 'Historiography of Small Wars', p. 293; *The Times*, 6 April 1911.

<sup>89</sup> *Spectator*, 24 March 1906, p. 461.

<sup>90</sup> TNA, WO32/4762, Strachey to Sir Edward Ward, 31 March 1906; Ward to Strachey, 4 April 1906; *Spectator*, 7 June 1906, p. 535.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 13 July 1906, p. 246.

<sup>92</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 13 July 1906, p. 246.

any officer asked for change [was to] any phrase that might affect our relations with our Boer fellow subjects'.<sup>93</sup>

Although Maurice persevered with the task of producing an account of the war as comprehensive and objective as the constraints of his War Office remit would allow, the pressure of work, exacerbated by on-going disputes with the Treasury over spiralling costs, undermined his health and he was compelled to retire in 1908. The project was eventually put under the direction of the newly established Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence and the fourth and concluding volume was finally published in 1910.<sup>94</sup> The finished history had, then, clearly failed to live up to Maurice's original aspirations. By omitting any reference to the political context of the conflict it had fallen short of educating the general public in the complexities of modern warfare and, notwithstanding the disclaimer in the second volume, it had never been able to shrug off the widely held belief that it had been tainted by the dead hand of official censorship. The sense of an opportunity missed was perhaps best given in Maurice's obituary which appeared in *The Times* on 13 January 1912:

If he had been given a free hand, then these volumes [of the *History of the War in South Africa*] would, without the smallest doubt, have been among some of the most interesting ever written, but the actions of the authorities did not do much to lighten the historian's task. It was decided that it was undesirable to discuss any questions that had been at issue between ourselves and the Boer Republics or any points that had been in dispute at home, while the earlier period was only to be mentioned so far as it concerned the necessary modifications in the plan of campaign, which were influenced by the unwillingness of Her Majesty's Government to believe in the necessity of war. It was, perhaps, in all circumstances inevitable that Sir Frederick should have decided not to discuss controversial military questions, but the result of the decision was equally inevitably to make the official history a colourless statement of facts rather than one which might guide and form the opinions of soldiers.<sup>95</sup>

In Volume II of *The Times History*, Amery opened the account of military operations in South Africa with a sweeping indictment of the British army. As an institution, he argued, it flattered to deceive: 'The numbers on its roll were large, the uniforms of the members through all the ranks of the military hierarchy most distinctive, their traditional ceremonies, known as parades, inspections, guards, elaborate and pleasing to the eye, the regulations to which

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<sup>93</sup> Maurice, *History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. II, 'Note to the Reader'.

<sup>94</sup> Volume III was published in 1908 with no author being credited; Volume IV appeared two years later with Captain Grant of the newly established Committee of Imperial Defence's Historical Section as the acknowledged author.

<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 13 January 1912.

they submitted, infinitely complex. As a fighting machine it was largely a sham'.<sup>96</sup> Although Maurice disagreed fundamentally with this viewpoint, he was realistic enough to recognise that his scrupulously detailed and objective exploration of the problems facing the British army in South Africa would do little to mitigate the criticism. 'It was', he resignedly admitted in Volume II of the official history, 'much more popular to ignore all this and throw the whole blame on our "ignorant generals" and our "stupid soldiers"'.<sup>97</sup> In this, Maurice was undoubtedly correct. Not only did Amery's stirring narrative trump the 'colourless statement of facts' contained in the official history, but, by reopening contentious debates, *The Times History's* polemics pandered to the public's appetite for scandal. In turn, the protracted and problematic genesis of the official history raised rumours about a War Office cover-up which served to reinforce Amery's critical interpretation of the conflict. It is this version of the war, of a poorly prepared and ill-led army outwitted by a resourceful enemy, which set the tone for subsequent histories and, as we will see in the next chapter, continued to colour the popular memory of the war for the rest of the century.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *The Times History*, Vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>97</sup> Maurice, *History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. II, p. 206.

<sup>98</sup> See Howard Bailes, 'Technology and Imperialism: A Case Study of the Victorian Army in Africa', *Victorian Studies*, 24: 1 (Autumn 1980), pp. 84–85.