

## REVIEWS

exercising their own judgement rather than being beholden to a radical programme. Even if the author is right that 'moderate' Liberalism was in decline at local level by 1895, surely it was precisely a reassertion of

moderate Liberal values that guided the party back to power in 1906.

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Morgan and Emyr Price, in their work on the young Lloyd George and the Liberal Party in Wales in the late nineteenth century. The important contributions of other historians to our understanding of a complex movement still regrettably lie buried in unpublished doctoral and masters' dissertations.

Some of the themes discussed in Mr Hughes's impressive volume are fairly well known. These include the discussion of Alfred Thomas's ambitious 'omnibus' measure, the National Institutions (Wales) Bills of 1891–92, T. E. Ellis's highly contentious decision to accept the position of junior whip in Gladstone's fourth administration in July 1892, and the steps which led to the famous meeting at Newport in January 1896, an event which heralded the ignominious collapse of the entire *Cymru Fydd* movement. Even so, the author has marshalled a great deal of new evidence to embellish his well-written narrative. Other themes covered in this volume

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## Wales of the future

Dewi Rowland Hughes, *Cymru Fydd* (University of Wales Press, 2006)

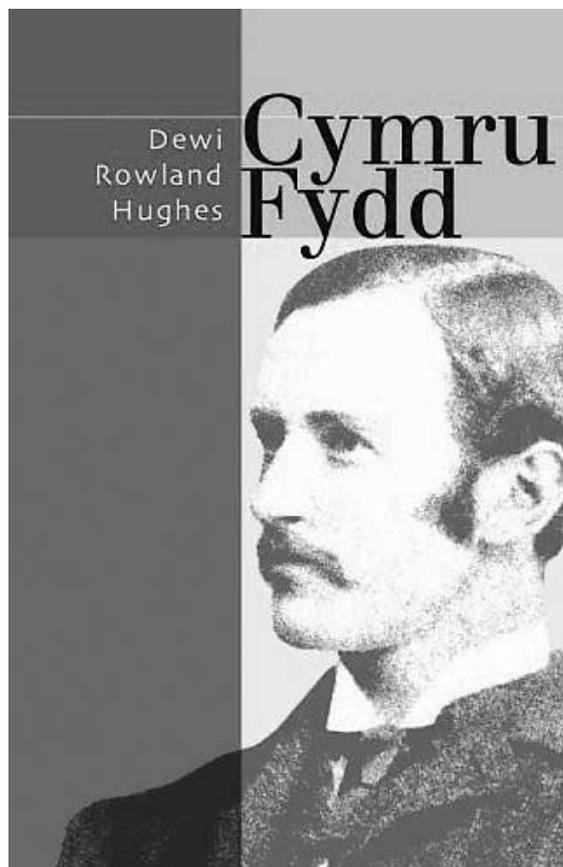
Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

**T**HIS SLIM but significant volume, published in the Welsh language, is to be warmly welcomed. *Cymru Fydd* was a patriotic movement, literally 'Wales of the future', known in English as 'Young Wales', formed at London in 1886, primarily by emigré Welshmen, on the model of Young Ireland, its programme appearing 'a manifesto against old age'. It conceived its nationalist mission in terms of a native cultural and linguistic tradition, and was based largely on the Welsh intelligentsia. Its most prominent members included mediaeval historian John Edward Lloyd, Oxford don and litterateur Owen M. Edwards, journalist Thomas Edward Ellis (who became Liberal MP for his native Merionethshire in 1886), and barrister W. Llewelyn Williams (in 1906 to be elected the Liberal MP for the Carmarthen Boroughs), the last named asserting that the *Cymru Fydd* movement was concerned with 'true politics'.

The second branch of the society was formed, significantly, at Liverpool, but the movement was notably slow to put down roots in Wales; the branch established at Barry in 1891 was the first bridgehead in south Wales. Thereafter branches were set up in many parts of Wales, often closely

linked with the traditional organisation and personnel of nonconformist Liberalism. The movement had published its own journal, *Cymru Fydd*, since January 1888, and it won the backing of the Welsh popular press, particularly of the veteran Thomas Gee in *Y Faner*, and of the youthful David Lloyd George, elected MP for the Caernarfon Boroughs in April 1890. Initially a cultural and educative movement, *Cymru Fydd* became, under the influence of T. E. Ellis and Lloyd George, a political campaign, Ellis underlining 'the necessity of declaring for self-government'. Home Rule thus became central to the *Cymru Fydd* programme, while Michael D. Jones and others even intended it to oust the Liberal Party and become an independent Welsh national party. A new nationalist journal, *Young Wales*, was launched in January 1895.

Yet *Cymru Fydd*, although highly significant, has tended to be somewhat neglected by historians. The last time a monograph was devoted to the movement was more than sixty years ago when William George, brother of Lloyd George, edited the volume *Cymru Fydd* (1945). Much valuable work on the movement has been undertaken since then by scholars, notably Kenneth



are highly original: details of the organisation of the *Cymru Fydd* society and the nature of its individual branches, the significance of the first Welsh county councils, elected in January 1889 (and the councillors and aldermen elected, most of whom are shown to be middle-class nonconformists), the component elements within the highly disparate Welsh Parliamentary Party after 1886, and the structure and nature of Welsh Liberalism during these crucial years. The text is embellished by a number of helpful charts and tables.

In the wake of this compelling analysis, much fascinating information emerges on a number of Welsh politicians, notably Thomas Edward Ellis (Merionethshire) of course, but also Stuart Rendel (Montgomeryshire), J. Herbert Lewis (Flint Boroughs), D. A. Thomas (Merthyr Tydfil), Alfred Thomas (later to become Baron Pontypridd) (East Glamorgan) and, not least, the youthful David Lloyd George (Caernarfon Boroughs). We also catch fascinating glimpses of the attitude towards Wales of successive Liberal Prime Ministers W. E. Gladstone and Lord Rosebery.

Not that this volume represents the last word on *Cymru Fydd*. Further work needs to be undertaken on the nonconformist ethos which underlay the movement and its unique distinctive culture, on the closely intertwined land and tithe questions, and on the legacy of the movement after 1896 when attempts were made to revive it. There were *Cymru Fydd* branches in existence in some English cities right up until the Second World War. By far the weakest section of Mr Hughes's volume is the all-too-brief chapter 10 (pp. 188–93) which devotes just four short pages to a discussion of the significance of the movement and its legacy. Yet that legacy was highly significant, even in the

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transition from nonconformist, Liberal Wales in the late nineteenth century to secular, Labour Wales in the twentieth.

The volume is attractively produced, with a picture of a youthful Tom Ellis on the dust-jacket, but it contains only one photograph inside – a frontispiece of those present at a history seminar convened by the Oxford Union in 1884, among them again a young Tom Ellis. More illustrations and cartoons would have added to the appeal of an attractive tome. Some of the many sources cited in the

footnotes do not appear in the bibliography of sources used. One final grouse – the price. At £35, the volume, which runs to just over 200 pages, is on the expensive side.

One can but hope that the author will now feel able to make his highly important research work available to an English audience. It would be sure of a warm reception.

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### **Learning the lessons of history: John Stuart Mill and politics today (continued from page 17)**

along these outdated lines. On tax, Mill made a sharp distinction between earned wealth, acquired through individual effort and initiative, and unearned riches, acquired through inheritance. He advocated a single rate of income tax – an idea in vogue among some right-wingers today – but also argued for supertax on inheritance to prevent the passing down between generations of 'enormous fortunes which no one needs for any personal purpose but ostentation or improper power'.

In a mental universe of left and right, there is a danger that liberalism is seen occupying a neutral, soggy centre – the Switzerland of political argument. True liberals are neither tame nor safe: Mill was thrown in jail aged 17 for distributing literature on contraception; threatened with death over his prosecution of Governor Eyre, who slaughtered hundreds of Jamaicans; and introduced the first bill to give women the vote, for which he was vilified in the press. 'Why is Mr Mill like a tongue?' joked *Punch*. 'Because he is the Ladies' Member.'

Liberalism suffered during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the titanic

struggle between capitalism and state socialism, it seemed to have little to say. Now liberal democracy has 'won', the thoughtful efforts of the liberals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are ripe for re-harvesting. The need to provide a more secure political and intellectual footing for our liberties is urgent. Familiarity with freedom has bred if not contempt, then perhaps complacency. Liberal society is a historic achievement, but it does not stand up on its own: each and every one of us has to make it anew. 'The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it,' warned Mill. 'With small men no great thing can really be accomplished.'

*Richard Reeves is the author of John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand, published in November 2007. See page 2 for reader offer.*

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*Contributions to the 'Learning the Lessons of History' series are invited. They should be thought-provoking and polemical, between 1500 and 2500 words in length.*