

The Peacemonger

Lord Davies was one who stood for great ideals, for which he was ready to spend his health and his fortune. He had the imagination of a poet; he saw great visions. His deep sincerity, his great generosity, his burning faith made him one of those rare beings who overcome obstacles and change the course of history.

*Viscount Cecil of Chelwood*¹

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

*Tribute of the King Edward VII Welsh
National Memorial Association*²

David Davies, the first Baron Davies of Llandinam, was born on 11 May 1880 at Llwynderw, Llandinam, Montgomeryshire, the first child (and only son) of Edward Davies who three years earlier had married his cousin Mary Jones, the daughter of the Revd. Evan Jones of Trewythen. There were also to be two daughters of the marriage, Gwendoline Elizabeth (1882–1951) and Margaret Sidney ('Daisy') (1884–1963), who were eventually to become the two famous Davies sisters of Gregynog Hall, Newtown.

Edward had been the only son of the first David Davies (1818–90), popularly known as 'Top Sawyer', an enormously successful capitalist and philanthropist who had amassed a huge personal fortune from the collieries, railways and docks of south Wales, and who had himself served as the Liberal MP for Cardigan Boroughs from 1874 to 1886. 'Top Sawyer' had been highly regarded as the epitome of all that was best in the Welsh, nonconformist way of life, and was deeply revered in his native Montgomeryshire. Mary Davies had died in 1888, leaving the three infant children to be brought up by their maternal aunt Elizabeth Jones who four years later married her brother-in-law, thus becoming the second Mrs Edward Davies. Edward, who had himself suffered from indifferent health for a number of years, died in 1898, leaving David Davies II, at just eighteen years of age, and his two younger sisters as the joint ben-

eficiaries of a cash estate exceeding £2,000,000, more than 10,000 acres of land, a substantial shareholding in the Cambrian railways and a controlling interest in the renowned Ocean Coal Company and Barry Docks. The young David thus found an array of industrial responsibilities thrust upon him, but he also enjoyed the unwavering support of his stepmother who possessed exceptional intelligence and ability. He also shared the energy, enterprise and determination of his grandfather.

David Davies was educated at Merchiston Castle, a public school in Edinburgh, where rugby football was regarded as vital and where he was dubbed '110% man', and at King's College, Cambridge from 1899 to 1903, where he graduated in history. At Cambridge he was viewed as an avid nonconformist and teetotaler, and was described as 'an impetuous Welshman with a great sense of humour and an infectious laugh'.³ Upon graduation Davies went on big game expeditions to Alaska, Vancouver and Washington, and he owned a ranch in Edmonton, Canada from 1907 until 1918. During 1904 he also spent a considerable period in Japan, and was one of the few westerners to be a long-term eye-witness of the Russo-Japanese conflict.

Upon his return home to Wales, Davies devoted his energies to improving agricultural practices on the Llandinam estate, and became one of the most avid of the founders of the Welsh National Agricultural Society. Welsh native breeds of cattle were conscientiously nurtured at Llandinam, and Davies is himself credited with saving the Welsh pig from extinction. He also developed a keen interest in fox hunting, diligently building up his own pack of foxhounds, and acquiring, too, his own pack of beagles. Other pursuits included shooting, rearing pheasants and entertaining his wide range of friends and acquaintances to good sport. In 1906 he became chairman of the Ocean Colliery group, one of the largest employers of labour in south Wales, with coal mines centred on the Rhondda and Taff Vale area.

In the landslide Liberal victory of the same year David Davies began his active political career when he succeeded A. C. Humphreys-Owen, Glansevern, as the Liberal MP for his native Montgomeryshire.⁴

In many ways he was a very strange choice. Both his grandfather 'Top Sawyer' and his father Edward had turned Liberal Unionist back in 1886, and he himself conspicuously diverged from the party line on most political issues: he was flatly opposed to Irish home rule, he tended to favour tariff reform on the lines advocated by Joseph Chamberlain (perhaps endorsing the taxation of imported food), he was not a supporter of church disendowment, and had even come out in opposition to Lloyd George's campaign against the provisions of Balfour's 1902 Education Act. He adhered to the party line only over temperance (he remained a teetotaler), and he was a fervent Calvinistic Methodist. Some Montgomeryshire Tories hoped that he might well be caajoled into joining their ranks.

Indeed in 1906 Davies entered parliament unopposed, standing on a highly personal, ambivalent political platform which combined policies taken from both the Liberal and Conservative election manifestos, apparently having won over both local parties.⁵ He thus entered the Commons like some eighteenth-century landowner, at once voicing his heartfelt distaste for the cut-and-thrust of parliamentary life. Very rarely did he participate in Commons debates, and he could never shed a consciousness of feeling ill at ease when speaking in public. Neither did he feel closely bound by party ties. Generally he preferred to rely on the services of the huge personal staff which he built up, and he was anxious to discourage the formation of a local party organisation within Montgomeryshire. Parliamentary procedure and niceties repelled him.

Within his constituency, however, Davies' position was totally secure. On the eve of the First World War the local Conservative press could write of the county's agricultural communities: 'In recent years they have given themselves over to, not Radicalism by any means, but the cult of David Daviesism. They have nothing in common with the Radical-Socialism which nowadays masquerades under the name of Liberalism'.⁶ During his early years in the Commons Davies had certainly gone his own way; he had voted against the land clauses of Lloyd

George's 'People's Budget' of 1909, and in 1910 he pronounced publicly against Irish home rule.⁷

The impact of war

David Davies' life, like that of so many of his contemporaries, was transformed by the outbreak of war in September 1914. He served in the South Wales Borderers and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and by November he had attained the rank of lieutenant-colonel and was channelling his prodigious energies into the raising of a new battalion – the 14th RWF Caernarvon and Anglesey. Although military life was completely new to him, his fertile imagination was totally captured by the necessity for rigorous military training, and he readily expended his own personal resources in purchasing field telephones, a supply of bicycles and other equipment, while also making available his own hunters for use as chargers.

His own unit, subjected to an uniquely vigorous training in Snowdonia, reached the western front in December 1915, and spent the first five months in the trenches around Laventie, Festubert and Givenchy. Davies' impetuosity as a commanding officer soon became proverbial, as did his propensity for experiments with unconventional weapons and for schemes to lure the enemy troops out of their trenches. But he developed a profound distaste for the squalor and filth of trench warfare and the massive loss of life which had already taken place. While on leave from his battalion during January 1916 he spoke freely in the House of Commons, pleading for changes in recruiting methods and in the production of munitions.

In June he was suddenly recalled to England and was appointed parliamentary private secretary to David Lloyd George on his becoming Secretary of State for War. One of the future prime minister's biographers has described Davies as 'a talkative, wealthy and light-hearted young Welshman in whose friendship and gossip he [Lloyd George] took much delight at this time'.⁸

During the successive critical months Davies played a key role in

keeping Lloyd George informed of the mood of the rank and file of the Parliamentary Liberal Party by keeping his ear to the ground in the smoking rooms and lobbies of the House of Commons and the clubs of Westminster.⁹ At this point the personal rapport between the two men was evidently very close; in November Davies was responsible for purchasing and furnishing a flat in St James's Court for his ally. He also made persistent overtures concerning the purchase of the *Westminster Gazette* 'in the Government interest'.¹⁰

During these fateful months, too, he made soundings of his Liberal parliamentary colleagues to discover their feelings towards a possible Lloyd George premiership, and during the crucial first week of December it was Davies, together with Dr Christopher Addison and F. G. Kellaway, who was primarily responsible for motivating support for Lloyd George. When his ally duly became prime minister and formed his renowned 'Garden Suburb', Davies received his reward, becoming one of his inner circle of trusted advisers and given a special responsibility for the drink trade and its possible state purchase. He was also responsible for liaison between the War Office and the 'Garden Suburb', and he visited Petrograd as a member of Lord Milner's delegation for the only Allied conference to be convened in Russia. Sensing at first hand the imminent collapse of the Czarist regime, he hastened to keep Lloyd George informed of developments in Russia.

Thereafter, however, the warm rapport between the two men rapidly crumbled. Davies' self-image as a 'self-appointed candid friend' soon antagonised both the prime minister and some of his closest associates. He was soon reduced to self-parody as 'a harmless sort of lunatic – always grouching and criticising'.¹¹ In his lengthy epistles to Lloyd George, Davies engaged in virulent criticism of many of their parliamentary colleagues, the general conduct of the allied war effort, the failure of the allies to render greater assistance to Serbia, and finally the government's decision to permit a 33.33 per cent increase in the brewing of beer. The crunch came in June 1917 when it was

announced that Lord Northcliffe rather than Balfour had been appointed the head of a high-powered mission to the United States to precipitate American entry into the war. Davies was unrestrained in his criticism:

23.6.17

My dear Chief,

I have seen various people of all colours this week and the impression left on my mind is that the Govt. stock and yours in particular, is tumbling down. The Reform [Club] is seething with discontent, and even the Tories are beginning to ask questions. ...

It's no good, my dear Chief, you can't go on fooling the people indefinitely. They take you at your word – if you play them false they will send you to Coventry with Winston. They thought you *were* a man of his word, who would not tolerate delay, who would make a clean sweep of incompetents – ministers or soldiers. They thought you *were* out to win the war for the vindication of the principles we are fighting for. Making the fullest allowances for all the tremendous difficulties which have beset your path, have you employed the best means of fulfilling these expectations – have you run the straight course? Have you set your teeth and done what was obviously the right thing – regardless of other considerations? This was the one course which could bring you success and victory in the long run. The moral factor is the only one which counts in the end, and that is why so many brilliant people come to grief. ...

You can call me anything you like my dear Chief – it's damned unpleasant – but it is the truth.

Yrs.

Dafydd bob man¹²

By return of post came Lloyd George's devastating response:

24 June, 1917

My dear Davies,

I regret having to tell you that there is a concerted attack to be made upon me for what is called 'sheltering' in a soft job a young officer of military age and fitness. I am told that the attack is associated with the efforts made to re-inforce the Army by re-examining the rejects. It is urged that it is a scandal to force men of doubtful fitness into the fighting line when others whose physical efficiency is beyond question are shirking under powerful protection. I hear that Welsh parents – North and South – are highly indignant and

do not scruple to suggest that your wealth is your shield. I know that you are not responsible, but they blame me, and as I know that you are anxious not to add to my difficulties in the terrible task entrusted to me, I am sure you will agree that I am taking the straight course intimating to the Committee set up to re-examine men in the public service that in my judgement you can render better service to your country as a soldier than in your present capacity.

I have put this quite bluntly to you, as I have always found you preferred plain speaking, however disagreeable. My only apology is for having withheld from you so long rumours which were detrimental to your patriotism and courage, both of which I know to be beyond reproach.

Ever sincerely,
DLIG¹³

The attack was blatantly unfair, for Davies had commanded his battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in France with bravery and distinction. His dismissal from the Cabinet Secretariat at this point heralded a permanent rift with the Prime Minister, an irrevocable parting of the ways. It was Davies' subsequent ambition to return to command a battalion in France, but he soon found his ambitions thwarted, probably by Lloyd George.

The cause of world peace

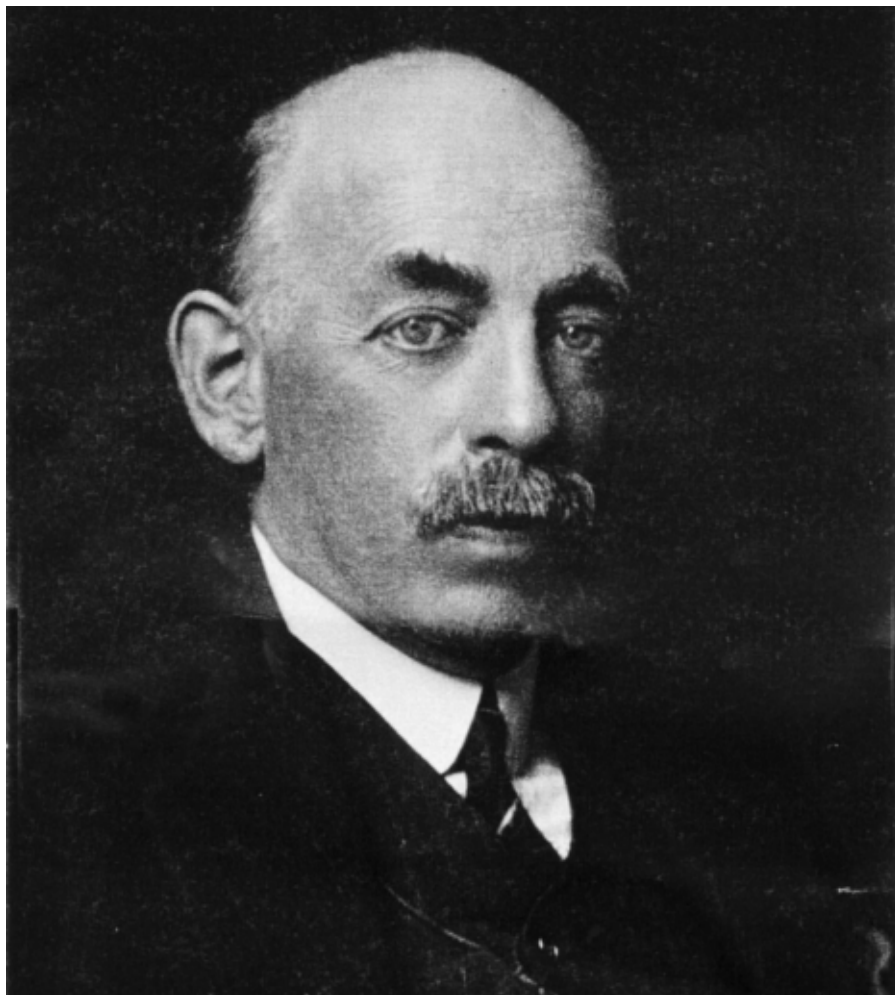
It was then his lot to make use of his parliamentary platform to press for an improved conduct of the Allied war effort and for some consideration of the pressing issues which would inevitably accompany the peace. He became almost totally divorced from party politics and began to interest himself in the idea of a League of Nations to exclude the possibility of a similar world conflict in future. As he mulled over in his mind his terrible experiences on the western front, he became convinced that another world war must be outlawed. Thereafter he spoke regularly in the Commons on the necessity to establish a League of Free Nations.

Davies was one of those who promoted a national conference held at Llandrindod in June 1918 to discuss a measure of devolution for Wales. Inevitably perhaps, it soon became a notably

damp squib. In 1919, together with his two sisters, he endowed the Wilson Chair of International Politics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (the first chair of its kind at any British university), dedicated to the memory of those students who had perished in the conflict, to foster the study of the inter-related problems of law and politics, ethics and economics, raised by the project of the League of Nations. The first holder of the new chair was the eminent political scientist Sir Alfred Zimmern who soon distinguished himself in the position. His eventual successors included prominent historian Charles Webster and E. H. Carr, an outstanding authority on international relations, notably on the affairs of Soviet Russia.

The League of Nations Union duly came into being on 13 October 1918 shortly before the signing of the Armistice with a founder membership of 3,000. Sir Edward Grey was its first president, distinguished Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray was chairman, and Davies was vice-chairman. All three were prominent and respected Liberals. In 1919 David Davies was one of the primary instigators of the formation of the International Federation of the League of Nations Societies, and in 1922 he was one of the founders of the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations Union to which he donated the princely sum of £30,000 to establish an endowment fund.¹⁴ It soon proved a most flourishing body in Welsh life. Thereafter Davies journeyed to the USA in pursuit of co-operation with American peace societies.

This impassioned quest for international peace extended to a number of ambitious initiatives. It was even proposed, following the death of Lord Northcliffe in 1922, that David Davies might purchase *The Times* newspaper for £1,500,000. He responded characteristically positively, calculating that a controlling interest might be purchased for £900,000; he himself was to put up £500,000, and his two sisters the residue. The venture was to be wholly philanthropic with all profits donated to charity. It was even suggested that former prime minister David Lloyd George, recently ousted



David Davies, first baron Davies of Llandinam (1880–1944)

from power, might serve as editor (a scenario unique in the history of British journalism). But the bizarre proposal soon became a damp squib. Another ultimately abortive proposal was that a national 'Temple of Peace' might be built on the site of Devonshire House, Piccadilly.

Throughout the 1920s David Davies devoted himself above all else to the cause of world peace, making use of the Welsh Council of the League of Nations Union to exert pressure on the League of Nations to adopt a more aggressive policy. He spared no effort to secure the return of the USA to the League. A succession of conferences on international education was held at Gregynog Hall and was attended by many distinguished foreign educationists. In 1926 Davies regarded as a personal coup the admission of Germany as a Council Member of the League of Nations at the AGM of the Federation of League of Nations Societies which he insisted should be held at Aberystwyth rather than Dresden. It was he

who personally paid the expenses of more than 100 delegates from twenty-two countries.

For the common good

An array of other interests and activities filled his every waking hour. Davies and his two sisters were the primary founders in September 1910 of the King Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association (the 'WNMA') set up to combat the scourge of the 'white peril' – tuberculosis – which was so rampant in Wales at the beginning of the twentieth century. He himself became the Association's first chairman, and he also chaired its finance committee. Of the £175,000 collected during the first year of its existence, the Davies family personally donated no less than £150,000. By the eve of the first world war the Association owned eighty-seven hospital beds, 148 sanatorium beds, while almost 9,000 patients had been examined during the course of 1914 alone. Its activities expanded rapidly throughout the

war years so that by 1919, when 12,660 patients were examined, there were 473 hospital beds and 594 sanatorium beds. Upon discovering that the WNMA was inadequately equipped for research, Davies and his two sisters shouldered single-handed for many years the total cost of maintaining a laboratory and paying the salary of a specialist bacteriologist.

They, too, in 1921 were responsible for endowing a Chair of Tuberculosis Research at the Welsh National School of Medicine to which they donated £12,500. When Davies died in 1944 his work in establishing the WNMA was rightly applauded as 'the most outstanding of his manifold activities on behalf of the people of Wales'.¹⁵ At the same time journalist David Raymond pointed to the 'unsolved paradox' of Davies' life and career: 'He was a rich coal owner. It was a position he inherited. Most of his life-work was devoted to curing the ills partly created by the very industry from which he drew his income'.¹⁶

David Davies was well aware that the appalling death rate from tuberculosis in many Welsh counties, his native Montgomeryshire included, was largely the consequence of poverty, poor housing and living conditions, malnutrition and an ignorance of basic dietary and hygiene requirements. Consequently he set about devising schemes to improve housing conditions, initially within the Montgomeryshire towns of Llanidloes, Machynlleth and Newtown. In 1913 he and his sisters had set up the Welsh Town Planning and Housing Trust charged to design model towns and villages where housing would be monitored, and facilities for amenity and recreation made available. This progressive scheme, following swift upon the heels of the passage of the 1910 Town Planning Act, first came to fruition at Wrexham where a housing estate of 245 houses was built between 1913 and 1917. Similar enterprises followed at Barry (with a family holiday centre attached) and at Rhiwbina near Cardiff. Davies was also instrumental in devising a scheme whereby the Great Western Railway Company assumed responsibility for building and letting houses to its employees.

Parallel with David Davies' work on behalf of health care and housing in Wales must be considered the enormous contribution which he made to the educational development of the principality. His grandfather, 'Top Sawyer', had generously supported the foundation and early development (to 1886) of the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth. His father Edward had served as the college's indefatigable joint treasurer from 1891 until his death in 1898.

Shortly after his graduation from Cambridge in 1903, Davies, his stepmother and his two sisters all began to take an avid interest in the fortunes of 'the college by the sea'. In that year all four donated £2,000 to build the Edward Davies Chemical Laboratory in the town. In 1907 he endowed the college's Chair of Colonial History, in the same year accepting the vice-presidency of the college together with Sir John Williams Bart, the distinguished royal physician. From 1926 until his death he served as the President of the College, urging the beginning of a building programme on the Penglais site overlooking the town, launching an appeal fund for £300,000, and in 1935 agreeing to contribute up to £10,000 on a £ for £ basis to a fund established by the college's Old Students' Association.¹⁷ This objective was indeed achieved before Davies' death in 1944.¹⁸ Back in 1918 he had also been instrumental in ensuring the appointment of the distinguished composer (Sir) Walford Davies as Professor of Music at Aberystwyth.

Davies was also a fervent supporter of the National Library of Wales ever since its foundation in 1907, donating materials, pressing for reasonable conditions in connection with the grant of a royal charter, and serving as one of the first members of the Library's Council. In May 1927 he was elected its president, and was re-elected three times to the same position, personally welcoming the King and Queen to the formal opening of the completed library buildings in July 1937. His regular contributions to the institution's building fund were unfailingly lavish, and he ensured that the substantial archive of colliery, railway, shipping and dock records

accumulated by his grandfather 'Top Sawyer' should be deposited at the Library's Department of Manuscripts and Records.¹⁹ In May 1939 an impressive portrait of Davies in oils, the work of S. Morse Brown, was donated by his friends to the Library.²⁰

David Davies' munificence to these national institutions was made possible by the massive income which he continued to receive as chairman of the Ocean Coal Company. Yet his concern and generosity extended, too, to the coalminers employed by the company. He was instrumental during the war years in persuading his fellow-directors to inaugurate a voluntary pension scheme for the staff of the Ocean Coal Company, and he arranged for the Deep Navigation coalmine to construct the first pithead baths in the whole of Wales (the second in Britain). During 1920 a company welfare officer was appointed and an Ocean Area Recreation Union formed which soon led to local associations in each of the Union's seven districts. An impressive array of initiatives and facilities followed.

Davies' other business commitments, which he invariably took seriously, included directorships of the Midland Bank and of the Great Western Railway Company. His chairmanship of Ocean Coal and of Ocean Coal and Wilsons vexed him particularly as the severe economic depression of the 1920s began to bite. As the mounting crisis in the coal industry reached crisis point during 1925–26, Davies was generally out of action, laid low by major surgery necessitated by the removal of a duodenal ulcer. Yet from his sickbed he protested vehemently against the unrelenting stand of the representatives of the Mining Association of Great Britain in their evidence before the Samuel Commission set up by Baldwin's government in 1925 to investigate the pressing problems facing the British coal industry.

His own outlook in this connection was clearly influenced by his campaign for international peace. Finally compelled to make his own representations directly to Sir Herbert Samuel as the commission's chairman, he voiced his heartfelt distaste for the 'evil spirit which appeared to vitiate and befog

every utterance of the coal-owners'.²¹ Appalled by the total lack of conciliation apparent in the evidence of the colliery owners, and convinced that the 'Triple Alliance' of colliers, railwaymen and transport workers would be called into play, Davies urged conciliation. He was adamant that the views of the coal owners in relation to the seven-hour working day in the mines were wholly mistaken, and urged recourse to the International Labour Office to solve the dispute.²² He believed passionately that an independent tribunal should be established to arbitrate the disputes which arose in the coal trade, but his advanced views were disregarded as events moved inexorably towards the general strike of May 1926 and the subsequent long lock-out in the coal industry.

Out of politics

It was the very same sequence of events which led to David Davies' final severance with Lloyd George and his resignation as the Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire. As already noted, the two men had parted company back in 1917. In the 'Coupon' general election of December 1918 Davies was yet again returned unopposed to Westminster, having, it would seem, been offered the infamous 'coupon' as an indication of favour from the coalition government machine and having publicly repudiated it, dismissing the gesture as 'an unsolicited testimonial, I assure you. I never asked for it... A great many people are beginning to protest against the kind of labelling which is going on at present'.²³

During the lifetime of the post-war coalition government he rarely appeared at Westminster, and, when he did surface, was generally to be found in the opposition lobby: 'I support the Coalition when it proposes measures based on Liberal principles', he wrote.²⁴ Describing the coalition as 'this new order of shameless opportunists', he was notably venomous in his personal attacks on Lloyd George who, he asserted, was fully prepared to 'sacrifice nearly all our principles in order that certain statesmen might remain in office'.²⁵ A fervent advocate of reunion between the two Liberal camps

(Asquithian and Lloyd Georgeite), Davies was vehemently opposed to the suggestion that the Coalition Liberals might consider 'fusion' with Bonar Law's Conservatives. Parliament, he thundered, had become 'simply a registering machine for the decrees of the Cabinet', 'practical government' having become the preserve 'of the chosen few'. Indeed, in his view, the Prime Minister had 'well-nigh become an absolute dictator'.²⁶

He railed consistently against what he regarded as the government's excessive public expenditure, and was one of only three Liberal MPs from Wales to vote against the Temporalities Bill to disendow the Welsh Church. Only over the Irish settlement of 1921 did Davies applaud Lloyd George's achievement – 'He has gone off the rails in the past, but he is on the right track now and his greatest war achievements have been entirely eclipsed in this latest triumph'.²⁷ This sense of admiration and respect, however, proved notably short-lived as Davies returned to assailing the Prime Minister as the term of office of the coalition government drew to its close.

In both the general elections of November 1922 and December 1923 David Davies was returned to parliament unopposed. Within Montgomeryshire, such was his personal popularity and prestige that he was considered 'unassailable', 'the premier of Wales when the time comes',²⁸ and local interest focused simply on 'the brand of Liberalism Col. Davies will adopt'.²⁹

At times he himself doubted whether he should continue to sit at Westminster. Fully absorbed by his abiding commitment to the work of the League of Nations and by an array of philanthropic initiatives to improve the lot of his fellow Welshmen, on more than one occasion he asked pointedly, 'Is it right that I should endeavour to represent the County in parliament when obviously so much of my time has to be devoted to other work?'³⁰ His appearances at Westminster were few and fleeting, while his constituency engagements had dwindled to almost nothing.

No contested parliamentary election had taken place in Montgomeryshire

since 1906. Yet the circumstances of the 1923 poll – a superficial reunion of the two wings of the Liberal Party in defence of free trade – appealed greatly to Davies when he addressed election meetings in support of a number of Liberal candidates in Wales. In 1924 he easily repelled the challenge of a pioneering Socialist aspirant, Arthur Davies. At this juncture it seemed that David Davies might well feel predisposed to continue as Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire, but events soon took a dramatically different turn.

Davies had always looked askance at Lloyd George's accumulation of a private 'Political Fund', which he had built up between 1918 and 1922, allegedly by selling political honours and distinctions. From the spring of 1924 onwards the former Prime Minister had made lavish use of his 'Fund' to finance a number of autonomous policy committees to investigate the economic ills of the nation and attempt to evolve radical policies for their remedy. Their findings were then pub-

lished in a succession of detailed reports, among them *Coal and Power* (1924), *The Land and the Nation* (the 'Green Book') (1925) and *Towns and the Land* (the 'Brown Book') (1925).

Of these by far the most contentious were the proposals of *The Land and the Nation* which proposed that British agriculture might be developed through the adoption of a scheme for the state purchase of agricultural land which would then be leased to working farmers under strict supervision at fixed rentals. These proposals came close to advocating the nationalisation of rural land and immediately enraged many prominent Liberals. Among them was David Davies who became even more incensed at the renewed fissure in the ranks of the Liberal Party caused by its reactions to the general strike in May 1926, and who intimated his intention to resign as MP for Montgomeryshire. Although the original 'Green Book' proposals were soon substantially modified, and repeated pleas were made to Davies to reconsider, he reiterated his

David Davies and his son, Mike, about 1922



intention to stand down as, in his view, the Liberals had become 'a party whose policy is no longer based on Liberal principles, whose Parliamentary leader is no longer to be trusted, and whose organisation is no longer inspired by the true spirit of Liberalism'.³¹

Again local Liberals begged Davies to review his position. 'Personally I don't want to stand again as I am sick of politics', he confided to Sir Donald Maclean, 'If the party is going to be bribed by Lloyd George we may as well shut up shop, at any rate for the present'.³² Richard Jones, the chairman of the Montgomeryshire Liberals, genuinely feared that the seat might be lost to the Conservatives at the next general election if another Liberal candidate stood:

I would not like to be a party to the rejection of so admirable a man. With a great name – famous traditions – rich personal qualities – and a good Liberal to boot, he would prove a tower of strength in the keen fight that is facing us. The Liberal Party in the county should make everything subservient to the prime consideration of retaining the seat.³³

Davies was adamant, and local Liberals were compelled to choose a new parliamentary candidate, a process in which Davies intervened by attempting to ensure that the nomination went to his own personal nominee W. Alford Jehu of Llanfair Caereinion. In this unworthy objective his ambition was thwarted as the choice fell on E. Clement Davies, 'by an overwhelming majority', and it was he who was duly elected to parliament on 30 May 1929. David Davies, although chosen president of the Montgomeryshire Liberals, generally remained conspicuously aloof from his successor's first election campaign.

International affairs

Predictably, following his retirement as an MP, David Davies devoted much of his time to international affairs. Convinced that the Covenant of the League of Nations was incapable of preventing the recurrence of war, he came to advocate the setting up of both an impartial tribunal to settle international disputes and an international police force to en-

force its decisions. His proposals, however, were widely rejected out-of-hand as visionary and impracticable. Davies' response was to write and publish the massive tome *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* (1930), an attractive work with an array of appendices which was generally well received by the critics. Sales, however, were sluggish; most copies were despatched as gifts by the author. Throughout 1931 the domestic economy and international relations rapidly deteriorated, provoking Davies to declare, 'We are prepared to die for our country, but God forbid we should ever be willing to think for it'.³⁴

Somewhat dejected by the conduct of the League of Nations Union, in 1932 David Davies turned to a new body, the New Commonwealth Society. Now created the first Baron Davies of Llandinam by Ramsay MacDonald, he looked askance at Japanese aggression in Manchuria and at what he regarded as the spineless acquiescence of the British foreign secretary Sir John Simon. June 1934 saw the publication of a second important work from his pen, *Force*, which virulently attacked the relative impotence of the League of Nations and again pressed for an International Tribunal and Police Force. During the same year he donated the sum of £60,000 to finance the building of the Temple of Peace which still adorns Cathays Park, Cardiff to this day.

Lord Davies' energy and enthusiasm for the causes in which he believed so passionately knew no bounds. He campaigned tirelessly to increase the membership of the New Commonwealth Society (year after year he wrote off its debts) and he addressed his fellow peers regularly on the need for an international tribunal and police force. When in June 1935 the League of Nations Union organised the National Peace Ballot, the extent of Lord Davies' influence in Wales became immediately apparent as the twelve highest returns in the whole of the United Kingdom were recorded in Welsh counties. Montgomeryshire, with a turnout of 86.6 per cent, was the highest of them all.

The same year saw the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Lord Davies and Winston Churchill were generally lone

voices protesting against the failure to impose sanctions against Italy. During the years leading up to the outbreak of the second world war, Lord Davies was an imposing voice, notably in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian*, the letters page of *The Times*, and the House of Lords, as German rearmament gathered momentum and Czecho-Slovakia was invaded. A public speech in London in May 1937 summed up the kernel of his philosophy: 'Our purpose is to make force the servant of right'.³⁵

It was noted in the press that he had lent support to Labour candidates in recent by-elections,³⁶ and, amidst avid speculation that a general election might well be imminent, it was rumoured in the Welsh press that Lord Davies' son, the Hon. Michael Davies, was likely to stand as an independent Liberal in Montgomeryshire against Clement Davies.³⁷ Although Lord Davies at once dismissed the press conjecture as 'pure gossip and invention', he implored Clement Davies, a member of the Simonite Liberal group in the Commons ever since 1931, to return to the mainstream party fold:

We shall never emerge from this torpor until the Liberal and Progressive flag is once more unfurled ... So will you allow me once more, as a Hen Liberal ['old Liberal'], to plead with you most earnestly and sincerely to join the ranks of the Independent Liberals in the House of Commons?³⁸

By this time Lord Davies had become totally convinced of the need to form a 'United Front' of all progressive forces in British political life as a base to fight against the appeasement policies of the Chamberlain government. In November he had appealed to Sir Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to condemn appeasement as 'the very antithesis of any policy based on League principles and the system of collective security', imploring him, 'Why not declare war openly against the existing regime, and join with others in creating a United Front of all the progressive parties in our country?'³⁹ During 1938 he had twice travelled to the USA in the cause of peace.

When war followed in September 1939, Lord Davies occupied himself fully with drafting lengthy memoranda on national policy for the war effort.

He began to formulate plans for a federation of free countries in Europe after the end of hostilities. He was moved to action above all by the Russian assault on Finland in November and began to set in motion a Finnish Aid Committee and Bureau, even visiting Helsinki. The ultimate defeat of Finland vexed him enormously.

Later campaigns involved the evacuation of children, a defence of the reservoirs serving the great cities, and a movement to reform the procedures of the House of Lords. Subsequently Lord Davies began to campaign for a Supreme War Council. The war years saw the publication of a number of volumes penned by him, among them *Federated Europe* (1940), *The Foundations of Victory* (1941) and *The Seven Pillars of Peace* (1943). By this time he had himself fallen victim to cancer of the spine and he died at Llandinam on 16 June 1944. Three months later his eldest son Mike was killed in action with the Sixth Royal Welch Fusiliers on the borders of Holland.

In 1910 David Davies had married Amy, the fourth daughter of L. T. Penman of Broadwood Park, Lanchester. There were two children of the marriage, a son David (always known as Mike), who briefly became the second Lord Davies in 1944, and Margarite, who died at school at the age of eighteen. The 1910 honeymoon had been spent big game hunting in Africa where it is thought that Amy contracted a rare tropical disease from which she eventually died in 1918 following years of ill-health.

In 1922 Davies married Henrietta Margaret (Rita) (died 1948), daughter of James Grant Fergusson of Baledmund, Pitlochry, Perthshire. Rita proved to be an extraordinarily devoted partner, fully in tune with her husband's philanthropic impulses, notably those related to health. There were to be four children of the second marriage – Mary, Edward, Islwyn and Jean. The present (third) Lord Davies, born in 1940, is the son of the second baron, and still resides at Plas Dinam, Llandinam, Montgomeryshire.

The National Library of Wales has a bust by Sir W. Goscombe John and the portrait by Murray Urquhart, while the

famous portrait by S. Morse Brown is by now in the custody of the National Museum. A further portrait by Augustus John is at Berthddu, Llandinam. A large archive of Lord Davies' papers, many relating to the organisation of the New Commonwealth Society, has been deposited at the National Library. His biography remains unwritten.

David, Lord Davies, was undoubtedly *the* public-spirited Welshman of his age, blessed with an exceptionally retentive memory and an ability to take a distant view of events. But he did tend to rely on his wealth to achieve results, and he was reluctant to concede that short cuts were not always available to achieve his cherished goals. Consequently he could be imperious and impatient at times, described by Sir Wynn Wheldon as 'notable for kindness and terribleness' (a phrase originally used by Elizabeth Barrett Browning to describe an acquaintance).⁴⁰

In his most important book *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* (1930), he summed up the crux of his belief in international co-operation:

We shall never get real prosperity and security until we get peace; we shall never get peace until we get justice, and we shall get none of these things until we succeed in establishing the rule of law by means of the creation of a really effective international authority equipped with those two vital institutions, an equity tribunal and an international peace force.

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- 1 Cited in Peter Lewis, *Biographical Sketch of David Davies (Topsawyer), 1818–1890, and his grandson David Davies (1st Baron Davies), 1880–1944* (n.d.), p. 17.
- 2 N(ational) L(ibrary of) W(ales), Welsh National Memorial Association Records, file 11, tribute of the WNMA to Lord Davies, 27 June 1944.
- 3 Lewis, op. cit., p. 21.
- 4 Kenneth O Morgan, 'Montgomeryshire's Liberal century: Rendel to Hooson, 1880–1979', *Welsh History Review* XVI (1992–93), 99–100.
- 5 *South Wales Daily News*, 5 and 15 December 1905; *Montgomeryshire Express*, 5 January 1906; *Montgomery County Times*, 9 January 1906.

- 6 *Montgomery County Times*, 18 March 1913.
- 7 See Davies' election addresses in the general elections of January and December 1910.
- 8 Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George* (London, 1975), p. 335.
- 9 See the correspondence published in Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George His Life and Times* (London, 1954), pp. 379–82.
- 10 Joseph Davies, *The Prime Minister's Secretariat, 1916–1920* (Newport, 1951), p. 56.
- 11 House of Lords Record Office, Lloyd George Papers F/83/10/5, Davies to Lloyd George, 27 May 1917.
- 12 Ibid. F/83/10/7, Davies to Lloyd George, 23 June 1917.
- 13 Ibid. F/83/10/8, Lloyd George to Davies, 24 June 1917.
- 14 Davies' work in this connection is noted in Goronwy J. Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace* (Cardiff, 1969).
- 15 *The Times*, 17 June 1944, p. 6, cols. f–g.
- 16 *Reynolds News*, 18 June 1944.
- 17 *Western Mail and South Wales News*, 23 April 1935.
- 18 *The Times*, 17 June 1944.
- 19 NLW, Llandinam Papers.
- 20 See the fulsome tribute by the NLW Librarian Sir William Llewellyn Davies published in the *Western Mail and South Wales News*, 20 June 1944.
- 21 Cited in Lewis, op. cit., pp. 34–35.
- 22 Davies argued that the coal owners should have concentrated their efforts on proving that the British coal industry was the victim of unfair competition from the continental coalfields where eight- or even nine-hour working days were the norm. See David Davies, 'The coal position in South Wales', *Welsh Outlook*, October 1929, pp. 38ff, where Davies argues powerfully that the Italian market had been lost to Welsh mines mainly because of the demand for German 'reparations' which would be paid in coal as imposed by the victorious allies from 1920 onwards. Germany supplied the bulk of the raw materials which fuelled the dramatic rise in Italian industrial production after the war.
- 23 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 3 December 1918.
- 24 Ibid., 3 February 1920.
- 25 *The Times*, 26 March 1920.
- 26 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 30 September 1919.
- 27 NLW, Lord Davies of Llandinam Papers (uncatalogued), Davies to Thomas Jones, 7 December 1921.
- 28 *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 23 October 1922; *South Wales News*, 1 November 1922.
- 29 *Montgomery County Times*, 28 October 1922.
- 30 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 23 October 1923.
- 31 NLW, Lord Davies of Llandinam Papers, Davies to Richard Jones, 15 November 1926 (copy).
- 32 Ibid., Davies to Maclean, 7 December 1926 (copy).
- 33 Ibid., Jones to T. Hughes Jones, 27 February 1927.
- 34 Cited in Lewis, op. cit., p. 38.
- 35 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 29 May 1937.
- 36 *Western Mail*, 3 December 1938.
- 37 Ibid., 17 December 1938.
- 38 NLW, Clement Davies Papers 11/3, Lord Davies to Clement Davies, 19 December 1938.
- 39 NLW, Lord Davies of Llandinam Papers, Lord Davies to Eden, 9 November 1938 (copy).
- 40 Dictionary of National Biography, 1941–1950 (London, 1959), p. 200.