

Dr J. Graham Jones uses Lloyd George's early diaries and correspondence files in the custody of the National Library of Wales to examine the nature of the courtship between David Lloyd George and Margaret Owen between 1884 and their marriage in January 1888.

DAVID A



ND MAGGIE

DAVID LLOYD George's love of women of all kinds, and enthusiasm for their company, are proverbial. Throughout his adult life, even in old age in the 1930s, he eagerly participated in a string of amorous liaisons; he was totally incapable of remaining loyal either to his wife, Dame Margaret, or to his long-term mistress and confidante for more than thirty years, Frances Stevenson. Indeed, his earliest diary, that for 1878, when Lloyd George was just fifteen years of age, reveals that he was already being sorely tempted by the attractive young ladies of Criccieth and Porthmadog.

Slim and handsome, with dark, wavy hair and piercing blue eyes, he was eyed eagerly by the local girls and he, in turn, found them irresistible. From his middle teens he found himself tormented by starkly conflicting, deep-rooted emotions – his preoccupation with the fair sex and his ambition to succeed professionally in his future career, probably as a lawyer, possibly as a politician. Relationships

Lloyd George, with Margaret and his two daughters, Mair and the infant Megan, in the garden of their Wandsowrth home (c. 1902).

with young ladies inevitably demanded time and money; the young Lloyd George had precious little of either. Moreover, the all-abiding influence of his revered uncle and mentor Richard Lloyd (to all intents and purposes his adopted father from 1864), coupled with the emphasis of the sermons which he heard in the local chapel (the gist of which he painstakingly noted in his early diaries) had convinced him beyond all doubt that preoccupation with girls would prove an unwelcome distraction from his studies and would be likely to harm his reputation at Llanystumdwy. Surely there were more important, pressing tasks than the pursuit of pretty young women?

These considerations were constantly being reinforced by the counsels of LG's elder sister Mary Ellen George (b. 1861), an austere, strait-laced, notably puritanical individual who regularly reprimanded her young brother Davy for flirting with the young ladies of the locality. After one such solemn ticking-off in the high summer of 1880 (when Lloyd George was now seventeen and a half years of

age), he noted very seriously in his diary:

This I know that the realization of my prospects, my dreams, my longings for success are very scant indeed, unless I am determined to give up what without mistake are the germs of a 'fast life' ... What is life good for unless some success, some reputable notoriety be attained – the idea of living merely for the sake of living is almost unbearable – it is unworthy of such a superior being as man.¹

His nephew, the late Dr W. R. P. George, believes that Lloyd George's first romantic involvement was with a 'Miss Jones of Glascwm' whom he first met 'in the romantic surroundings of Penmachno' near Bettws-y-Coed which, apparently, he had visited at the insistence of Rev. John Roberts, the Porthmadog Baptist lay preacher and republican. Following an evening service at the local chapel, Lloyd George took Miss Jones 'sweet and twenty' as she was, for a walk along a leafy country lane at Penmachno and was, it seems,



totally captivated by her beguiling presence. Even such an innocent stroll attracted the attention of local gossips – much to Lloyd George's concern: 'I was awfully afraid of it becoming known by all the sisterhood and through them to other persons from Porthmadog and Criccieth who may go there to preach.'²

Although the regular evangelical visitations to Penmachno continued at the instigation of Rev. John Roberts, the relationship with 'Miss Jones' did not, brought to an abrupt end by the young lady herself who had heard persistent local rumours that her suitor 'was an awful flirt and was having an affair with a Porthmadog girl at the same time'. She was also annoyed by the letters – 'too independent for her liking' – which Lloyd George had sent her. Not long afterwards Miss Jones agreed to marry the local doctor, LG consoling himself that the unhappy course of events was probably for the best: 'Well, I am not sorry ... I think it is better for her that she

'Highgate', Llanystumdwy – the cottage in which Lloyd George grew up (Richard Lloyd's workshop in the foreground).

should stick to a man who is in a position to give her a comfortable life and not to an unthinking stripling of 19.'³ (The use of the adjective 'unthinking' in relation to himself was rather an over-harsh self-condemnation.) But Miss Jones of Penmachno at least has the distinction of being the first real love in Lloyd George's life.

Soon he was to become even more captivated by another Miss Jones – Lizzie or Liza Jones of Criccieth, a well-known singer in the locality whose dark eyes and black hair bowled him over. Her string of singing engagements throughout Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire meant that all too frequently she failed to keep her dates with Lloyd George, to his intense dismay and disappointment. His diary entries for the last months of 1883 contain several references to their planned meetings, usually abortive, and her detailed explanations to account for her last-minute failure to turn up. As he noted on 25 November

1883, an entry which powerfully underlines his loss of control over his emotions, 'In earnest I do not know but I am afraid it is too late now. She has acquired a wonderful mastery over my idiot heart.'⁴ Just a week later, after Lizzie had failed to turn up for an engagement, apparently without explanation, he wrote further, 'What anguish it would have saved me if I had known it in time [i.e. her failure to appear]. Let every young man be wary in time of falling in love. It is replete with peril.'⁵

As it happens, Lloyd George was not the only young man to have fallen deeply in love with Liza Jones at this time. She had also captivated the heart of a young schoolmaster in a neighbouring village by the name of Lloyd Williams whom, in fact, she was soon to marry. Again LG accepted the news philosophically, consoling himself that at least he would now be spared the considerable expense of paying for voice lessons for Liza, but it is clear that the

anguish of losing her continued for several months, intensified by the fact that, as a Baptist, she worshipped at the same chapel as him. In June 1884, he wrote in his diary, 'I wish to God she would keep away altogether. I might feel it keenly perhaps, for a while, but I'd sooner get over it by not seeing her at all than by being compelled, as I am now, to see her and *hear her voice* twice a week.'⁶ As a symbolic gesture that the relationship was now well and truly over, he burned all her letters to him, but their subsequent occasional chance encounters clearly still continued to vex him sorely for some time.

It was during that very same month – June 1884 – that Lloyd George first met the woman who was to become his wife, Margaret Owen of Mynydd Ednyfed Fawr, Criccieth – 'a sensible girl without fuss or affectation about her' was his first impression.⁷ It would appear, however, that their paths did not cross thereafter for almost a year, or at least

there are no references to further meetings in Lloyd George's diaries. On 21 May 1885 Lloyd George wrote in his diary about an evening function organised by the local Grand Debating Society:

Grand Debating Society Soiree – a really 1st class affair. The victualling part was excellent & the entertainment part of it was equally excellent – singing, speechifying, playing forfeits & the like games until 11.30. I acted as chairman, there were 30 present – it was an undoubted success in all respects. Am glad of it. Took Maggie Owen home short way – her mother waiting for her in some house. Had my new suit on.⁸

The intervention of Mrs Mary Owen deliberately in order to cut short LG's walk home with Maggie is highly suggestive. The young solicitor was evidently unwelcome at Mynydd Ednyfed Fawr, and he was consequently reduced to ambushing Maggie

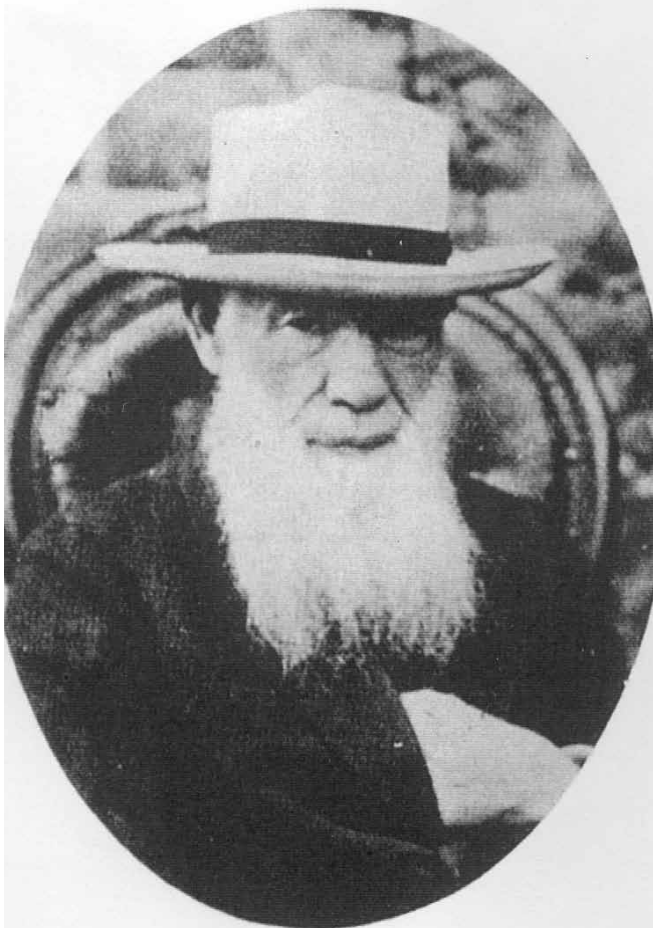
furtively as she walked to and from chapel, to bombarding her with regular letters and notes and to arranging clandestine meetings on neutral territory.

Margaret Owen, born on 4 November 1866, was the only child of Richard and Mary Owen of Mynydd Ednyfed Fawr, a substantial farmstead of more than a hundred acres on a superb site to the north of Criccieth. Richard Owen was highly regarded locally as an individual of sound judgement, frequently called upon to act as an agricultural valuer. He proudly claimed descent from Owain Gwynedd, one of the native princes of Wales in the twelfth century, while Maggie liked to claim that she was a direct descendant from Prince Hywel Dda in the tenth century on her mother's side. Richard Owen's wife Mary hailed from the same area and from the same background. An able, spirited woman, she, however, remained totally illiterate throughout her life. Both parents clearly adored their only

General view of Criccieth, with the castle.



DAVID AND MAGGIE



daughter and were determined that she should enjoy a better lifestyle and education than they themselves had had. Such was Richard Owen's success as a farmer (and as an investor in the Porthmadog trading fleet) that he could afford to send his daughter to the notable Dr Williams's School at Dolgellau, whose main purpose at the time was to train young girls to grow up to become genteel young ladies; she was one of the first boarders there. Here Maggie learned how to read and write and developed a passion for art and gardening, but a marked distaste for cooking and the more mundane household chores.

Richard Owen was also an elder or deacon at the local Calvinistic Methodist chapel which met at Capel Mawr, a commitment which Maggie was to inherit; she took a full part in the life of the local CM chapel at Criccieth throughout her life. By 1885 she was a rather plump, generally good-natured girl of eighteen, still the pride of her parents' life. Any potential suitors for their daughter's hand were to be given close scrutiny by Richard and Mary Owen; her abilities, education and inheritance were not to be squandered on any young adventurer who fancied his chances and tried his luck! Lloyd George's younger brother William (b. 1865), in his volume of reminiscences penned in extreme old age, recalled Richard Owen as 'something of a strong, silent man, dignified and awesome in appearance and bearing, reliable in judgement'. His wife Mary, meanwhile, 'was of a much more approachable type, endowed with a ready wit, and had a wide circle of friends'.⁹

The depth and passion of sectarian feeling were very much apparent in the north Wales of the 1880s. Occasionally acrimonious splits could occur within chapels, even where all of the members were of the same denomination, sometimes leading to the foundation of split

congregations at new locations by rival groups. The rivalry was even more deep-rooted and acute between different denominations, sometimes crystallising when a marriage took place between two members of different denominations. Should the wife then change her denomination to her husband's and bring up their children in the same church? The situation was especially sensitive in the case of small denominations such as the Baptists who believed that in their business and public life they were being discriminated against. Lloyd George knew full well that, as he set out to woo Maggie Owen, he was labouring under a distinct disadvantage as a youthful adherent of the Campbellite Baptists. Her father was a deacon at Capel Mawr CM chapel, and one of her other suitors – one of no less than three who were to propose to her during the summer of 1887 – was none other than the Rev. John Owen, the minister of the chapel.

The deep-rooted denominational differences which separated LG and Maggie Owen were accentuated by the fact that Richard Owen was unimpressed by what he perceived to be Lloyd George's lack of financial prospects and his family background (which he considered inferior to his own), both of which led Owen to conclude that his adored daughter's suitor was really little more than an upstart young adventurer unworthy of Maggie's hand in marriage. Denominational rivalry was further underlined by social differences. As a farmer descended from generations of farmers, Owen undoubtedly hoped that his attractive daughter would marry someone of farming stock, however auspicious the future prospects of the young solicitor from Llanystumdwy. He had read with much alarm reports of Lloyd George's numerous flamboyant speeches embodying sarcastic,

caustic attacks on the gentry class, the established church and established institutions more generally.

In an early multi-volume biography of Lloyd George published by J. Hugh Edwards in 1914–15, Dr R. D. Evans of Blaenau Ffestiniog, who did a great deal to advance LG's early political career in the 1880s and gave him numerous important introductions (and whose son Thomas was eventually to marry LG's second daughter Olwen from 10 Downing Street in 1917), wrote:

In regard to Mrs. Lloyd George, I well remember going, when I was a mere lad of six or seven years, along with my mother to Mynydd Ednyfed Fawr to see the mother and to take a present to the new-born babe, as was the good old custom in those times. I also remember that I was given the privilege of kissing the babe. Mrs. George's parents were well-connected farmers in the district. Her mother was very much like Mr. Lloyd George's own mother in the shrewdness, gentleness, and refinement of her disposition. Her father was a stalwart in both physique and character. He was invariably described as 'sure-footed' – cautious alike in speech and in deed. He was endowed above measure with common sense, and was a man of high repute throughout the neighbourhood. Both father and mother were known for their piety, and the home life was beautiful in its harmony.

I well remember that on one of the occasions on which Mr. Lloyd George stayed at my house I spoke quite seriously to him in regard to the right choice of a wife. I still recall my advice to him: 'You must turn your attention to a good, well-connected Methodist family for a while, and I assure you that I know of no one more suitable for you in every respect than Maggie,

Clockwise,
from top left:
David Lloyd
George, aged
16; Margaret
(Maggie) Loyd
George, born
Margaret Owen;
William George
(David's brother);
Richard Lloyd
(Uncle Lloyd').

Mynydd Ednyfed'. I confess that I felt not a little gratification when I heard a rumour, some weeks later, that he and Maggie had been seen taking 'sly walks' together. These 'walks' developed shortly afterwards in a courtship which led to the marriage ceremony at Pencaenewydd Chapel.¹⁰

Another local contemporary was to describe Maggie Owen as 'the most charming and the most respected lass in the whole neighbourhood'.¹¹

Lloyd George and Maggie clearly met on a number of occasions during 1885, experiences which convinced LG that he now wished to court 'Miss Owen' in earnest. His fascinating diary for 1886 (like the volume for the previous year) casts invaluable light on Lloyd George's personal life in his twenty-fourth year, notably on his relationship with Miss Owen. Seven days into the new year, he recorded in his diary that he had been to Porthmadog for a professional meeting, then, 'Home 6 train. Waylaid Maggie Owen; induced her to abstain from going to the Seiat [religious meeting] by showing her by my erratic watch that she was too late, then for a stroll with her up Lôn Fêl.¹² At the beginning of February, following a meeting with Maggie on the Marine Parade (which appears to have extended over several hours), he wrote that he now felt that he was 'getting to be very fond of the girl', impressed by her transparent 'combination of good nature, humour and affection'. Three days later, he took a walk with his younger brother William towards Aberistedd before a chapel service, taking advantage of the occasion to discuss his 'predicament with regard to love affairs. He does not disapprove.' On 9 February, 'An appointed rendezvous by 6.30 at Bryn Hir gate to meet Maggie Owen; took her home by round-about way, enjoyed

Another local contemporary was to describe Maggie Owen as 'the most charming and the most respected lass in the whole neighbourhood'.

the stroll immensely and made another appointment. It looks as if I were rapidly placing myself in an irretrievable position. Doesn't matter. I don't see that any harm will ensue. Left her at 7.45.¹³

On 15 February, just three days after the famous meeting at Blaenau Ffestiniog which was addressed by the prominent Irish nationalist leader Michael Davitt (following which LG spoke to a large audience in public for the first time in order to propose the vote of thanks to Davitt – a singular personal triumph for the young solicitor), Lloyd George attended a concert organised by the Criccieth Debating Society, then:

I then waylaid Maggie Owen to take her home. Never felt more acutely than to-night that I am really in deep love with girl. Felt sorry to have to leave her. I have I know gradually got to like her more and more. There's another thing I have observed in connection with this, that my intercourse with L. [Liza Jones] rather tended to demoralize my taste; my fresh acquaintance has an entirely different influence. She firmly checks all ribaldry or tendency thereto on my part.¹⁴

The following day a further meeting took place between the two lovers until 8 pm – 'She will not stay any longer.'¹⁵ On 9 March, 'Up to meet M[aggie]. Walked in public with her without a blush ... Think I have at last made a prudent choice'. By 11 June, rather patronizingly, 'Met M[aggie]. First time I ever used an expression of endearment towards her. Feel I am becoming very fond of her.'¹⁶ Six days later, 'Sunday school centenary. Speaking at evening meeting. Took Maggie Owen home. Seems to be a jollier girl as you get on with her.'¹⁷ Before the end of the month, 'M. expecting me. M. asked me what I would tell them at home if they

wanted to know where I'd been. I replied: "I'd say I'd been to see my sweetheart". This is the second time I've called her so. She likes it. I am now quite committed.'¹⁸ About a month later Lloyd George raised with his only sister Mary Ellen George the subject of his relationship with Maggie, 'Told my sister M.E.G. to-night about M. She is well-pleased and thinks a lot of her, says I may mention the matter [of proposing marriage] to M. shortly, but that it would not do to marry for about five years at least.'¹⁹ It was advice that he was not to take. Although he was doubtless pleased that his sister approved of the obvious love-match, Lloyd George would never have agreed to wait for five years before marrying.

By this time he was clearly considering seriously proposing marriage to Miss Owen. This proposal eventually took place on 25 August 1886:

Left Carnarvon per 4.40 train – dropped down at Llanwnda. Wrote at the inn at Llanwnda a note for her ... marched right up to the door [where Maggie was staying], asked if Miss Owen was in, told the girl at the door that I was desired by her father Richard Owen to give her a note in passing! Eventually I saw her. It appears Miss Jones had read the note, M. being too excited to open it. She had to go to a party that evening, but promised to try and return by 8, and to meet me by the gate; I gave her a bouquet I had brought with me ... I returned at 8 to Bodfan – but had to wait until 9.45 until the girls returned. M. came with me for a long drive in carriage (I had brought from Llanwnda). Here I proposed to her. She wanted time to consider, but admitted her regard for me. Although, when I write this, I have not been formally accepted, I am positive that everything is all right so far as the girl is concerned. I left her

about mid-night. M. has some of the 'coquette' about her – she does not like to appear to jump at my offer.²⁰

It may well be that Lloyd George felt more inclined to make his proposal away from Criccieth. At the end of August Maggie was staying with relatives at Llanwnda, south of Caernarfon. Posing as a messenger from her father Richard Owen, Lloyd George was thus able to speak with her and he persuaded her to meet him later in the evening. Although she readily admitted affectionate feelings for Lloyd George, she nevertheless asked for time to consider. She evidently did not respond at once, and Lloyd George predictably (and in keeping with his character) soon grew impatient. Just three days after the verbal proposal, he wrote to her from Criccieth:

Write me your answer to the question I gave you on Wednesday evening (or Thursday morning – I am not sure which it was!). Do, that's a good girl. I want to get your own decision up on the matter. The reason I have already given you. I wish the choice you make – whatever it be – to be really yours & not anyone else's ...²¹

Characteristically, Maggie's vacillation made her suitor more ardent than ever to press his suit. He apparently wandered aimlessly the streets of Criccieth until the small hours, greatly unnerving his revered uncle and mentor Richard Lloyd who, deeply concerned, looked for him late at night, seeking the assistance of passers-by – to LG's intense annoyance. According to the late Dr W. R. P. George, LG even resorted to desperate measures like hiding his uncle's walking boots in an attempt to keep him at home!²² That LG had fallen deeply in love with Maggie cannot be doubted,

but Maggie was determined to take her time. Both her parents strongly disapproved of Lloyd George as a suitable suitor for their daughter, and the young couple could meet at her home at Mynydd Ednyfed only when the parents were away.

On 6 September 1886 comes another fascinating entry in the Lloyd George diary:

Up with him [Williams] to Mynydd Ednyfed & after knocking & dodging about in the rain for about an hour I managed to whistle the servant girl out – & she got Maggie for me – saw her for few minutes to arrange an appointment for tomorrow evening. Gleaned from servant that M. had told her that I had been to see her at Bodvan – it is a sure sign of love when you talk about the doings of another person in connection with yourself to a 3rd person, that is in such circumstances as these.²³

In his subsequent letters he gives her advice on how to handle her difficult mother.²⁴ Finally on 1 October she was won around:

Afterwards to Mynydd Ednyfed & Mr & Mrs O. having gone to Ty Mawr, remained until 1 a.m. Pressed Maggie to come to a point as to what I had been speaking to her about, she at last admitted that her hesitation was entirely due to her not being able to implicitly trust me. She said that some times she did at other times she didn't. She then asked me very solemnly whether I was really in earnest. I assured her with equal solemnity that I was as there was a God in Heaven. 'Well then', she said, 'if you will be as true & as faithful to me as I am to you it will be all right'. She said nothing about her mother's frivolous objection to me being a Baptist, nor to her own objection to my sceptical vagaries. For I told her emphatically the other day

that I could not even to win her give them up & that I would not pretend that I had – they were my firm convictions.²⁵

It is evident that Maggie's deep-rooted religious convictions, coupled with the all-important fact that the couple were members of different religious denominations, had caused serious problems in the relationship and, although she had by now accepted his proposal, Maggie was still anxious that the matter should be kept secret. On 11 November they kissed for the first time, a concession which Maggie granted 'in exchange for a story I promised to tell her'. 'Never on better terms', wrote Lloyd George. Two days later:

After dinner went straight to meet Maggie by an appointed trysting place. William Roberts, Penystumllyn taking her home from Penystumllyn. I stuck to my post until he came up. Maggie rather angry I did not hide myself – but I stood to my dignity. Rather strong rebuke from Maggie for having condescended to gabble at all with Plas Willraham girls – I foolishly let out somehow that I had done so – she let me off – dismissed me – in disgrace.²⁶

On 20 November, 'Dr told me that he had been told by a person who had spoken to Mrs O. about me that she thought a lot of me, only objection being that I did not go to the same chapel.'²⁷

Maggie's relationship with her mother seems to have vexed the smitten Lloyd George particularly at this point. He wrote to her in early December:

I trust you will have something to report to me tomorrow of the result of an interview with your mother. As I have already intimated to you it is but of trivial consequence to me what your mother's views of me may be – so long of course as they do not affect yours. All I wish

Characteristically, Maggie's vacillation made her suitor more ardent than ever to press his suit.

for is a clear understanding so that we may afterwards see for ourselves how we stand.

You will appreciate my anxiety to bring the matter to an issue with your mother. I somehow feel deeply that it is unmanly to take by stealth & fraud what I am honestly entitled to. It has a tinge of the ridiculous in it, moreover.

This being done, you will not be troubled with any more lectures & I am confident I shall be thereby encouraged to act in such a way as will ensure your requited Confidence.²⁸

Was he here raising the possibility of an elopement with his beloved? Further impassioned letters followed.²⁹ By the following year – 1887 – the courtship had assumed a more open course, the two lovers appeared together in public, Maggie was an occasional visitor to the Georges' home, and both attended each other's place of worship.

Richard and Mary Owen were, it would seem, generally won around by the realisation that the proposed union was an obvious love match and by the ever-increasing prominence of their future son-in-law as an up-and-coming solicitor and in the political life of the locality. By 1887 their resistance was little more than token, but it had not totally disappeared, and at times Maggie justifiably felt like a hapless pawn between her parents and Lloyd George. In a letter from Maggie to Lloyd George during the early days of their courtship, she wrote, 'I have begged of them to let me come to Porthmadoc this evening but father has utterly refused to let me go. I am sure I don't know why, therefore I must submit to his will & stay at home. I trust you will get this note in time.' She urged him not to take a legal case involving a young lady:

for your own sake. All the old stories will be renewed again,

people will be glad to do it. I know there are relations of mine at Criccieth, & other people as well who would be glad to have anything more to say to my people about you to set them against you & that will put me in an awkward position. I know this much. I shall not be at my ease while the thing is on if you will be taking it up.³⁰

A little while later she wrote, 'I had a good scolding this morning for staying up [late] last night, so my parents are angry with me one day & you another. I am on bad terms with one or the other continually, & for such a sulky girl as me, it is very hard not to get into the sulks. Well I am very miserable, that's all I have to say, & I hope things won't be long as they are now.' Yet some members of the Owen family did approve of Lloyd George, notably one of her aunts who urged her niece, 'Don't you give him up! That young fellow has a great future before him!'³¹

Their letters from the early weeks of 1887 constantly arrange meetings and complain of innumerable broken appointments. LG clearly discussed with his intended his legal work and his political aspirations in the area – 'I want to see you particularly – about that breach of promise affair for one thing.'³² On 19 January he sent her two lengthy letters which he had recently received from his close friend and associate Thomas Edward Ellis, who had been elected the Liberal MP for Merionethshire the previous July:

I enclose the last two letters I received from T. E. Ellis. It would do your mother good to read these letters as they will bring home to her mind that it is not perhaps essential to even good Methodism that you should taboo other Sectarians. I intend replying to him on Sunday. I implore you to read them out to your mother. She'll pull as wry a face as if she

were drinking a gallon of assa-fatida. Did you tell her what a scandal she has created about us throughout Lleyn?³³

Before the end of the same month he had sent her a much more bitter letter, complaining to her of a succession of broken appointments on her part and asserting that his business interests were now so heavy and beyond his control that he had become 'quite entangled and confounded with office arrears'. Lloyd George appealed to Maggie for her much-needed support, underlining in no uncertain terms the agenda which he had drawn up as the basis for their relationship: 'It comes to this, my supreme idea is to get on. To this end I shall sacrifice everything – except I trust honesty. I am prepared to thrust even love itself under the wheels of my Juggernaut if it obstructs the way ... Do you not really desire my success? Recollect my success probably means yours ...' After spelling out to her so clearly his perception of marriage, he continued, 'My love to you is sincere and strong. In this I never waver, but I must not forget that I have a purpose in life, and however painful the sacrifice I have to make to attain this ambition I must not flinch.' He then signed the letter, 'From your sweetheart D.L.G.'³⁴

In another lengthy epistle dating from this period Lloyd George elaborated in some detail on his views on the nature of marriage:

You seem to think that the supreme function of a wife is to *amuse* her husband, to be to him a kind of toy or plaything to enable him to while away with enjoyment his leisure hours. Frankly, that is simply prostituting marriage. My ideas are very different – if not superior – to yours. I am of opinion that woman's function is to soothe & sympathise & not to amuse. Men's lives

Some members of the Owen family did approve of Lloyd George, notably one of her aunts who urged her niece, 'Don't you give him up! That young fellow has a great future before him!'

are a perpetual conflict. The life I have mapped out will be so especially as lawyer & politician. Women's function is to pour oil on the wounds – to heal the bruises of spirit received in past conflicts & to stimulate to renewed exertion. Am I not right? If I am then you are pre-eminently the girl for me. I have a thorough belief in your kindness & affection.

As to setting you free that is a matter for your choice & not mine. I have many a time impressed upon you that the only bond by which I have any desire to hold you is that of love. If that be lost then I would snap any other bond with my own hand. Hitherto my feelings are those of unflinching love for you. You ask me to choose – I have made my choice deliberately & solemnly. I must now ask you to make your choice. I know my slanderers – those whom you allow to poison your mind against me. Choose between them & me – there can be no other alternative.

May I see you at 7 tomorrow? Drop me a note, will you?²⁵

Almost from the beginning of their extended courtship, LG had made it crystal clear to Maggie that his great energies and ambitions were being directed principally towards a political career. Such was the ultimate goal towards which all his hard work in the solicitor's office was meant to lead.

It is clear that, although she had now accepted his proposal of marriage, Maggie still harboured very real doubts and suspicions about the relationship, while her parents even at this late stage had not totally abandoned hope of preventing the union. The letters on both sides refer constantly to broken appointments, poor time keeping and various embarrassing incidents. In mid-February Lloyd George apologised

**As 1887 ran
its course,
Lloyd George
came to the
conclusion
that the
sooner he
got married
the better.**

profusely to Margaret for the necessity to travel to London on legal business:

My future is at present to me a sealed book & not until I am up in the city consulting my agents will the seal be broken. Remember to behave in my absence 'as if I were present in the body' as I shall be 'in the spirit'. Redeem your faithful promise to show your mother the token of our engagement. You may also should you deem it prudent (this I leave to your discretion) arrange an appointment for me to discuss matters with your father, mother or any or either or both of them. That's a good week's work (for you) – I have cut out for you. With sincerest love.³⁶

Subsequent letters are emotional – 'I am coming home tonight & unfeignedly long to kiss my sweetheart once more'; 'I am far more eager to have a chat with my sweetheart than I am to hear expositions of [religious] orthodoxy'.³⁷

Generally, as 1887 ran its course, Lloyd George came to the conclusion that the sooner he got married the better. Some Owen family relatives and others in the locality were still attempting to poison Mary Owen's mind against Lloyd George. On 22 March he wrote in his diary:

It appears that Misses Roberts of Bronygadair & Ystumlllyn have been reviling me to Mrs Owen, telling her that they are surprised how I could stand in my shoes when I had been courting 'the daughter of Nansi Penwaig'. Mrs O. pitching into her told Maggie how Miss Roberts, Bron. had by various wiles endeavoured to seduce me from my courtship of her & set me on to court Misses Jones, Davies &c. Told her that if her parents continued to nag at her in that style that the only way to put an end to it was to get married.³⁸

On 3 April he recorded a conversation with his sister Mary Ellen George:

Walk after dinner M.E.G. past Ynysgain fawr – told her my ideas as to getting married – that I meant to pay uncle his £200 first & then directly I accumulated another £300 get spliced – told her that if I were to complete matters in hand I should probably get about £500 for them & that W.G. could collect them in about 6 months. She did not in any [way] dissuade me but approved of the amount I had fixed so that perhaps after all my 'impulse' had directed me wisely. Persons most likely to disapprove don't do so. Think that owing to other reasons the sooner I get married, the better. It will steady me.³⁹

It is evident that he had already devoted at least some thought to the financial and practical aspects of marriage. Several of his diary entries for the summer months of 1887 refer to his desire to get married as soon as possible, but they also consider the practicability of such a step. On reflection, it was his considered view that the spring of 1888 would be best. In order to accumulate the necessary resources to take such an important step, he made a big effort to maximise the income from his legal work. Consequently he often found himself obliged to cancel his meetings with Maggie, generally at quite short notice. She, too, was frequently guilty of the same offence. 'You did not keep your appointment tonight', wrote an exasperated Lloyd George in May, 'Nor let me know that you did not intend doing so, but I have no doubt you have a good reason why to give. Can I see you tomorrow (Friday) evening & where. I shall be home by the 4 train from Pwllheli. Drop me a line at the Post Office, there's a pet. Sincere love, Yours David'.⁴⁰

With his heart now committed to the idea of marriage during the early months of 1888, Lloyd George applied himself to his legal work with renewed vigour. In mid-July 1887 he devoted his energies to a complex but potentially remunerative arbitration case which took up almost all his time:

I am making an extra effort to bring the thing to a conclusion. The effort may deprive me temporarily of your company, but I can the more easily bear that when I recollect that it expedites the permanent association to which we both look forward. I am in hopes that we may finish this week & then if our worthy Methodist opponent pays up pretty sharply you may bear another name soon ... There is nothing that would reconcile me to neglecting an appointment with you except the fact that my doing so speeds the time when appointments will be unnecessary – even in the evenings.⁴¹

Just three days later he eagerly anticipated ‘a final & irrevocable (I trust) determination’ of the arbitration case, insisting, ‘Don’t imagine angry things about me, that a pet. I shall redeem all misbehaviour yet. Believe me, though I am bodily in the coffee room of the Belle Bue Hotel, Trefriw with Parry Pwllheli by my side assiduously indicting a letter to one of his numerous sweethearts, I am in mind at M. with my sweetheart by me. I swear by the pen which I now hold in my hand that I shall not flirt nor even wink impudently at a girl.’⁴²

The depth of Lloyd George’s love for his intended is strongly reflected in the long, passionate letters which he wrote to her during their frequent periods apart. He kept her fully informed of the progress of the many legal cases in which he was involved, pointing to the substantial income which he might

The depth of Lloyd George’s love for his intended is strongly reflected in the long, passionate letters which he wrote to her during their frequent periods apart.

enjoy in consequence. Responding to a letter from Maggie informing him of her ill-health, Lloyd George wrote:

I am very grieved to hear that my little darling is in such agony. I’ll soon settle it. I listened to a very interesting lecture, which had something to do with your & my relationship & it explained how the contact of another person’s hand or arm or lips on a pained nerve assuaged the torture. I shall apply this idea practically – by way of experiment when we meet. Now how, when, where & whither shall I see you[?]. I am anxious – *eager* to see you – *longing* desperately for it – now that my anxiety about these cases is over. (Did I tell you that I won my Chancery case on Monday?) I *must* see you tomorrow. Nothing can stop me.

Reacting to light-hearted banter in his previous letters that he was in search of a new relationship, he wrote:

Did you really think I was in earnest about ‘a new sweetheart’? You read the scratched sentence again, I didn’t say that I was going to ‘*take*’ one. What I referred to was a joke of very dubious propriety (had it not been that I have acquired almost conjugal confidence with you). That’s why I scratched it out. I shall never want a new one, especially as my present one shows every sign of lasting longer than I do. I therefore do not even anticipate enjoying the privileges of a widower. What nonsense I am writing.⁴³

A lengthy entry in his diary for 30 August 1887 crystallised Lloyd George’s feelings towards the concept and the timing of his intended marriage and to the vexed question of his relationship with his future in-laws:

By the bye I am in a very queer state of mind upon this

question [of getting married]. My inclination is strong for a marriage straight away – say in November.⁴⁴ On the other hand for obvious reasons I am anxious that it should not come off until the spring at the earliest. Maggie I believe to be in a very similar state of mind, but on the whole I think she would prefer the earlier date. However my present view is that prudence dictates spring as the date & I rather imagine that the event will be postponed to that season. I should however like to be in a position to ask the old folks consent *now*. One very good reason for postponement is that there is no available house for our residence – except Cefniwrch which neither of us cares for. The only thing to be said for it is that it is to be let furnished for a short period, we might have another house by the end of that period. It is when I am with Maggie that I find myself most anxious for marriage. Her society has a wonderful charm for me & I believe she now much prefers me to her parents. She will tell me so occasionally ...

It is evident that I have a higher opinion of Maggie’s qualifications than her mother has. I think she is worthy of something better than a farmer. A farmer’s wife is only a portion of his stock.⁴⁵

Just four days later he wrote further:

Long talk as to my night visits. Told her that I was not enamoured of them especially as my uncle seemed to feel them so sorely, but that they were our only resource [*recte* recourse] since her mother was not civilized eno’ to permit my visiting her during decent hours. I suggested that she should tell her mother that I intended coming up at 8 every evening & she said she had been thinking of the same thing, that she was thoroughly tired of our midnight

meetings as they involved a sense of transgressing respectable rules. She finally promised to tell her mother on Monday without fail. She *may* do so.⁴⁶

The following evening Lloyd George escorted Maggie home following a service at a local English chapel, 'Home by 9 through a driving rain. All looking sultry at me.'⁴⁷

On 7 September 1887 Lloyd George paid a visit to Mynydd Ednyfed Fawr, Criccieth:

Up to Mynydd Ednyfed 8. The old chap [Richard Owen] was down at Criccieth attending a committee in reference to the Capel Mawr Enquiry. I went in thro' front door to dining room. Mrs O. told Maggie that I must not come there more than three times a week. M. replied that she would see me out then the other nights. 'You don't have to put your reason to work' said Mrs O. Left at 10.⁴⁸

Twelve days later – 19 September 1887 – Lloyd George attended a meeting at Caernarfon of the executive of the North Wales Temperance Association where, to his dismay, he discovered that the amendments which he had proposed were rejected as 'being too advanced'. The timing of the marriage clearly continued to preoccupy his thoughts. Generally, it would seem, both partners were prepared to wait until the early spring of 1888, but Maggie felt that if a local church squabble (to which LG referred as 'the Davies affair' in his diary) were not settled fairly promptly, then the marriage should go ahead in any event. The precise date of the wedding clearly caused them considerable trepidation. On 19 September Lloyd George wrote in his diary:

Home 4 train – met Maggie by Station & with her for stroll. Had asked her on Saturday evening to make up her mind as to our marriage, having

regard to the turn Davies' affair had taken. She told me today that she would suggest we should wait until early in spring & see what would become of it & if it was not likely – then – to be settled soon, then get married. Personally I am not sorry for the delay as physically I am far from strong at present but 6 months & those *winter* months may work wonders. Told her my idea about going to Porthmadog & joining the Independents. She approves. The Capel Mawr verdict has disgusted her with Methodism. The Portmadoc idea has grown upon me to that extent that I now look upon it as my fate – fixed & irrevocable – but something may change me. The old folk [Richard and Mary Owen, Maggie's parents] are talking now of leaving Mynydd Ednyfed. Left M at 7. Went up again at 8 & remained until 10.⁴⁹

Just a week later, 'Walked as far as Ynysgain fawr with Maggie. She was staying there over night. Had supper there. Started home 11.30. Had a slight tiff with Maggie about her not coming to Chapel with me – not meeting me at Gwyndy as she had promised. We soon settled our differences however.'⁵⁰

At this time LG seems to have made up his mind that he would become a member of the Independents and go to live at Porthmadog. At this point it would seem that the marriage would take place at Capel Mawr. But nothing came of joining the Independents or the Congregationalists, and Lloyd George was certainly in no position to establish a home at Porthmadog (or anywhere else for that matter) in 1887 or 1888. On 1 October Lloyd George recorded in his diary:

Walked as far as Porthmadog to see Gorphwysfa, Parry's home to which I have taken a fancy. It will be let furnished

for £50. That is an advantage until I get my cash in. Maggie I believe would now prefer immediate marriage. She liked Gorphwysfa. Home 8 train, I having called upon Roberts, surveyor first as to Monday. Up until 12.30 preparing case for Monday.⁵¹

Four days later LG paid a further visit to Mynydd Ednyfed – 'I remained until 11. We had a talk about marriage. We arranged to get married soon – provided my uncle [Richard Lloyd] did not upon my talking the matter over with him show good cause to the contrary.'⁵² On 1 November Lloyd George was finally able to discuss matters fully with Richard and Mary Owen:

I then had a talk with Mr & Mrs Owen – they pleaded for delay – that they had made up their minds not to stay at Mynydd Ednyfed after all, but they could not get anything like a good price for the stock these bad times, especially this time of the year, & that they could not get a tenant worth anything to buy their interest [?] at such short notice – that if they sold their things under value it would be *our* loss in the end. They wish us to wait for a year or so – that we were quite young eno'. The old man also said, 'I can't give you any money at the moment, only the money that she herself already has'. I suppose he meant that he had no cash until he sold the stock. I was not prepared for this sort of talk. I thought the old man very cunningly tried to persuade me to delay by showing it was my own interest. In the course of conversation Mrs O. said something about building a house. I then told her we had made up our minds to settle at Porthmadog as we could get no houses at Criccieth. She replied that she did not like us to go to Porthmadog to live. I told them when R.O. said something

'They wish us to wait for a year or so – that we were quite young eno'. The old man also said, "I can't give you any money at the moment, only the money that she herself already has".'

about money that I wanted no money as I had of course before coming to that point seen that I would have sufficient myself without any extraneous aid (I am not sure whether it would not have been better to plead poverty – but I wanted to show them that I took no commercial views of my engagement). The interview ended by their asking me to reconsider the matter & see them again about it. They then went to bed and left me with Maggie who was in the kitchen during the interview. Stayed until 10.⁵³

As a result of this interview Lloyd George was predictably left enraged. He suspected that the Owens were deliberately raising difficulties over housing and finance in order to postpone the marriage. His anger over the attitude of his future in-laws knew no bounds. A week later he wrote to Maggie:

Your mother has not said anything to the contrary. No, perhaps not, but we must not marry on the strength of inference. We ought to know definitely whether they object & also where they propose we should go in the interval between our marriage & their leaving Mynydd Ednyfed. Unless they tell us to stay with them we must lose no time in looking for a house & furniture. Do you understand, Mag[?]. Ensure that you have achieved a perfect understanding by the time I come home. Will you?⁵⁴

On 2 November he noted in his diary, 'Her mother [Mrs Mary Owen] suggested we should take Cardigan House or Plas Wilbraham jointly with them – not a bad idea. This Porthmadog talk has scared them.'⁵⁵ On 8 November:

She [Maggie Owen] told her mother we proposed getting married in February. Her

mother simply said, 'As soon as that? You may as well keep your new bonnet until then, hadn't you?' I told my mother before starting – the poor old woman cried & said she felt my leaving very much. She then gave me some very good advice about being kind to Maggie – never saying anything nasty to her when I lost my temper, to be attentive to her especially when she was ill & that sort of thing. She praised M. very much from what she had heard from MEG [Mary Ellen George]. Told MEG also.⁵⁶

Ultimately the settlement of the date of the marriage was to be determined by the resolution of the local religious dispute and the decision of Richard and Mary Owen not to leave Mynydd Ednyfed, at least for the moment. Consequently it was possible for Lloyd George, who had failed to find a suitable property at Criccieth and who had also considered moving to Porthmadog, to, albeit reluctantly, move in with his in-laws after all following his marriage.

Further bickering was to ensue over the venue for the marriage, which eventually took place on 24 January 1888 at Pencaenewydd at a small secluded country chapel some eight miles from Criccieth. At the insistence of Richard Owen, a denominational elder totally committed to the cause, the wedding took place at a Methodist chapel, while Richard Lloyd, it appears, knew nothing of their plans until just a fortnight before the actual ceremony. The family patriarch had not even met Maggie until the wedding day, but any doubts and suspicions which he may have had about her suitability as a bride for his nephew had been assuaged by her reputation in the locality – 'Everyone says that she is a gentle girl, sensible and a practical girl too.'⁵⁷ Uncle Lloyd had indeed been presented with a *fait accompli*, but he accepted the rather dramatic course of

events with his customary good grace and humour, convinced that this was an ordinance of life and assured that such was the true desire of his adored nephew's heart. Having given Lloyd George a fatherly lecture on his duties and responsibilities as a husband, he agreed to officiate at the very private ceremony jointly with Rev. John Owen (the Methodist minister from Criccieth), who had himself asked Maggie to marry him only the previous summer.

Richard Lloyd conducted the actual marriage ceremony, while the Rev. Owen read the lesson and led the tiny congregation in prayers. This rather bizarre arrangement would undoubtedly have met with fierce disapproval from many of the Criccieth Methodists – another good reason for holding the ceremony elsewhere. Possibly, too, both families – the Lloyd Georges and the Owens – instinctively recoiled from the inevitable publicity of a Criccieth ceremony. In the words of Mr John Grigg, 'In all the circumstances, the form and venue of the service represented the best compromise that could be worked out.'⁵⁸ LG's mother, his brother William and his sister Mary Ellen were all absent from the marriage ceremony. Maggie was just twenty-one years of age; Lloyd George had just seven days earlier celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday.

It is clear that the marriage was a distinct advantage to Lloyd George within the context of north Wales, personally, professionally and politically. In the words of his distinguished biographer Dr Thomas Jones CH, 'He was indeed fortunate in gaining the affection and companionship of this serene, steadfast, wise and large-hearted woman.'⁵⁹ But Maggie's subsequent deeply entrenched reluctance to go to London inevitably meant that she could never fulfil the same kind of social and political role as, for example,

As a result of this interview Lloyd George was predictably left enraged. He suspected that the Owens were deliberately raising difficulties over housing and finance in order to postpone the marriage.

Margot Asquith or Charlotte Campbell-Bannerman. To a large extent, Lloyd George was to keep his political career, his will to succeed and his focus on himself quite separate from his personal life and his relations with women. He displayed but scant interest in the London political society in which a wife could prove of great assistance to him, rarely accepting invitations to London and country homes. While in office, he often invited his political associates to his Criccieth home Brynawelon, but even here he himself was to be the centre of attention, with Maggie fulfilling the role of a glorified housekeeper and devoted mother to their five children. Throughout their marriage Lloyd George was to demand a great deal of his long-suffering wife of whom he always remained genuinely fond. But to her, he was to give precious little in return.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Throughout their marriage Lloyd George was to demand a great deal of his long-suffering wife of whom he always remained genuinely fond. But to her, he was to give precious little in return.

- 1 N(ational) L(ibrary of) W(ales), William George Papers 2, diary entry for 17 June 1880.
- 2 Cited in W. R. P. George, *The Making of Lloyd George* (London: Faber, 1976), p. 106.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 NLW, William George papers 4, diary entry for 25 November 1883.
- 5 Ibid., diary entry for 2 December 1883.
- 6 NLW, William George papers 5, diary entry for 18 June 1884.
- 7 Cited in W. R. P. George, op. cit., p. 136.
- 8 NLW, Lloyd George's diary for 1885, entry for 21 May.
- 9 William George, *My Brother and I* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1958), p. 96.
- 10 J. Hugh Edwards, *The Life of David Lloyd George*, Vol. 2 (London: Waverley Book Company, 1914), p. 159.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 NLW, William George Papers 6,

- diary entry 7 January 1886.
- 13 Ibid., diary entries for 4, 7 and 9 February 1886.
- 14 Ibid., diary entry for 15 February 1886.
- 15 Ibid., diary entry for 16 February 1886.
- 16 Ibid., diary entries for 9 March and 11 June 1886.
- 17 Cited in William George, op. cit., p. 97, but apparently not included in Lloyd George's original diary for 1886.
- 18 NLW, William George Papers 6, diary entry for 27 June 1886.
- 19 Ibid., diary entry for 22 July 1886.
- 20 Ibid., diary entry for 25 August 1886.
- 21 NLW MS 20,403C, no. 11, D. Lloyd George to Margaret Owen, 28 August 1886.
- 22 W. R. P. George, op. cit., p. 140.
- 23 NLW, William George Papers 6, diary entry for 6 September 1886.
- 24 NLW MS 20,403C, no. 13, DLG to MO, 25 September 1886.
- 25 NLW, William George Papers 6, diary entry for 1 October 1886.
- 26 Ibid., diary entries for 11 and 13 November 1886.
- 27 Ibid., diary entry for 20 November 1886.
- 28 NLW MS 20,403C, no. 19, DLG to MO, 8 December 1886.
- 29 See John Grigg, *The Young Lloyd George* (London: Collins, 1973), pp. 65–70.
- 30 NLW, William George Papers 4615, Margaret Owen to David Lloyd George, [?1886], 'My dear Mr George ...' (loose letter).
- 31 NLW, William George Papers 4818, MO to DLG, [?1887], 'Dearest Die ...'; Malcolm Thomson, *David Lloyd George: the Official Biography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1949), p. 79.
- 32 NLW MS 20,403C, no. 22, DLG to MO, 8 January 1887.
- 33 NLW, William George Papers 4615, ff. 42–43, DLG to MO, 19 January 1887 (copy).
- 34 DLG to MO, [? January 1887], cited in W. R. P. George, op. cit., pp. 144–45. Kenneth O. Morgan (ed.), *Lloyd George: Family Letters, 1885–1936* (Cardiff and London: University of Wales Press and Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 13–14, attributes this letter to 'probably

- 1885', but this is almost certainly too early.
- 35 NLW, William George Papers 4615, f. 65, DLG to MO, January 1887.
- 36 Ibid. f. 76, DLG to MO, 15 February 1887.
- 37 Ibid. ff. 85–88, DLG to MO, [March 1887].
- 38 NLW MS 20,443A, f. 6^v, diary entry for 22 March 1887.
- 39 Ibid., f. 8, diary entry for 3 April 1887.
- 40 NLW MS 20,403C, no. 29, DLG to MO, [13 May 1887].
- 41 Ibid., no. 30, DLG to MO, 14 July 1887.
- 42 Ibid., no. 31, DLG to MO, [17 July 1887].
- 43 Ibid., no. 35, DLG to MO, 11 August 1887.
- 44 This phrase is wrongly transcribed in Morgan (ed.), op. cit., p. 19, as 'say in [an] hour'.
- 45 NLW MS 20, 443A, ff. 15^v–16^v, diary entry for 30 August 1887.
- 46 Ibid., ff. 18^v–19^f, diary entry for 3 September 1887.
- 47 Ibid., f. 19^v, diary entry for 4 September 1887.
- 48 Ibid., f. 20^v, diary entry for 7 September 1887.
- 49 Ibid., f. 23^v, diary entry for 19 September 1887.
- 50 Ibid., f. 25^f, diary entry for 26 September 1887.
- 51 Ibid., f. 26^f, diary entry for 1 October 1887. On 23 September Lloyd George had written in his diary, 'Told William of my proposed Congregationalism & he said he did not blame me if my views were so' (ibid., f. 24, diary entry for 23 September 1887).
- 52 Ibid., f. 27^f, diary entry for 5 October 1887.
- 53 Ibid., ff. 28^v–29^f, diary entry for 1 November 1887.
- 54 NLW MS 20,403C, no. 39, D. Lloyd George to Margaret Owen, 9 November 1887.
- 55 NLW MS 20,443A, f. 29^f, diary entry for 2 November 1887.
- 56 Ibid., f. 30^f, diary entry for 8 November 1887.
- 57 Richard Lloyd's diary entry cited in W. R. P. George, op. cit., p. 149.
- 58 Grigg, op. cit., p. 72.
- 59 Thomas Jones, *Lloyd George* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 10.