

THE REMINISCENCES OF MRS RUTH EVANS

In June 2008, Mrs Pamela Ellis of Aberystwyth very kindly donated to the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library a file of correspondence and papers accumulated by her late husband Dr E. L. Ellis (1922-2008), the author of a magisterial biography of Dr Thomas Jones published by the University of Wales Press in 1992. During the initial stages of his research work, between 1978 and 1982, Dr Ellis had approached some of TJ's contemporaries who were still alive, requesting them to pen their personal reminiscences of Dr Jones. Those who consented included David Astor (son of Lady Astor), Ruth Evans (widow of Ivor Leslie Evans, former Principal of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth), A. J. Sylvester, Lady Eirene White (TJ's daughter) and Marlene Yeo. These typescript recollections have now been designated as NLW ex 2563.

Ifor (or Ivor) Leslie Evans (1897-1952) served as Principal of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, from 1934 until his early death.¹ A native of Aberdare in the south Wales valleys, and the son of the famous musician W. J. Evans, he received his early education at Wycliffe College, Stonehouse, and also studied in France and Germany. At the beginning of the First World War, Evans was arrested in Bavaria as a suspected Russian spy and was imprisoned at Ruhelen prison camp for the duration of hostilities. It was here, ironically, that he fully mastered the Welsh language, a commitment which then saw him change his name from 'Ivor' to 'Ifor'. Upon his release from Ruhelen, he travelled extensively in Europe and spent a brief period in the coal trade at Swansea ('selling coal' as he himself subsequently put it). At the rather late age of twenty-three, he then enrolled at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1920. Here he was to achieve a first class in the Economics tripos in Part I in 1921 and an upper second in the History tripos in Part II in 1922. In the same year he was appointed a lecturer in Economic History there and was elected a fellow of the college in 1923. He was also elected Whewell Scholar in International Law. He was to remain at Cambridge for fourteen years – until his appointment at Aberystwyth in 1934.

For five years Ifor Evans also earned his living as a part-time lecturer at King's College, London, and he was also a visiting lecturer at the Graduate School of Economics at Washington DC and a visiting professor at the University of Geneva. He was a regular contributor to the columns of *The Economist*, was a member of a League of Nations commission on economic conditions in Austria, and travelled widely in eastern Europe and in Africa, partly in order to pursue his researches in agricultural economics and colonial administration. Among Evans's many publications were *The Agrarian Revolution in*

Rumania (1924), *The British in Tropical Africa* (1929) and *Native Policy in Southern Africa* (1934). The range of his talents and interests was indeed considerable. Quite apart from his extensive teaching commitments at Cambridge and elsewhere, Ifor L. Evans also participated extensively in the administrative work at St John's College and in the management of its estates, serving as secretary to the college council and deputy to the Senior Bursar.

Such was the richness and depth of experience which Evans brought to the position of Principal at Aberystwyth when he succeeded Sir Henry Stuart Jones in 1934. Here his basic contribution was to be three-fold: prudent financial management, which enabled him substantially to reduce the debts of the university college and attract valuable long-term benefactions; the initial planning and development of a range of new buildings and facilities on Penglais hill; and a careful nurturing of agriculture as an academic discipline within the university college. On three critical occasions he also served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales and, crucially, he was for many years Chairman of the University Estates Committee (which served all four constituent university colleges in Wales) at a time when substantial sums became available as a result of the provisions of the disestablishment and disendowment of the Welsh church in 1920. Four years into his term of office as Principal, I. L. Evans had married, on 11 November 1938, Ruth Jolles of Hamburg, who was eighteen years his junior. In old age, Ruth Evans vividly recalled the 'much head-ache and a great deal of work' caused her husband by the manifold complexities of the disendowment provisions of the Welsh Church Act, 1920. She wrote, 'He often sat in his large arm chair in the lounge in Laura Place in a veritable sea of notes, strewn about his feet on the floor. Having managed to reduce the considerable debt the college was burdened with, when he first became Principal in 1934, by war economy, additional grants, donations and gifts, he was determined to start the post-war period without deficits, and gave his mind to this with whole-hearted energy'.² Then she continued:

Amongst our regular visitors was Dr. Thomas Jones, or T.J. as he was known to us. He fully shared Ifor's work for and enthusiastic interest in Aberystwyth College. An old student himself, he did much to enrich the College. He had an outstanding ability to encourage wealthy benefactors to make large private donations for the advancement of learning. His visionary zeal was widespread and entirely successful, but it always returned again to his old alma mater. When in 1944 Lord Davies the President of Aberystwyth College died, T.J. was unanimously elected as his successor, Ifor and he were ever more closely drawn together.³

Dr Thomas Jones CH (1870-1955) was a native of Rhymney in north-west Monmouthshire. He had been educated at the Upper Rhymney board school and Lewis School, Pengam, but at the age of just fourteen had started work as a clerk at the local ironworks. He had later entered the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 1890, but found to his intense

dismay that failure in mathematics meant that he could not graduate there. Several years later, in 1901, he was awarded a highly distinguished first class honours degree in Philosophy and Economics from the University of Glasgow. He was then appointed to a lectureship there, and in 1909 he took up the new position of Professor of Political Economy at Queen's University, Belfast. But Wales, clearly, still beckoned, most notably in the form of persuasion from David Davies MP (Liberal, Montgomeryshire), who convinced TJ that he should take up the post of Secretary to the King Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association, set up personally by Davies in an attempt to combat the dreaded 'white peril', tuberculosis. Subsequently, in 1912, Jones moved on to become Secretary of the Cardiff-based Welsh National Insurance Commission, in which position he quickly earned the respect and admiration of his fellow Welshman David Lloyd George, since 1908 the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Asquith's government. It was largely at LG's instigation that Tom Jones became, from 1916, first, assistant secretary, and later, deputy secretary to the Cabinet secretariat. Here he was to remain until 1930, serving four successive Prime Ministers – D. Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Stanley Baldwin and J. Ramsay MacDonald. In 1919, however, a particularly cruel rebuff awaited TJ. Having been rejected for the position of principal at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff, a short time before (a rejection which did not particularly vex him), Jones had clearly set his sights on appointment to a similar position at his *alma mater*, Aberystwyth, a goal which seemed realistic following the death of the long-serving Principal, T. F. Roberts, in August 1919. But, although widely supported and encouraged by an array of distinguished academics and other public figures in Wales and beyond, Jones eventually lost out to J. H. Davies of Cwrt-mawr, Llangeitho, Registrar of the college since 1906, and enormously influential and respected throughout his native Cardiganshire. The taste of rejection was bitter indeed for TJ. It was a cruel snub which he never forgave or forgot for the rest of his days, even after he had been appointed President of the College at Aberystwyth in 1944.

But Jones's dedication to public life and service continued. Following his retirement from the Cabinet secretariat in 1930, his main preoccupation was to be a fifteen-year stint as Secretary to the Pilgrim Trust, a well-financed venture set up to tackle the harsh plight of the unemployed at the height of the depression and also to protect the British heritage. Jones was also an active member of the Unemployment Assistance Board and several committees of the National Council of Social Service. Other preoccupations included unstinting support for the activities of the Workers' Educational Association and, above all, the establishment in 1927 of Coleg Harlech, a residential adult education college for men of mature age in north-west Wales.

TJ's selection (Was this "selection" or "election"?) in 1944 as President at Aberystwyth inevitably brought him into regular contact with the well-established Principal there, Ifor L. Evans. In the next year, having recently accepted an invitation from the Harvard University Press to pen a full-length biography of his old associate, the recently deceased David Lloyd George, Jones had resolved to take up permanent residence in Aberystwyth, where he might take full advantage of the magnificent resources of the National Library of Wales. Now he was truly to be 'a President of the College in residence'.⁴ On occasion the two men – Evans and Jones – were to work together admirably in tandem, and Jones soon grew to admire enormously Evans's unquestionable administrative and financial prowess. This unity first became most conspicuously apparent in the purchase of land on Penglais hill and in the formulation of ambitious, far-reaching plans for its future development and use. However, there were also frequent clashes of personality and rather violent disputes between these two headstrong, opinionated individuals, neither of whom was inclined to back down or submit to the other.

The deep-rooted strains and stresses of their relationship are very much apparent from Jones's regular letters to his close friend, the prominent Liberal socialite Miss Violet Markham. In January 1946, soon after appointing Ifan ab Owen Edwards to succeed Ben Bowen Thomas as Director of Extra-Mural Studies at the University College, TJ was highly displeased at the tone of a memorandum on the Council of Music drafted by Principal I. L. Evans – 'It was so tendentious & unfair that I wrote a sarcastic criticism of it, but when I went to give it to the Principal I found him unwell & desisted'. Inclined to re-consider somewhat, 'I fired in a milder shot, but still somewhat disturbing, & got a sharp reply'. He reflected on what had clearly developed into a rather tense situation, 'I find that as President & living in the town I can't do anything like as much as I feel I should for the College – especially in the direction of making up for the deficiencies of the Principal. And controversy isn't good for me: it sends up my temperature & takes away my sleep'. At this point Jones was so unnerved and disconcerted as a result of a series of altercations that he seriously considered standing down as President in the autumn of 1946, upon completing just two years in office, '& to make room for a younger man'.⁵

Happily for the university college, its staff and students, that threat did not materialise. However, problems certainly remained. The following April, the advent of a late spring, 'the changing of the seasons' as Tom Jones put it, found him 'limp & disinclined for any effort – "moulting" I call it, & weighed down with life's burdens'. Tending to feel overwhelmed by an array of personal and family problems, Jones now felt under intense pressure as a result of his 'differing views with the Principal over an architect for a chapel & art centre on the

College site etc etc'. Indeed the development of the projected campus on Penglais hill was to be one of the most absorbing themes in the history of the university college during the post-war years. TJ's unease stemmed from a deep-rooted 'conscious[ness] of being used by the College authorities to curb the dictatorial habits of the Principal'. Becoming more and more embroiled in the manifold difficulties and problems of the college, he was aware that he was rather neglecting his research work on the life of Lloyd George: 'I feel under obligation to the National Library for much kindness. Solitude is impossible living between two public & national institutions & anyway for the present I must have books of reference within reach'. The one compensation to emerge from his necessarily close working relationship with Ifor L. Evans was the opportunity to savour the company of 'his admirable Hamburg wife', Ruth, whose hospitality and genial personality TJ clearly adored.⁶

Although Tom Jones had agreed to continue as President in 1947, the question of standing down from office clearly remained in the forefront of his mind, especially during his not infrequent periods of ill-health. One such occasion was the high summer of 1949 when, now at the age of 79, he was largely confined, by severe bladder problems, to Street Acre, St Nicholas at Wade. Neither was Evans's health robust. Ear and throat difficulties persistently dogged the Principal, to whom Jones wrote on 17 August:

My dear Ifor, I could wish that your tonsillitis were if not permanent at least periodical. This attack has been most fruitful and I want more – much more. A companion to the Hymnology. And you know how bare our shelves are of Welsh humorous verse. Please go to it. This is a serious and solemn request and as near a command as a diffident President can venture. I hope Ruth is no less prolific. I knew she had started French with an Emeritus. For myself I am entirely barren and have been prostrated by the terrific heat – unexampled since 1921 in these parts. I saw a Birchington doctor this morning – bladder trouble. He was hopeful that it is something of a nightmare, and if you can comfortably relieve me of the Presidency during the coming session, it would be wise for all concerned. I might even find an hour's meeting unendurable. Verb. Sap. I hope the children flourish. I'm negotiating for the letting of Streetacre for 6 months from October. Cofion gorau, T.J.⁷

Evans replied:

You have once again asked me to consider anew the difficult question of finding a successor, if and when you should feel it necessary to relinquish the Presidency. Much against my better judgement I have, therefore, had to think again, and feel that we should first of all agree on certain basic points.

The appointment of a commoner who is also an Old Student having proved such an outstanding success, I should like to see it repeated. In accordance with this precedent, we should look for a man of high academic standing and considerable administrative experience: and well versed in the financial handling of Government departments. He should also be a man of many parts, with views of his own: able, if and when necessary, to put the Principal in his proper place, as you have done. He should, moreover, be a gentleman of relative leisure: of a ready tongue: generally acceptable, and, if at all possible, a Welsh speaker. All this would be in full accordance with the new tradition we are trying to establish. There are one or two people I have in mind. But first and foremost: What think you, Praises amplissime?⁸

The threatened resignation did not, of course, occur. In the event, Jones was to remain in the presidency until after Evans's death and, sadly, had to participate in the selection of his successor as Principal the following year. At the beginning of the new decade Plas Penglais was fully renovated, and converted into the Principal's official residence. This property was just a stone's throw away from Brynhir, the spacious house owned by the National Library of Wales and situated half way up Penglais hill at the end of the Library's long driveway, where TJ had now resided for several years. Mrs Ruth Evans fondly recalled how the close proximity of the two grandiose dwellings had enabled the Principal and President to develop a somewhat closer rapport and better understanding than previously, 'in an easy and neighbourly way, and as far as the children and I were concerned it was a relaxed and friendly relationship which lasted until his death'.⁹ Jones clearly doted on the Evans's two children, and sometimes sent them gifts. Again, Ruth Evans recalled, 'He [Thomas Jones] had what I for missed by his own admission, a natural instinct for and genuine understanding of the very young'.¹⁰ The same difference also surfaced in their respective relationships with the growing student body. While Principal Evans undoubtedly harboured a genuine, heartfelt concern for the welfare of the students in his care, he 'did not find personal contact with them easy'. Jones, on the other hand, invariably 'revelled in the company of young people' throughout his long life.¹¹

The two men had largely overcome their earlier differences, and generally worked together amicably in tandem. A mutual respect and rapport had clearly grown up, and Tom Jones had resolved to retire from the presidency at some point during 1952, convinced that the Principal, although he had already given eighteen years of generally distinguished service to the College and the University of Wales, still had many more years to give. Sadly, it was not to be. Suddenly, during May 1952, Ifor L. Evans died at the age of 55. The very next day, Tom Jones poured out his emotions to Violet Markham:

We are stunned here by the sudden death yesterday of our Principal Ifor Leslie Evans. He was only 55 & had held the office for 18 years & had 10 years to go. I travelled with him from London last Friday week. He was very tired after many meetings. It was his turn to be Vice-Chancellor of the University & this involves two years of incessant travelling – the drawback to our federal constitution. On Monday night he had a group of Uruguayans to dine – here on some agricultural researches.. From Tuesday on he remained at home & at last sent for a doctor as there were breathing difficulties which grew into a fatal heart attack. Ruth, his wife, had flown to Chicago a fortnight ago to help her brother's wife through a confinement. She is 40. There are two children, 11 & 8 away at schools. Her father was Rector of Hamburg University. She is an attractive, able woman who has learnt Welsh. Thanks to the trans-Atlantic telephone we were able to speak to her brother at six last evening & again at half past two this morning. If she can get a plane at New York she may be here tomorrow, Monday night! We plan a Memorial Service for staff & students on Friday. Luckily our Vice-Principal [Professor Lily Newton] is an excellent woman, calm & competent.

It was perhaps characteristic of TJ that, in spite of his overwhelming sense of shock and grief, clearly very real, the question of the appointment of Evans's successor occupied the forefront of his mind – 'I had arranged with the Principal to resign from the Presidency in October. I may have to reconsider this while searching for his successor, who must be bilingual. This limits the field of choice. We shall settle all this when the Council meets on June 27th.¹² As Ruth Evans wrote in the reminiscences that follow, after she had been compelled by her husband's untimely death to travel home at once from New York, 'T.J. was there to receive, if not to comfort me'. She could easily detect at once that, although Tom Jones was clearly 'terribly shaken' by Evans's premature death, his only way of coping with his intense grief was by a display of a 'harsh and downright offensive unsentimentality'. His words of condolence to the grieving young widow were superficial and made little impression. He then continued brusquely, 'We'll have to think about the next Principal now. There are one or two people I would like to discuss with you'. Although taken aback by what she saw as a 'harsh, impersonal remark' made under exceptionally difficult circumstances, Ruth Evans charitably interpreted Jones's seemingly callous demeanour as a feeble attempt to 'hide his own biting sorrow'. Within days of the Principal's death, TJ predictably found himself full absorbed in 'many interviews, meetings & letters. He filled a big space which is suddenly empty'. Three weeks later a full meeting of the college council resolved, as anticipated, to advertise the vacant position –ten years before they had expected to take such a step. Ideally, Jones conceded, there was a need for a Welsh-speaking scholar of considerable distinction, but one who also possessed a track record of proven administrative competence – a tall order.¹³

The process of appointing a new Principal to succeed Ifor L. Evans proved to be lengthy and fraught with problems and setbacks. Little progress had been made by the end of 1952, and consideration was given to the appointment of a non-Welsh speaker.¹⁴ The perplexing course of events vexed Tom Jones sorely. At the end of February 1953 he remained in an Aberystwyth 'drenched in this dreary, shivery sea-mist – the hills & woods around covered with it & I am too thick & heavy in mind to read even a Sunday paper let alone write an intelligible letter. It is ... one of the most soulless winters in memory. ... I am not sleeping well chiefly because I see no satisfactory Principal in sight'. Although he had been highly impressed by the competence and achievements of Professor Lily Newton as acting Principal during the interregnum, he felt that her 'lack of Welsh' would inevitably tend to thwart her prospects of appointment. Sir J. Goronwy Edwards, then head of the Institute of Historical Research in London, was considered too old at 62, while Hilary Marquand (a most distinguished academic and author who had served since 1950 as the Labour MP for Middlesbrough East, and before that as Labour MP for Cardiff East, 1945-50) had expressed to TJ's daughter, Eirene White (since 1950 the Labour MP for Flintshire East), his

‘willing[ness] to be considered, but he has no Welsh, only a Welsh wife!’ A professor at Bangor was to be ruled out because he had ‘an impossible wife’. Jones had come to the conclusion that it might prove necessary to ‘fall back on the first name in *Who’s Who*’:

R. I. Aaron who Professes Philosophy here & is now visiting Yale for a session, is thoroughly Welsh, & has five children. I like him personally, *qua* philosopher he is a specialist in a narrow field, & is infected with Welsh nationalism & hardly strong enough to withstand its currents which are flowing strongly just now. He is what I would call B++ for this post, but he has local friends who think it safer to take the man we know & play for safety. What depresses me is that with all the hundreds, nay thousands, of students we have turned out, distinction is so very rare. The Committee meets tomorrow afternoon & I shall be glad when it is over. I’ve been in correspondence with Hector & other Principals about the vacancy. Fulton of Swansea will stay with me tomorrow, & the Bangor Principal Sir Emrys Evans will be at the Committee – an experienced Counsellor.¹⁵

By the spring new names had suggested themselves to the harassed old President, notably M. Goronwy Rees, whom a panel from Aberystwyth went to interview at Bristol in May. Still only 43, Rees had in TJ’s considered opinion ‘much to recommend him’ for the vacancy, being Fellow and Bursar of All Souls College, Oxford, and a former assistant editor of *The Spectator*. Another name briefly considered by Jones was that of J. Enoch Powell, but he, it would seem, was not personally approached. TJ had mentioned the two men as likely Principals in conversation with Mrs Ruth Evans – ‘talked about these two men as gifted scholars and possible successors of Ifor’s’. By the end of the month, the selection committee had agreed to appoint Goronwy Rees, Tom Jones writing to Violet Markham:

I must send you a line to say that the Selection Committee which has been meeting here this week has agreed to submit the name of Goronwy Rees for the post of Principal. He is a native of Aberystwyth, son of a Presbyterian minister, took a First in Oxford, & is now Fellow & Bursar of All Souls College, Oxford, & also, part time, a managing director of an engineering business with shops in London, Birmingham & Leeds. He is 44, married & four children. He reads & understands Welsh & has promised to learn to speak it in twelve months. This last disqualification was the obstacle to his rapid adoption but ultimately, by exercising much patience in the chair, I secured unanimity. He was, early on, on the staff of the Manchester Guardian, The Times, & Assistant Editor of the Spectator. He had a very good war record; is certainly an able & attractive person. I have just written to half a dozen editors asking them to say nothing until the choice is confirmed by the College Council on June 26th¹⁶

Jones remained distinctly nervous and uneasy as the crucial meeting of the College Council drew near. The days just before the meeting proved especially ‘anxious’:

As I knew there was to be opposition & for a couple of nights before the Council meeting I found it difficult to sleep even with the aid of a sedative. The Selection Committee had been unanimous & we knew the defects of the candidate *qua* Welsh speaking Welshmen. Fortunately the proposer of the amendment that our Report be ‘sent back’ & the seconder (in a less degree) indulged in such extravagant abuse of the candidate before he was seen that when he was interviewed the contrast with what the Council had been led to expect was such that he was elected by an overwhelming majority. I put him through a catechism on the instructions of the Council & he answered with dignity & lucidity & humour. An appointment of this sort

in this small town excites the whole community & all sorts of rumours are spread in the weeks immediately preceding the election. One reached me this morning: that Mrs Rees' father has made a fortune in a brewery. I imagine this has arisen because Mr R's business makes machinery for breweries! All this good evidence of democratic interest in higher education.¹⁷

It is interesting to note that some hesitation had arisen in the minds of several of the selection committee as it had become apparent that Rees lacked full fluency in the Welsh language. It was left to Tom Jones to reassure his colleagues, 'As to his being a Welshman, he is a Welshman by birth and upbringing but unfortunately his knowledge of the language, at present, is imperfect. He has lived most of his life in England and has forgotten much of the Welsh he learnt as a boy at Aberystwyth. He believes he can recover the fluency he once enjoyed and has pledged himself to the Selection Committee to do so'.¹⁸

J. Graham Jones

The National Library of Wales

There follows the text of Mrs Evans's reminiscences:

The first time I met T.J. was in 1938 a week or so after Ifor and I got married. The occasion was a Cymmrodorion dinner at the Dorchester Hotel in London. The guests of honour at this dinner were the then Foreign Secretary Mr. Anthony Eden and his wife, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales, Ifor L. Evans and his very new wife, who had come more or less straight from Germany. Let it be said that this young, 23 year old creature had very little idea how to deport and behave herself; had never been to a big official function like this before; and had received very little help from her husband beforehand. He said, when anxiously questioned: 'Just be your own sweet self'.

The chairman at this function was Lord Sankey – then Lord Chancellor, I believe. He was charming, quite enchanting, and I shall never forget him. When he heard of the very recent marriage, saw the shy and ignorant young woman by his side, he went out of his way to be kind and supportive, somewhat at the expense of the other lady on his right. He said in his after dinner speech, introducing the guests, that he took it as a tremendous compliment that Principal Evans had got married specially for this occasion; that, being a bachelor himself, he might have done likewise, had he but known in advance. He certainly gave the appearance of finding pleasure in drawing out and putting at her ease the young foreigner.

I was introduced to a lot of people that night, most of whom I have forgotten. T.J. stands out, and so does Gwilym Lloyd George and his charming wife Edna. Having just left Hitler's Germany, I was somewhat race-conscious. Without a moment's hesitation I took the small, dapper, hook-nosed Dr. Thomas Jones for a very distinguished looking Jew. In fact I told my husband afterwards that I had no idea that so many Welsh people were Jews. Names like Levy, Aaron, Samuel could not be anything else, and they looked so semitic. Ifor's cynical reply was that the scarcity of Jews in Wales was due to the fact that there was too much competition from the Welsh. Much later I told T.J. about my first impression and he roared with laughter. He taught me a verse, 'It's odd that God should choose the Jews'.

War, so soon upon us, brought sporadic appearances of T.J. in Aberystwyth, and until he moved into his own house there, he often stayed with us. Whenever there were academic intrigues, discussions about new appointments, policy decisions to be made, he seemed to be there. I cannot remember when he became President of the college, but recall a much later

remark by him that unsuccessful candidates for the Principalship seemed fated to become successful Presidents in due course. (I think I am right in saying that T.J. was a runner-up when J.H. Davies was appointed, and know that Hughes-Parry was a co-applicant with Ifor L.). Quite frequently, I was sworn to secrecy, having sat in on an off-the-record conversation, only to find after a while that what I had kept hidden, was already common knowledge. T.J. was an easy and accommodating guest in Laura Place, not like some, who by their choosiness and negligence made wartime housekeeping even more difficult. A kind word for Miss Lewis, our housekeeper, a pat on the head for the children were natural gestures for him.

One day, sitting by the open garden door in Laura Place, he told me about his youngest son Elphin and his tragic death. He had never spoken about his family before and never did again until 1946. That autumn I went to post-war Germany to see my family. Neither he nor Ifor thought that I would manage this, but I did. I had an abrupt order – and T.J. could be very abrupt – to go to Bryn Hir to have tea. Usually gentle and expansive, a good listener and a fabulous raconteur, he could suddenly close up into an almost aggressive withdrawnness. He had theories – probably valid ones, but to me abhorrent – about gatherings and parties. In his own house he would butt in on conversations, tear them apart and remove the one or other participant to the other side of the room, command them to start a fresh dialogue.

Anyway this time we were alone, decidedly alone. ‘My son Tristan’, he said, ‘Is in the army in Germany. He is running and editing a Forces Newspaper in a place called Lübeck. I want you to go and see him’. T.J. then mentioned a certain estrangement which had occurred between them, of a partly political and partly personal nature. This facile and vulnerable situation was then – and probably still is – of a confidential kind, never touched upon again after the event. I found it embarrassing, an awkward prospect. I was told that Tristan was separated from his wife, that T.J.’s knowledge about his son came from her. That whole journey to the British Occupied Zone of Germany is the most traumatic experience of my life, and had it not been for the desperate desire to see my family, especially my mother, I would not have undertaken it. I think T.J. was aware of the difficulties of my mission. Maybe he wanted me to see Tristan to take my mind off my personal tragedies. I don’t know. Anyway, despite apprehensive forebodings, my meeting with Tristan and Annelie, who later became his wife, was an uncomplicated and happy one. When I say uncomplicated – nothing was in those days, but Tristan made it very easy for me to gain admittance into his immediate circle of work and friends. The first thing that met my eye when I entered his room was a photograph of his father, framed and hanging in a prominent position.

Almost as if to compensate one journey’s difficult task with an easier and more rewarding one, he arranged for me to be met and escorted round New York on my first and rather fatal sojourn to that vast continent. T.J.’s friend Abraham Flexner had a secretary and factotum, who was so devoted to both these men, that she treated any recommended friends of theirs like precious royalty. I’ve forgotten her name, but she gave me a marvellous day in New York, shied off no expense and trouble to make it a memorable occasion, before I went on to stay with my brother and his family. And when I had to return very suddenly from that same journey, because Ifor had died, T.J. was there to receive, if not to comfort me. He was terribly shaken by his friend’s untimely death, had no other means of showing his grief than by a harsh and downright offensive unsentimentality. The big front room in Plas Penglais had seen too much happiness to be turned easily into a chamber of mourning, and I will never, if I can help it, have drawn curtains. T.J. was standing by one of the large windows. Respectfully and conventionally he was dressed in black. He always moved very quickly, walked almost at a run and rarely allowed himself lingering greetings and adieus. With business on his mind, he jumped right into the middle, and having had his way, he would be off, leaving you to ponder and wonder. It was no different on this occasion. If there were words of condolence, they left no mark, because his next sentence made me almost tremble with indignation. ‘We’ll have to think about the next Principal now. There are one or two

people I would like to discuss with you'. Maybe he invested me with more objective and forward-looking sense that I had at my disposal at that moment, and very likely his harsh, impersonal remark hid his own biting sorrow.

During my so-to-speak official years in Aberystwyth I had never been quite sure whether my presence was purely an annex to the Principal, or whether I counted as a person in my own right. Both T.J. and Ifor had had more confidence in my ability to cope with practical issues of life, especially during the hard war- and post war years, than I deserved. I am thinking particularly of occasions like degree ceremonies, inaugural lectures and the 75 anniversary of the College with the inevitable host of visitors and private and official entertaining, lunch, tea and dinner parties. It was taken more-or-less for granted that behind the scenes work would run smoothly and without a hitch. There was no catering help in those days, and as many guests as possible were put up in one's own homes. Looking back I am proud of their confidence and trust; at the time, I will admit, I often cursed the unacknowledged burdens they imposed. However there were always compensations. I wrote into[?] my diary on November 1, 1944, when my house was also full of evacuees, children who had fled from the doodlebugs in London, 'We had an exciting and amusing week electing T.J. as President of the College. Ted Carr came last Monday, and T.J. on Tuesday, full of beans as ever. Tuesday night I dressed up in my old long black silk skirt and Rumanian blouse as a surprise for my guest of honour. T.J. very graciously knelt down when I entered the room and kissed my hand. Ifor had brought three old boiling chickens from Pantyrhuad Farm and lots of vegetables and eggs, so I could feed the party well. Wednesday they had committees, court and council, and Ifor delivered his beautiful speech – duly reproduced in the *Western Mail* the next day. For lunch, apart from T.J. and Ted, we had Sir George Fossett Roberts, old Major Owen Jones, and for tea Lord Harlech and Sir Llewelyn Davies. Then came Ted Carr's lecture "Russia and Europe", excellent, and he is such a nice man, and Andre Barbier for supper. Then a concert, and the student president and vice-president for coffee. A very satisfactory but hectic day'.

When the relatively short time of my life as Mrs. Principal was over, T. J. left me in no doubt about his regard and friendship, and till the end of his days remained a faithful and caring companion. It was he, who, when the war was over, got me the first official confirmation of my family's whereabouts and well-being in occupied Germany, he who entertained my Mother and stepfather when they came to Wales in 1947. Later he often took the trouble to come out to Elerch vicarage to discuss college matters. Perhaps it was not so much my opinion he sought, but to air his views and speculations to a person of whose interest he could be absolutely certain. Maybe I was one of the first to hear the name Goronwy Rees mentioned. T.J. came out to Elerch one afternoon in June 1953, pressed a book into my hand and said, 'Read this and let me know what you think in a couple of days'. It was Goronwy Rees' novel *Where no Wounds Were*. Similarly he had dropped the name Enoch Powell into a conversation, talked about these two men as gifted scholars and possible successors of Ifor's. No doubt that all this had already been discussed at different levels, but I was touched and glad that he gave me at least the opportunity to think about his part in selecting a new Principal, and not to be taken by surprise.

T.J. was an excellent listener as well as a magnificent raconteur. His store of memory was amazing, and what in others remains a vague echo of things gone by, was always a sharp and concise picture in his backward glances. When his keen sense of humour got the better of him, and an apposite but rather biting remark failed to raise a response, he often remembered the adverse impression he had created later and was quick to make up for it. The first time he saw my daughter in her cradle, he bent over it and pronounced in a solemn voice, 'What an earnest child! I can see her future, a bespectacled spinster, mistress of Newnham College Cambridge'. To a proud mother not exactly what she most wanted to hear! Much later, when that same little girl, aged nine by then, sang with her father at the piano, for the celebration of T.J.'s eightieth birthday, which was held at Plas Penglais, - he was dewy-eyed and especially

tender and appreciative. I knew he remembered his sombre forecast. If one was slightly afraid of the great little man in company, because he demanded respect and affection, one could not but love the great little man who, stripped of his uniform of office, became a gentle, kind and considerate listener who did not – as so many – interrupt with ‘When I was young’ or ‘the same happened to me once, etc.’.

I saw many important people, authors, politicians, collectors and educators, through T.J.’s eyes. Sometimes he felt, I suppose, like showing off a bit. And what man of his experience and knowledge wouldn’t? Now that I am getting old myself, I can understand this lovable trait much better. At the time it surprised me that he would, for instance, spend a whole afternoon talking to my young son and two French au pair boys about the abdication of Edward VIII. They listened politely, but the chosen dish of exquisite narrative offered to them was too grand a taste to be fully appreciated. And they don’t remember. That is sad. In that respect I was old enough to treasure certain pictures and panoramas T.J. offered to me, if not in detail, certainly as an overall impression. His journey with Lloyd George to visit Adolf Hitler; his friendship with Kurt Hahn; his intimate association with Stanley Baldwin; the already mentioned long-standing contact with Abraham Flexner; his admiration [for] and personal knowledge of Lord and Lady Astor and the house-parties at Clivedon. So vividly did he bring people and situations to life, just by speaking about them, that I will never forget. His friend Joyce Grenfell came to Aberystwyth and as a personal favour performed in the examination hall in College, all the proceeds going towards the Rag-week charity. This was a very typical gesture of T.J.’s unending generosity. His interest in the young was unstinting once he was convinced of their promise, and he used all the strings at his disposal to pull in right and unselfish directions. In 1951 he sent the then student president to a nursing home in Ruthin for treatment of a duodenal ulcer, paid for by the York Trust. In 1949 he took into his house the sister of his daughter-in-law, a young German. This eighteen year old girl, like the rest of her family, came originally from East Prussia. A fantastic and harassing fight had brought them to the British Zone. Marlene Wiemer was a young person of great promise and astonishingly humble temperament. T.J. saw her through college, where she fulfilled more than one could possibly have expected: a degree in English and Philosophy – having started with but a scanty knowledge of the English language. She would be the first to admit that, but for his guiding influence – harsh at times but always compassionate, she would not have been able to sustain the demands made upon her. She became and still is a very great friend of mine. How many more people are there whom T.J. helped in the past! And while some might have bragged about such achievements, T. J. did this quietly, often totally unknown to outsiders. Just as his movements were quick and purposeful, so his decisions; and like the true diplomat he was, he never went back on his word. When things did not work out as he had hoped, he would withdraw from the scene. But as far as I know, there were no recriminations.

The last time I saw T.J. was on September 20, 1955 in a nursing home in St John’s Wood, London. ‘I’m afraid he is very old and ill’, I wrote into my diary, ‘and on top of everything has broken a bone in his back when falling. Outside on the road I met Marlene, who had come on her Lambretta. We couldn’t really say anything to each other’. Then two days later, ‘To St John’s Wood again, probably the last time. Read to T.J., and massage his poor legs’.

It was completely against his nature to be seen as an inactive and feeble old man. When I left him I gave the tears I had suppressed in his presence free rein. With every person who dies, the chilly draught of loneliness gets colder. I felt it then, I feel it now. But I am proud to have known Thomas Jones, to have been for a short while in his confidence, to have felt his warm regard.

Only a very short while ago I read extracts from Michael Foot’s book in *The Observer*, and what he writes about the millionaire press Lord Beaverbrook has a curious relevance to T.J. For what it is worth this is a quotation, ‘He was wary, high spirited, erratic, cunning,

calculating, passionate, sentimental, restless, impulsive; he could be mean and magnanimous; he had the most perfect manners and he could turn savage’.

All this could have applied to T.J. too, and although a lot of my knowledge of his strictly professional side was second hand, some of it gained by eavesdropping during harangues and discussions, or just ordinary conversations he had with people in my presence, I myself had many occasions to fall victim to his immense charm; to be put off by his sometimes ruthless brusqueness.

- 1 On Ifor Leslie Evans, see the obituaries in *The Times*, 2 and 9 June 1952, and in the *Cambrian News*, 6 June 1952; the tribute by Alwyn D. Rees published in *The Welsh Anvil* IV (1952), 9-12, and the entry by Dr E. L. Ellis in *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography, 1941-1970* (London, 2001), p. 66.
- 2 NLW ex 1837 (‘A Widow’s Tale’), p. 37.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The phrase is that used in E. L. Ellis, *T.J.: a Life of Dr Thomas Jones CH* (Cardiff, 1992), p. 471.
- 5 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T8/3, Jones to Violet Markham, 27 January 1946.
- 6 Ibid. T8/47, 50 and 87, Jones to Violet Markham, 11 April, 7 May and 24 June 1948.
- 7 NLW ex 1837, p. 61, Jones to I. L. Evans, 17 August 1949.
- 8 Ibid., Evans to Jones, [August 1949].
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., p. 62.
- 11 Ellis, *T.J.*, pp. 469-70.
- 12 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T9/21, Jones to Violet Markham, 1 June 1952.
- 13 Ibid. T9/22, Jones to Violet Markham, 6 June 1952.
- 14 Ibid. T9/40, Jones to Violet Markham, 16 December 1952.
- 15 Ibid. T9/48, Jones to Violet Markham, 22 February 1953.
- 16 Ibid. T9/55, Jones to Violet Markham, 27 May 1953.
- 17 Ibid. T9/58, Jones to Violet Markham, 28 June 1953.
- 18 Ibid. T9/59.