

VALENTINE, LEWIS EDWARD (1893-1986), Baptist minister, author and Welsh nationalist

Name: Lewis Edward Valentine

Date of birth: 1893

Date of death: 1986

Spouse: Margaret Valentine (née Jones)

Child: Gweirrul Valentine

Child: Hedd Valentine

Parent: Mary Valentine (née Roberts)

Parent: Samuel Valentine

Gender: Male

Occupation: Baptist minister, author and Welsh nationalist

Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Patriots; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Religion

Author: Dafydd Johnston

Lewis Valentine was born on 1 June 1893 in a house named 'Hillside' in Clip Terfyn street, Llanddulas, Denbighshire, the second of the seven children of Samuel Valentine (1854-1940), a quarryman who was a Baptist lay preacher, and his wife Mary (née Roberts, 1865-1928). He had three brothers, Richard, Idwal and Stanley, and three sisters, Hannah, Nel and Lilian. Bethesda chapel in Llanddulas was a key influence in his upbringing, and the congregation of that little chapel became the basis for his ideal of a spiritual community for the rest of his life.

He was educated at Llanddulas elementary school and at Eirias secondary school in Colwyn Bay. He returned to his old primary school as a pupil-teacher for two years before going to the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in 1913 to study Semitic languages under **Professor Thomas Witton Davies** (see the DWB article by Valentine himself), and Welsh under **Professor John Morris-Jones**. He had already begun preaching in 1912, and his intention was to become a minister after graduating. But his studies were interrupted by the First World War, and having joined the college OTC, in January 1916 he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps like many other students for the ministry. He arrived in France at the end of September 1916, and served on the front line until he was seriously wounded on 23 October 1917 when he inhaled poisonous gas whilst treating the wounded at the battle of Passchendaele. He was blind, deaf and unable to speak for three months in hospitals in England, but by March 1918 he had recovered sufficiently to be moved to Belfast, and he was in Blackpool when the war came to an end. He kept a diary during the war, which he later used as the basis for recollections which were published in *Seren Gomer* in 1969-72 under the title 'Dyddiadur Milwr' (A soldier's diary). Although there is an element of the wisdom of hindsight in the published recollections, it is clear that his nationalist and pacifist convictions were a direct result of his war experiences.

Valentine returned to the university in Bangor in January 1919, where he lodged with his sister Hannah who kept a grocer's shop in the town with her husband. He graduated with a first-class in Semitic languages in June 1919, and was awarded the degree of MA two years later for a thesis on Welsh translations of the Book of Job by **William Morgan** and **Richard Parry**. He played a full part in the Welsh life of the college, and was the first secretary of the Welsh society 'Y Macwyaid', the predecessor of Y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol Gymreig ('Y Tair G') which was established after Valentine had left the college. Valentine was considered to be a very promising Hebrew scholar, but he kept to his intention of joining the ministry, and was ordained as minister of Tabernacl chapel in Llandudno in January 1921. He married Margaret Jones of Llandudno on 1 October 1925, and they had a son, Hedd, in 1926 and a daughter, Gweirrul, in 1932.

In November 1923 Valentine established a monthly paper for the Llandudno Welsh Baptists, *Y Deyrnas* ('The Kingdom'), the same title as that of the pacifist journal edited by **Thomas Rees** during the war), and he was its editor until the paper ceased publication in 1930, and again when it was revived for a short run in 1936. Although the aims of *Y Deyrnas* were primarily devotional, it gave Valentine the opportunity to express his culture nationalism, showing the influence of **Emrys ap Iwan**, particularly with regard to his belief in the inextricable link between religion, language and nation. And it was on the pages of *Y Deyrnas* that he expressed his support for **Tom Nefyn Williams** on the issue of the 'social gospel' in 1928. Later in his life Valentine was editor of the Baptists' national quarterly journal, *Seren Gomer*, for almost a quarter century from 1951 to 1975.

Valentine was present in a series of meetings at the Queen's cafe in Caernarfon in 1924 which led to the establishment of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (The National Party of Wales) in collaboration with like-minded colleagues in the south. The new party was launched at the Pwllheli Eisteddfod in August 1925 and Lewis Valentine was elected as president. He held that post for just one year, until the summer school in Machynlleth, when he was succeeded by **Saunders Lewis**, but Valentine served as vice-president from 1935 to 1938, and he was the party's first parliamentary candidate when he stood for the Caernarfonshire constituency in the general election of 1929. The 609 voters who supported him in that election have become part of the mythology of Plaid Cymru.

By the mid-1930s Valentine felt that the time had come to take action for his principles, and an opportunity arose to do so when the Defence Ministry announced plans to establish an RAF training camp at Porth Neigwl on the Llŷn Peninsula, on the former Penyborth estate. The action for which Lewis Valentine is primarily remembered is his part in the burning of the Bombing School with **Saunders Lewis** and **D. J. Williams** on 8 September 1936. His nationalist and pacifist ideals converged in a symbolic act which inspired many nationalists over the subsequent decades. Valentine was the 'Mr X' who brought the issue to the attention of the press in December 1935, forcing **Saunders Lewis** to take a stand on the matter. Valentine described the fierce clashes which resulted from the campaign against the Bombing School in an article in *Y Ddraig Goch* (June 1936) entitled 'Bedydd tân y Blaid Genedlaethol' (The National Party's baptism of fire). The act of setting fire to the camp buildings was intended to gain publicity for the nationalist cause, and Valentine and **Saunders Lewis** both delivered speeches at the hearing at Caernarfon Crown Court in October 1936 which were published as a pamphlet by the party. The jury failed to reach agreement on that occasion, but when the case was transferred to the Old Bailey in London in January 1937 the three defendants were sentenced to nine months in prison, and they were in Wormwood Scrubs from 20 January until 26 August 1937. Valentine recounted his experience of prison in articles entitled 'Beddau'r byw' (Graves of the living) published in *Y Ddraig Goch* between November 1937 and February 1939, in which his sense of humour and

his sympathy for his fellow prisoners are very evident. The congregation of his chapel were supportive of him during this whole affair, and he was welcomed back to his ministry after his release from prison.

Valentine was invited in October 1943 to become minister of Sion chapel in Ponciau near Wrexham. He refused that invitation, but when a call came to Penuel chapel in Rhosllannerchgrugog in 1947 he decided after much deliberation to accept it. It was a big change for the family to move from the town of Llandudno to the mining village of Rhos, but Valentine served there until he retired from the ministry in 1970. He devoted himself more to literary activity in this period, taking on the editorship of *Seren Gomer* in 1951, where he demonstrated his acumen as a literary critic in reviewing over 900 books. He was an able poet in both the free and strict metres, and his best known composition is 'Gweddi dros Gymru' (A prayer for Wales), a hymn published in *Seren Gomer* in 1962 which has become a kind of second national anthem sung to the tune of Sibelius's 'Finlandia'. He became president of the Welsh Baptist denomination in 1962, and his presidential address published in the same issue of *Seren Gomer* is a sobering assessment of the critical condition of religion in this period.

The crisis facing the Welsh language was also a matter of great concern to him. Having studied the Hebrew of the Old Testament, it is no surprise that he admired Israel's efforts to revive its national language. He was keen to see similar methods applied in districts such as the Rhondda, especially through the education system, and he had been a pioneer of Welsh classes for adults in Llandudno in the 1920s. The influence of **Saunders Lewis's** 'Tynged yr Iaith' (The fate of the language), broadcast on the radio on St David's Day 1962, is apparent on Valentine's presidential address delivered the following month, in which he states that 'the great call for the Welsh-speaking Christians of Wales today is to save the Welsh language as a medium to promote the Kingdom, and as a medium to preach the Word'.

Lewis Valentine had an elevated concept of the role of the minister, and he put particular emphasis on the sermon as a means of expressing a prophetic message. 'The minister is a prophet, and if he is not a prophet then he is nothing', he said in *Seren Gomer* in 1952. Standing straight-backed at over six foot tall, he had an imposing physical presence and an impressive voice to match, and his Welsh was a rich combination of the spoken dialect of his region and the classical literary language. He stood steadfastly faithful to his principles throughout his life, and he can well be taken as representative of the Welsh nonconformist tradition at its best.

After retiring in 1970 he first moved back to Llanddulas, but he was disappointed by the change in his old village, and he and his wife soon moved again to nearby Old Colwyn. The University of Wales awarded him an honorary doctorate in Divinity in 1986, but he did not live to receive it. Lewis Valentine died in a nursing home in Llandrillo-yn-Rhos on 5 March 1986.

Author

Dafydd Johnston

Sources

John Emyr (ed.), *Lewis Valentine: Dyddiadur Milwr a Gweithiau Eraill* (1988)

D. Densil Morgan, 'Y proffwyd ymhlith y praidd: Lewis Valentine (1893-1986)', in *Cedym Canrif: Crefydd a Chymdeithas yng Nghymru'r Ugeinfed Ganrif* (2001), 68-104
Arwel Vittle, *Valentine: Cofiant i Lewis Valentine* (2006)

Correspondence and diaries of Lewis Valentine in the National Library of Wales - a selection of his papers relating to WW1 have been digitised and can be seen on the [Cymru1914 website](#)

Further Reading

NLW Archives: [Anerchiad y Parch. Lewis Valentine i Etholwyr Sir Gaernarfon](#)

People's Collection Wales: [Fire in Llŷn](#)

Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru: [Valentine - Lewis \(1893-1986\)](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Lewis Valentine](#)

Additional Links

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