Lord Robert Cecil

Politician and Internationalist

Gaynor Johnson

ROUTLEDGE

LORD ROBERT CECIL

In memory of 'Y Blant Saes': Hugh (1923–1964), Nancy (1927–2007) and Bob (1929–2000).

Lord Robert Cecil

Politician and Internationalist

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This book has taken some time to write. Indeed, I feel sure that, over the years, many of my friends and colleagues have doubted whether it would ever see the light of day! Grappling with the extensive range of issues on which Lord Robert Cecil passed comment has been one of the most rewarding aspects of writing this book. In helping me try to do justice to Cecil's long life, I am very grateful to a number of colleagues and friends who valiantly took on the heroic task of reading the entire manuscript. In particular, I would like to thank: Professor Martin Ceadel, Professor David Dutton, Dr Carolyn Kitching, Dr Lorna Lloyd and Professor William Keylor. They saved me from a number of embarrassing mistakes and provided me with generous amounts of helpful critical comment. I am also indebted to Professor Patrick Salmon of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for providing me with useful information relating to Cecil's work for the League of Nations. The book benefitted from the support offered by my now former employers, the University of Salford, who granted me a sabbatical to enable me to finish the first draft, in the days when they believed in the value of such things. I would also like to thank my publishers at Ashgate for their good humoured patience, especially Emily Yates and Pam Bertram, and my hawk-eyed copy editor, Patrick Cole. However, the responsibility for any remaining errors, whatever they may be, rests with me alone.

This book is based primarily on a wide range of private papers as well as British government sources. It also makes extensive reference to the large secondary literature that exists on topics relating to British domestic and foreign policy in the first half of the twentieth century. The centrality of Cecil's work for the League of Nations is reinforced by the reproduction of the terms of the Covenant in an appendix. I would very much like to be in a position to offer my thanks to the copyright holder of the Cecil papers at this point, but I am sorry to say that I am unable to do so at this time. Since the death of Professor Ann Lambton, who was the copyright holder when I began the project, all my efforts to find out the identity of her heir in this respect have failed. I would particularly like to thank the staff at the Cecil family archive at Hatfield House for their assistance on this matter, especially Robin Harcourt-Williams and Vicki Perry. Should I be able to ascertain this person's identity after the publication of this book, I would be delighted to seek their permission to quote from the papers.

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My final and greatest debt is to my family. Without their love and support and willingness to accept my claim that writing is indeed 'real work', this book would have been considerably more difficult to produce. I would especially like to thank my now late mother for her unfailing support for my endeavours in all things. She was a remarkable woman of quiet grace, intellect and good humour. Like the subject of this book, she was very mindful of what it was to be a 'middle child', in her case having both an older and a younger brother. In life, she too was devoted to her siblings. To reflect this, in honouring her, this book is dedicated to the memory of not one but three Liverpool Welsh children.

Gaynor Johnson, Bolton, August 2013.

Abbreviations

ADM	Papers of the British Admiralty
BL Add Mss	British Library Additional Manuscripts
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
CAB	Papers of the British Cabinet
CHE	Papers of Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, UK
FO	Foreign Office
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office
LNU	League of Nations Union
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, Surrey, UK
WLL	Women's Library, London

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Introduction

Anyone who has studied British political history and foreign policy during the first half of the twentieth century will have encountered the subject of this book. The presence of Lord Robert Cecil, later Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, barrister, Unionist politician, Cabinet Minister, internationalist, Nobel Laureate, peace activist, university chancellor, author, broadcaster and devout Christian in the historical record is considerable.[1] He was a member of one of the most well-known and influential political dynasties in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British history and part of one of that family's most brilliant generations. He was the most prominent internationalist of the interwar period. He was also one of the first to appreciate the value of public opinion as a political weapon. Indeed, Cecil was no ordinary politician or international figure. He often transcended the conventional barriers of party orthodoxy, ideology and diplomatic convention that inhibited the actions of other men. Even resignation from the Cabinet failed to produce as great a decline of influence in government circles than others would have experienced. If anything, Cecil's public profile was highest when he held no official government office. He was independent-minded but was not an original thinker. He engaged with all of the political and diplomatic questions he encountered on his own terms

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[1] For Cecil's career as a Unionist MP, see especially A. Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics, 1903–1913* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); D. Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition: The Unionist Party in Opposition 1905–1915* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992). For Cecil's two periods as a Cabinet Minister, see V. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971); B.J.C. McKercher, *The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924–1929* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For his work relating to the League of Nations and peace movements, see D.S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); M. Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); G.W. Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations. Strategy, Politics and International Organisation, 1914–1919* (London: Scolar Press, 1979). Cecil has also been the subject of a number of articles in academic journals. The most notable are: D. Carlton, 'Disarmament with Guarantees: Lord Cecil 1922–1927', *Disarmament and Arms Control*, 3, 2 (1965), pp. 143–64; P. Raffo, 'The League of Nations Philosophy of Lord Robert Cecil', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 20 (1974), pp. 186–96; J.A. Thompson, 'Lord Cecil and the Historians', *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 709–15 and 'Lord Cecil and the Pacifists in the League of Nations Union', *Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), pp. 949–59; C. Thorne, 'Viscount Cecil, the Government and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931', *Historical Journal*, 14 (1971), pp. 805–26.

but in doing so, did not produce a radical new philosophy to explain them. Yet to many, Cecil was *sui generis*. During the interwar period, he became the doyen, indeed almost the physical embodiment, of the British moral crusade against war, although his reputation never assumed the same heights abroad. The impression that Cecil operated on a higher plane than his contemporaries led many to attribute Christ-like qualities to him. The author, Gertrude Bell, wrote of how she felt her 'soul had been rested', after encountering him. Harold Laski commented that one 'went out feeling cleaner by contact with him', while the civil servant, Clement Jones, wrote how Cecil 'always gave the impression that he was going to say something that we should all want to remember all our lives.'[2] Another commentator believed that Cecil's views on international affairs were as 'unimpeachable as the Sermon on the Mount'.[3]

Cecil was a forensic debater and fiercely loyal to the causes he believed in. His career as a politician and internationalist spanned a half-century of unprecedented change in British domestic and foreign affairs. As such, an analysis of his career offers insights into subjects as diverse as tariff reform, Irish Home Rule, the operation of the British government during periods of war as well as peace, the conduct of diplomacy, Britain's changing status as an international power and the Disestablishment of the Welsh Church. He also worked alongside all of the most important figures in British political history during this time, as well as many of the most influential statesmen in the world of international diplomacy. Cecil possessed a relentless energy that fuelled his campaigns for a plethora of causes, and left him for the last time only a matter of weeks before his death in his 94th year.

Yet, despite his importance and presence on the British political and international scene and the survival of plentiful personal papers, this book represents the first full-scale biography to be published. It will focus on the two principal strands of his life: his political career and his long association with the League of Nations in the years following the First World War. In Cecil's case this affords a useful means of constructing a biographical analysis of his life because he had the tendency to focus on these elements consecutively with only a brief, albeit important, period of concurrence during the First World War. Therefore, while it would be correct to assert that Cecil enjoyed a career as a Member of Parliament that lasted more than half a century, it was only during the period between c. 1906 and 1918 that he can be regarded first and foremost as a parliamentary politician. As Peter Raffo has pointed out, there is little evidence

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[2] Gertrude Bell to her father (undated) but c. March 1919, Gertrude Bell Archive, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/home/index.htm>; I. Kramnick and B. Sheerman, *Harold Laski: A Life on the Left* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 183; C. Jones, 'Viscount Cecil of Chelwood 1864–1958: An Appreciation', *International Affairs*, 35 (1959), p. 282.

[3] 'Crying in the Wilderness', *The Star*, 22 April 1922, BL Add Mss 51075B, Cecil Papers.

that Cecil thought seriously about the condition of international affairs before 1914. However, he was shocked into considering how to prevent future wars by the outbreak of hostilities in that year and by the high levels of casualties the war created.[4] Cecil's memoirs attest to his life-long interest in international affairs, yet it was only after 1916 that this became paramount in his thinking. After the First World War, with one exception – the debate about the creation of a Centre Party, 1921–22 – Cecil played little role in the consideration of domestic political issues, despite his period as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the second Baldwin government, 1924–27. As with so many of the positions he held during the interwar period, Cecil turned that role into a League of Nations and foreign affairs brief. As a result, much of the second half of the book maps Cecil's thoughts and actions against the international history of the interwar period and the Second World War, and makes reference to little else.

The above outline of Cecil's career also implies, of course, that it was the First World War that was the pivotal event that brought about the change in his priorities. In this respect, this book follows the pattern of Cecil's own thinking. In his memoirs, *All the Way*, Cecil explained 'though I never got near enough to the front to see war as it actually is, yet my glimpses of its relatively distant surroundings were among the chief causes of my determination to devote the rest of my life to the maintenance of peace!'[5] There are innumerable similar comments within his private correspondence, the most notable of which is a manuscript entitled 'On the War', dating from late 1914 or early 1915, in which he wrote:

> Is it possible that when the storm has passed some new policy may arise, inchoate indeed and even rudimentary, but still in some degree providing for joint action by the whole of Europe or even Christendom to force upon civilised nations some less barbarous way of settling their disputes? If this should be the outcome of the war it would be some mitigation even of its misery, some palliation of its wickedness.[6]

Given the importance therefore of the First World War in understanding Cecil's life's work, the chapters that deal with this period move at a slower pace than the remainder of the book. Particular attention is given to his relationship with his colleagues in the Tory Party, his views on economic warfare, his career in the Foreign Office and his negotiations with the American government concerning the creation of the League of Nations. That said, the book does not provide an exhaustive account of every aspect of Cecil's career in politics and international affairs. The present author has deliberately navigated around aspects of his work that add comparatively little to the central thesis. Cecil's involvement in the prosecution of the Marconi scandal is more than adequately covered by

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4 Raffo, p. 187.

5 Viscount Cecil, *All the Way* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), p. 127.

6 'On the War', undated memorandum by Cecil, BL Add Mss 51195, Cecil Papers.

Frances Donaldson's book, for example.[7] Likewise, Cecil's promotion of the enfranchisement of women after the First World War has already been well documented by Martin Pugh and others.

In the introduction to books such as this, it is customary to outline how the argument contained within its pages complements or challenges the existing orthodoxy on the subject. Although there is no other biography of Cecil in print, as already indicated, he has not been without historical attention in the past. While some scholars have made detailed comment on Cecil's role in Edwardian politics, there is a richer debate on his views concerning international affairs and the work of the League of Nations. As a Unionist politician before the First World War, Cecil has been viewed as something of a maverick, frequently at odds with his party and its leader, but never to the extent that he contemplated changing political allegiances.[8] This study does not fundamentally challenge this general assessment of Cecil, but instead offers a more nuanced and detailed analysis of this important part of his career in public life, suggesting that his strengths lay in his talent for organisation and bureaucracy.

The most important recent work relating to Cecil's career as an internationalist is that by the Canadian historian, Peter Yearwood.[9] In his account of the role of the British government in the creation of the League of Nations, Yearwood points to the comments made by earlier scholars that Cecil was high-minded, that his aristocratic background rendered him remote from the new post-war world of mass democracy, that he was too immersed in Church affairs and spent too much time engaging in political intrigue to be able to make a positive mark.[10] As an extension

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7 F. Donaldson, *The Marconi Scandal* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962).

8 See, for example, D. Dutton, 'Unionist Politics and the Aftermath of the General Election of 1906: A Reassessment', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), pp. 861–76; P. Fraser, 'Unionism and Tariff Reform: The Crisis of 1906', *Historical Journal*, 5 (1962), pp. 149–66 and 'The Unionist Debacle of 1911 and Balfour's Retirement', *Journal of Modern History*, 35 (1963), pp. 354–65; H. Glickman, 'The Toryness of English Conservatism', *Journal of British Studies*, 1 (1961–62), pp. 111–43; H.W. McCreedy, 'The Revolt of the Unionist Free Traders', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 16, (1963), pp. 188–206; R. Murphy, 'Faction and the Home Rule Crisis 1912–1914', *History*, 71 (1986), pp. 222–34; G.D. Phillips, 'Lord Willoughby de Broke and the Politics of Radical Toryism, 1909–1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1980), pp. 205–24; A. Sykes, 'The Confederacy and the Purge of the Unionist Free Traders 1906–1910', *Historical Journal*, 8 (1975), pp. 349–66 and 'The Radical Right and the Crisis of Conservatism before the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 661–76. Cecil also features prominently in, among others, Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics, 1903–1913*; Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*; L.L. Witherell, *Rebel on the Right: Henry Page Croft and the Crisis of British Conservatism, 1903–1914* (London: Associated University Presses, 1997); and J. Smith, *The Tories and Ireland 1910–1914: Conservative Party Politics and the Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).

9 P.J. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy, 1914–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

10 Ibid., p. 153.

of this, we have all of the ecclesiastic similes and metaphors that have been used to describe Cecil. In particular, there is Salvador de Madariaga's description of him as a 'civic monk', with all of the associations of saintliness and self-sacrifice that this image creates.[11] In contrast, Yearwood's Cecil is much more three-dimensional, more flawed, and, significantly, more devious and ambitious. Cecil was, he argues, continuously engaged in political intrigue in the period between 1918 and 1922, and was motivated by an 'overriding aim' to 'bring down Lloyd George'.[12] Furthermore, in his earlier work, Yearwood wrote that 'it is difficult to avoid gaining the impression that Cecil was systematically collecting grievances so that he could either force out [the Foreign Secretary, Lord] Curzon, who he would then replace, or break with the government on the grounds that it was indifferent or even hostile to the interests of the League'.[13] However, while Yearwood is right to assert that there was much more to Cecil than his 'civic monk' persona, it is more difficult to find sustained evidence of the Machiavellian character that emerges from the pages of his book. Cecil was undoubtedly a ruthless negotiator, but so were the majority of those who congregated in Paris in 1919 to sort out the way in which international peace would be maintained after the First World War. Yearwood cites Cecil's promotion of a Centre Party between 1920 and 1922 as evidence of his political plotting. While Cecil undoubtedly advocated this idea, it is difficult to see against whom he could be described as conspiring. And with the increasing rise of the Labour Party, it was hardly in his interests to promote a political strategy that could split the Conservative vote. Instead, to Cecil, the Centre Party was a way in which to combine liberal-minded people on a common political platform. In this it mirrored his vision of the League of Nations Union, of which he was president for more than two decades after the First World War. It is difficult to see Cecil as a man who bore grievances to such an extent that he would try to bring down the Lloyd George government because he felt that it had not afforded him sufficient support in developing a robust League policy. And while his personal view of Lloyd George did indeed border on hatred, it is nevertheless true that when Cecil's relationship with all of the senior British politicians he came into contact is examined, Anthony Eden was probably the only one whose commitment to the League measured up to his expectations. In his single-minded enthusiasm for the cause, Cecil seldom made allowances for the political juggling that all those in government charged with foreign affairs had to perform, between Cabinet, Parliament and the electorate. He just ignored any of these three if they did not suit his purpose, only to cultivate them again as and when their support suited his agenda.[14]

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[11] S. de Madariaga, 'The Civic Monks', in G. Murray, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 37.

[12] Yearwood, p. 151.

[13] P.J. Yearwood, '"Consistently with Honour": Great Britain, the League of Nations and the Corfu Crisis of 1923', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), p. 562.

[14] E.H. Carr, *Britain: A Study of Foreign Policy* (London: Longman, 1939), pp. 100–101, 108–9.

The principal aim of this book is to provide an analysis of Cecil's life that steers a path between his 'civic monk' reputation and that of the Machiavellian plotter. This study also challenges the myth that Cecil was an unrealistic idealist who lacked an accurate grasp of the way in which international diplomacy worked and who was unwilling to listen if those dynamics appeared to work contrary to the interests of the League of Nations. Instead, Cecil emerges as a politically astute if single-minded figure whose views on international relations and on the operation of the League evolved over time in direct response to events as they unfolded. The League of Nations, as Cecil envisaged it, was an organic entity that would evolve and grow to accommodate the needs of the international community it served. That said, it is unfortunate that Cecil had a habit of writing and speaking about the League with a type of absolute certainty that suggested a mind closed to reform. In reality, nothing could have been further from the truth. His was a pragmatic approach both towards the operation and the evolution of the League. This book will not seek to 'rebadge' Cecil politically; it makes no claim that he was in reality a closet member of the Labour Party, although he did have some socialist leanings. Equally, it discusses Cecil's various dalliances with the Liberal Party without claiming that he ever entirely abandoned his Tory roots. Instead, the book portrays Cecil as he wanted to be seen, as a liberal Tory.

Like the majority of men in public life, Cecil was anxious to influence how history would judge him. He originally believed that the most effective way to do this was through the example of the League of Nations itself. A League that commanded the respect of an international community that was committed to banning war would provide sufficient testament to the validity of his arguments about collective security. But, as is well documented, the League far from lived up to the challenges facing its authority, stepping aside with increasing frequency as Europe and Japan's fascist dictators flouted international treaties, rearmed and threatened to plunge the world into a second global conflict. The two largest pieces of prose that Cecil penned, *All the Way* (1949) and *A Great Experiment* (1941), are as much attempts to guard against accusations of errors of judgement and naivety as they are respectively an effort to chronicle his life and to write a history of the League.[15] Indeed, *All the Way* is a disappointing, thin memoir that exhibits the worst attributes of such books. Written in a hurry, its primary purpose was to provide an income for Cecil's old age. In it, as Thomas Davies has recently pointed out, Cecil was too blasé in his dismissal of his errors of judgement and too willing to engage in rhetoric about what the League could have embodied, rather than what it actually achieved.[16] But in his defence, away from the pages of his memoirs, Cecil was willing to engage in a more sober reflection of the evolution

[15] Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, *A Great Experiment: An Autobiography by Viscount Cecil* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941) and *All the Way* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949).

[16] T.R. Davies, *The Possibilities of Transnational Activism: The Campaign for Disarmament between the Two World Wars* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2007), p. 14. See also Thompson, 'Lord Cecil and the Pacifists in the League of Nations Union', p. 950;

of his ideas about the League. In July 1936, he admitted embarrassment when reading his earlier speeches because he had 'relied almost entirely on the pressure of public opinion to achieve peace, and had ignored the necessity of backing it up by material action'.[17]

When embarking on this book, I was intrigued why Cecil had not yet been the subject of a biography.[18] For, as Christopher Thorne wrote as long ago as the early 1970s, 'it scarcely seems necessary to explain why Cecil's views are of interest in the first place'.[19] Having decided to rectify the situation, I rapidly became aware of a number of challenges that perhaps explained the reluctance of other historians to embark on the task. The first was practical: the sheer scale of the undertaking. The enormous breadth of Cecil's interests and activities, combined with the length of his career and the voluminous papers that have survived, makes the task of synthesis into a study of his life daunting.

The second challenge was the man himself. Although he would have disliked being termed enigmatic, Cecil, nonetheless, was a man who was difficult to pigeonhole. By upbringing, he was a High Anglican, the son of one of the grandees of the nineteenth-century Conservative Party, the third Marquess of Salisbury. While Cecil did not share many of his father's sensibilities about how political influence should be brought to bear on government, they both believed that all forms of power contained a responsibility that should only be given to those who would use it wisely. The conduct of politics and diplomacy should be guided by Christian conscience and have an ethical foundation, rather than serve as a means of self-promotion. This was a point appreciated by one government official who wrote of Cecil: 'No one wanted a front seat or a prominent position in the limelight less than he did.'[20] Indeed, Cecil did not embark on his political career until he was 42, having spent much of his adult life trying to avoid being drawn into the world other members of his family more readily inhabited.[21] Cecil did not expect or solicit Cabinet appointments, expressing no desire to be either Foreign Secretary or Prime Minister, the two principal roles that drove the agenda in the conduct of British foreign policy. Through the 1920s, he pressed for the creation of the post of Minister for League of Nations Affairs, a post that he fully intended to occupy. Yet this was because he wished the British government to recognise the importance of the League, not as an opportunity to infiltrate the Cabinet.

Thorne, and, by the same author, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931–1933* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

[17] Cecil to Murray, 30 July 1936, BL Add Mss 51132, Cecil Papers.

[18] The family surname name was Gascoyne-Cecil. With very few exceptions, this was always shortened to Cecil and was the name that the subject of this book used himself. Consequently, it is this form of the name that has been used throughout this book.

[19] Thorne, 'Viscount Cecil, the Government and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931', p. 805.

[20] Jones, p. 282.

[21] Cf. Thompson, 'Lord Cecil and the Pacifists in the League of Nations Union', p. 950.

Another obstacle is the tendency of some historians and commentators to explain Cecil's thoughts and actions in terms of his family background. The journalist, E.T. Raymond, for example, felt compelled to write that:

> Concerning Lord Robert, the most important fact is that he is a Cecil. Every Cecil is a Cecil before everything. In no English family does the type remain more constant. There have been Cecils good and bad, brilliant and stupid, fools and men of great qualities, if never quite of the greatest. But running through ten generations are discernible certain mental traits a good deal more enduring than any physical feature … a passionate attachment to the Church; an instinct of compromise which enables them, while maintaining the extreme Tory position, to avoid the reproach of mere bigotry; a detachment which would savour of pure arrogance were it not allied with considerable simplicity of manners; and a singular vein of grave rowdiness which breaks out in every generation.[22]

In contrast, this study does not lump the progeny of the third Marquess of Salisbury together in an attempt to define a collective Cecil family mindset.[23] On one level, this would undoubtedly have been an interesting exercise. After all, Cecil's eldest and youngest brothers were both leading members of the Unionist Party. His cousin, Arthur Balfour, rose to be leader of the party and later Foreign Secretary. But in this study, they are accorded a secondary function, although their role as formative and contemporary influences on Cecil's thinking is acknowledged where it is appropriate to do so. That said, it is a source of regret that space did not permit a detailed discussion of Cecil's long marriage to his beloved wife, Nelly, a union which is documented in minute detail in their correspondence preserved at the Cecil family home, Hatfield House. During their 70 years of matrimony, it seems that they kept every letter they wrote to one another.

The task of measuring how Cecil's thinking compared to that of his siblings and his father is further complicated by the impact of his family's high-profile Protestantism. Cecil's High Anglicanism undoubtedly provided the moral core to his life. When, in old age, he was asked how his religious beliefs had underpinned his career in public life, Cecil described how he had been 'born into a family of believers' where Christian teaching had been 'part of the surrounding circumstances of my life'.[24] The connection between Cecil's religious convictions, his ideas about international relations and the maintenance of peace will form a strand of this book, although will not be a principal focus of the analysis. For Cecil, Christianity was a practical creed. He believed that one lived the faith, that 'Christianity is not a vague theory'.[25] Nonetheless, his family's high-profile Anglicanism has had some adverse effect on Cecil's historical reputation, with

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22 E.T. Raymond, *Uncensored Celebrities* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1919), pp. 62–3.

23 K. Rose, *The Later Cecils* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975).

24 Cited in Rose, pp. 169–70.

25 Cited in Rose, pp. 169–70.

some scholars describing him as a sanctimonious, moralising prig. One notable scholar of the interwar period, writing in the 1980s, described Cecil as 'quick-tempered, self-righteous and stubborn'.[26]

However, it is important to remember that the majority of Cecil's contemporaries did not judge him as harshly. Many, instead, would have recognised the Earl of Balcarres' description of Cecil as a 'fanatic'. In many respects, this depiction provides a helpful means of moving the analysis forward.[27] The etymology of the word is derived from the Latin *fānāticus*, meaning 'a temple devotee who is orgiastic, inspired, frantic or frenzied'.[28] Another definition goes further, describing a fanatic as 'always profaning, attacking the temples, polluting the relics, defying the taboos and cursing the gods of the "other" and shitting in the pope's tiara'.[29] The seventeenth-century definition of a 'visionary' and 'an unreasoning enthusiast' also has a role to play in analysing Cecil.[30] This, indeed, fits in well with Cecil's own definition of himself as a 'monomaniac', or, as he expressed the point more fully: 'I think that the League of Nations, or rather the ideas which underlie the League are the only things which really matter in politics today.'[31]

All of these definitions are, of course, attempts to describe the opinions of religious zealots, but in applying them to Cecil, it is important to remember that he was never himself a religious fanatic. There was undoubtedly a connection between Cecil's Christian faith, his political views and his work to outlaw the use of war. However, it was primarily his political convictions that shaped his views on war, not the other way round. That is, the single-minded zeal he adopted in his promotion of the League derived some of its strength from a Christian, humanitarian reaction to the horrors of the trenches.[32] Yet in this, as with most things, he was not always consistent. It was also true that for one who claimed to

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[26] B.J.C. McKercher, *The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924–1929* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 77. See also K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 368.

[27] J. Vincent (ed.), *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay Twenty-Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871–1940 during the Years 1892–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 483. See also L.S. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p. 144.

[28] G. Johnson and M. Hughes (eds), *Fanaticism and Conflict in the Modern Age* (Ilford: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 1.

[29] A. Colas, *International Civil Society: Social Movements in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 5.

[30] Cited in Johnson and Hughes, p. 1.

[31] Cecil to Victor Gollancz, 5 October 1938, BL Add Mss 51181, Cecil Papers; Cecil to Hartington, 7 April 1922, BL Add Mss 511623, Cecil Papers.

[32] It is interesting to contrast Cecil's views on the futility of war with those of one of his brothers. Reflecting on the loss of five of the third Marquess' ten grandsons in the First World War, Edward Cecil wrote: 'It was in a sense an awful family loss but I cannot be quite sorry now. It is a splendid thing to leave life as clean and bright as that. It is a great honour and distinction.' Cited in Rose, pp. 149–50.

reject war in all its forms, the First World War left in Cecil a lasting appreciation for the effectiveness of blockade as a military tactic – one that he vociferously encouraged the League of Nations to adopt.

Cecil's brand of fanaticism also brought out aspects of his character that compounded if not explained the frustrations of many with whom he came into contact, particularly in the realm of party politics. While his barrister's training gave him the skill to put forward political and diplomatic arguments with vigour and confidence, it also exacerbated a strong dogmatic streak in his personality. He was not what today would be termed a team player. Instead, he subjected his critics to a relentless barrage of close argument until they either no longer had the stamina to continue the debate or until they expressed themselves convinced of his argument. No one was too inconsequential to take on. He took no quarter in debate, whether it was a rank and file member of the League of Nations Union, a constituent or one of his Cabinet colleagues. One senior Conservative politician described Cecil as 'headstrong … without much judgement, the fanatic of one idea'.[33] Meanwhile, the French politician, Georges Clemenceau, described Cecil's mind as 'banged, barred and bolted against arguments'.[34] This aspect of his personality, which his kinsman, the historian Hugh Cecil, sees as a consequence of living too long as a child in the relatively 'closed' world of the family home, Hatfield House, helps to explain Cecil's propensity for threatening resignation throughout his career.

In creating a portrait of Cecil's personality, it would be remiss to omit a description of his physical appearance. The most vivid comes from the pen of Salvador de Madariaga:

> The gaunt, stooping, clerical figure of Robert Cecil seemed ever drawn forward by an eager zest which one fancied sharpened his long pointed nose and flashed in his powerful eyes … That cross hanging from his waistcoat pocket witnessed to the religious basis of his political faith; but the sharp tongue, the determined chin, the large, powerful hand, the air of a man used to being obeyed, proud towards men if humble before God, did suggest that in that tall figure striding with his long legs that thronged corridors of the League, the levels of Christian charity were kept high above the plane of fools.[35]

Unfortunately for a man of peace, the majority of pen portraits depict Cecil metaphorically not as a dove but literally as a hawk. One contemporary saw him as a 'gaunt but benevolent member of the family of the Falconidae'.[36] His early days

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[33] Austen Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 22 September 1923, in R. Self (ed.), *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1995), p. 232.

[34] G. Clemenceau, *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* (London: Harrap, 1930), p. 138.

[35] De Madariaga, pp. 178–9.

[36] 27 May 1923, Sir Almeric Fitzroy, *Memoirs*, vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1938), p. 807.

on the Unionist benches led another observer to describe Cecil as 'a benevolent hawk … anxious to swoop upon the Liberal Party'.[37] There are numerous accounts of Cecil's absence of sartorial elegance, a trait that began as a boy when he rebelled against wearing his school uniform at Eton and which continued throughout his life. Hugh Cecil described his appearance as 'a cross between a poor clergyman and a navvy'.[38] One contemporary even suggested that Cecil's propensity for a 'soft hat, black coat, and light trousers' indicated that he had leanings towards being a 'Socialist intellectual', belying the fact that there was a 'hard core of aristocratic exclusiveness beneath'.[39] This was a variant on the advice that Cecil's Oxford contemporary, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, once gave him: 'If you cannot dress like a gentleman, I think you ought at least try and dress like a Conservative.'[40] Nonetheless, even on the occasions when Cecil did manage smart attire, it seems that clothes did not maketh the man. In November 1924, Cecil, recently elevated to the House of Lords as Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, wore his new robes to the State Opening of Parliament. One commentator noted that, while 'saintly Bob was wearing some wonderful robes', he looked 'incredibly wicked and scheming, like the evil counsellor in the fairy tale, or the bad uncle of a mediaeval king'.[41] There were other facets to his distinctive appearance. Cecil was, as Clement Jones noted, always easy to spot at meetings because he was known for 'sitting on his back collar-stud', a phenomenon that was 'among the sights of London'.[42] As late as 1958, when peers gathered to pay tribute to Cecil at the time of his death, the then Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, the Earl of Home, recalled how frequently he had 'watched him, with his long figure, slide more and more under the table, until only the distinguished head was left above his plate'.[43]

A final challenge to a biographer of Cecil is that it is difficult to detect a core intellectual foundation to his ideas that extended beyond what he would have seen as the moral framework created by his Christian beliefs. Reference has already been made to his relative lack of original thought. It is known that he read widely, but he left little indication about what he actually read. It is not possible to discern evidence of the influence of any particular author on his thinking, although in his later years he took great pleasure in identifying the commentators on contemporary affairs who publicly agreed with him. His close associate, Gilbert Murray, was a distinguished Oxford classicist, but, as Cecil was the first to admit, their debates

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37 Cited in Rose, p. 142.

38 H. Cecil, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the League of Nations during the First World War', in P.H. Liddle (ed.), *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War* (London: Brassey's, 1985), p. 71.

39 Raymond, p. 68.

40 Cited in Rose, p. 130.

41 Ibid., p. 166.

42 Jones, p. 281.

43 *House of Lords Debates*, 26 November 1958, 5th Series, vol. 212, col. 842.

centred on the practical work of the League rather than on what today would be described as international relations theory. Cecil is thus as difficult to categorise in retrospect as he was in life. A life-long member of the Conservative Party, he was often intellectually more at home among Liberals. He was a product of the British Victorian aristocracy, whose authority in the corridors of political and diplomatic power he sought to uphold, yet possessed a zealous enthusiasm for the democratisation of the decision-making processes in these areas to reflect wider public opinion. He was a man with few close friends and allies, yet was revered by thousands. He operated more effectively as a politician either when out of office altogether or when the boundaries of his areas of responsibility were blurred. As president of the League of Nations Union he was an autocrat, yet reviled autocratic forms of government, be they fascist or communist. While being a Cecil by name, with all the associations that came with that, physically and temperamentally he more resembled his mother than his father. Yet, at the same time, he was as aware as any of his siblings of the enormity of the third Marquess of Salisbury's contribution to Victorian politics and his legacy to the Conservative Party. As the American journalist, P.W. Wilson, put it, Cecil was 'a noble, living in his own country, but always as an exile'.[44]

[44] 'Lord Robert Cecil, Apostle of the League of Nations', *The New York Times*, 25 March 1923, p. 8.

Chapter 1
Inheritance

Edgar Algernon Robert Gascoyne-Cecil emerged into the world on 14 September 1864, at 11 Duchess Street, Portland Place, London, the third son of Lord Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, the future third Marquess of Salisbury and three-times Conservative Prime Minister, and his wife Georgina. His parents had married in 1857 amidst some controversy, it being believed that in marrying the daughter of the middle-class Sir Edward Alderson, Lord Cecil had married beneath him.[1] Despite this inauspicious start, theirs was a happy union that produced eight children. When Bob, as he was to be known by his friends and family throughout his life, was born, he joined Maud,[2] Gwendolen,[3] James[4] and William[5] in the nursery, and was closely followed by two other brothers, Edward[6] and Hugh.[7] A third sister, Fanny, was born in 1866, but died a year later. This tight-knit group of siblings, together with his wife, provided Cecil with his emotional, moral and intellectual compass throughout his life. They were at once insular and clannish and yet gregarious in the expression of their opinions. Their political pedigree meant that they expected to be influential, taking it for granted, as many of their class did, that their role in life would be to shape opinion rather than to follow it. That said, Cecil's formative years reveal him to be a classic middle child, believing himself to be unremarkable in his achievements and accomplishments in comparison with

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[1] A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), pp. 30–1.

[2] Beatrix Maud Gascoyne-Cecil, Countess Selborne (1858–1950). M. Pugh, '(Beatrix) Maud Palmer (1858–1950)', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). K. Rose, *The Later Cecils* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975) is a series of short biographical sketches of her and her siblings.

[3] Gwendolen Gascoyne-Cecil (1860–1945). H. Cecil, 'Lady Gwendolen Gascoyne-Cecil', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[4] James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil (1861–1947). P. Williamson, 'James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil, Fourth Marquess of Salisbury (1861–1947)', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[5] Rupert William Ernest Gascoyne-Cecil (1863–1936).

[6] Edward Herbert Gascoyne-Cecil (1867–1918). M.W. Daly, 'Lord Edward Herbert Gascoyne-Cecil (1867–1918)', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[7] Hugh Richard Heathcote Gascoyne-Cecil, Baron Quickswood (1869–1956). K. Rose, 'Lord Hugh Richard Heathcote Gascoyne-Cecil, Baron Quickswood (1869–1956)', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

his siblings. However, rather than persuading Cecil to whither away into obscurity, this sense of relative mediocrity fired an independence of mind and singularity of purpose in him that ultimately outlasted and eclipsed the apparently brighter stars of his brothers. From his mother Cecil inherited a strong sense of social responsibility and an even temper, and from his father a ruthlessly logical mind. His academic careers at Eton and later at Oxford were marked more by his maverick attitudes towards social and intellectual conformity than by academic achievement. A consummate debater, a career in the law seemed to be the natural outlet for a man who spent much of the first four decades of his life resisting family pressure to enter politics. Despite taking silk, Cecil grew increasingly disenchanted with his work as a barrister. In particular, he believed that his family connections to the world of politics meant that those prosecuting the major cases of the day were reluctant to engage his services in case such a step had political consequences. In this there was probably some justification, an impression reinforced by the marriage in 1883 of Cecil's sister, Maud, to the son of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Selborne. Cecil's legal career also has a bearing on the evolution of his ideas about international affairs. The mantra of tolerant, egalitarian liberalism that he used to promote the League of Nations was largely absent from his accounts of his travels to Japan in 1905. He found encounters with other cultures distasteful and unsettling. He also developed a dislike of long-distance international travel that was to remain with him for the remainder of his life.

A year after Cecil's birth, his father became Viscount Cranborne, the courtesy title accorded to the heir of the Marquess of Salisbury, after the death of his childless elder brother, James, in June 1865. Although his profound disability had led many to assume that James Cecil would not live to adulthood, his sudden death came as a shock to his brother, who had anticipated spending the rest of his life pursuing political office without the responsibility of running the family estates. The death also brought about a partial reconciliation of the rift that had existed between Cecil's father and the second Marquess caused by the controversy surrounding his marriage. As it was, in 1865, the Cecils returned to live at the family seat, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, for the first time since their marriage eight years earlier. Therefore, although born in a relatively humble abode in London, it was to be this magnificent Jacobean mansion in Hertfordshire, with all of its associations with Tudor power brokering, that Bob Cecil was to regard as home. This connection was reinforced more permanently three years later when Cecil's father succeeded to the title of Marquess of Salisbury.

The family heritage associated with Hatfield had a direct impact on the Cecil children. Close in age, they enjoyed a generally harmonious relationship that was to last throughout their lives. This closeness was also forged by their educational experiences and by their home life. The boys' early education was far removed from that traditionally associated with the Victorian aristocracy. They did not attend prep school but were educated at home until the age of 13, whereupon they were dispatched to Eton. During these formative years, all of the Cecil siblings were exposed to a 'bracing' programme of intellectual development that required

them from an early age to hold their own in discussions about politics and religion.[8] They were spoken to and treated as adults by their parents, who encouraged them to speak their minds and taught them the oratorical and writing skills necessary to do this.[9] The imprint of this style of parenting varied considerably from child to child, but its most profound legacy – present in all of the siblings – was a lasting reverence for the Conservative principles expounded by their father and a deep devotion to High Anglicanism. They were also to develop a collective reputation for being intellectual and political mavericks, whose independence of mind made them formidable company – loose cannons that could influence politics either to brilliant or to disastrous effect. They were able to bring their presence to bear through force of numbers – four of the five Cecil brothers entered either politics or the Church at a time when their father's career was at its height. Of these four, one was later to become a bishop and two Cabinet Ministers. This gave the impression of the rebirth of the Cecil dynasty at the heart of political power in Britain for the first time since the seventeenth century.

In none of the Cecil siblings was this independence of mind and adherence to personal conviction more apparent than in the subject of this study. Furthermore, this was something of which Cecil himself was acutely aware. While his siblings had a brother or sister to whom they were naturally close, he did not. 'I was not in any way isolated, but I had no special confidant, and that perhaps increased my natural aggressiveness.'[10] Cecil's relationship with his parents was close and remained good into adulthood. The Salisburys' unconventional attitude towards their children's education was supplemented by a liberal approach to discipline, although Cecil later noted that 'anything like direct disobedience was unthinkable' and that 'a glance from my mother was enough to put an end to any bad behaviour'.[11] Indeed, Lady Salisbury played a larger role in the day-to-day care and upbringing of her children than was usual for someone of her social station. In particular, it was she who undertook their religious education. Unlike her husband, who believed that the values of the Christian life were to be lived and not questioned, Lady Salisbury encouraged her children to adopt a pragmatic attitude to their faith that left greater scope for question and debate. Cecil and his siblings were taught to engage with the Bible on their own terms – a practice which he in particular found liberating.[12] Despite this, Cecil was clear that it was his father who had provided the intellectual and moral agenda that underpinned his formative years. 'He had,' Cecil wrote, 'an almost fanatical belief in personal

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[8] P. Williamson, 'James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil, Fourth Marquess of Salisbury (1861–1947)', *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[9] Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, *All the Way* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), p. 14.

[10] Ibid., p. 13.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., pp. 14–15.

liberty' and felt an 'extreme repugnance' for any type of discipline.[13] On those occasions when childish freedom of action was curtailed, Salisbury was always at pains to explain why, and he gave his children the opportunity to argue their case.

Cecil and his siblings were also encouraged from an early age to devour the contents of the library at Hatfield. It contained many priceless volumes and the Cecil children were encouraged to study the contents of its shelves without restraint, particularly those tomes relating to natural science, economics and philosophy. The learning of modern languages was also encouraged and Cecil became a competent French speaker.[14] An education rooted in the use of ruthless logic left little scope for the study of the more abstract humanities disciplines. For a family with such an imposing historical pedigree, the study of the past was curiously absent from the curriculum, as was the analysis of literature and art. Particular scorn was reserved for the 'unfortunate love of music' shown by their cousin, Arthur Balfour.[15]

As his father's political career advanced – Salisbury was Secretary of State for India in 1866–67 and again in 1874–78, followed by a period as Foreign Secretary in 1878–80 – so the number of distinguished guests who visited Hatfield increased. Cecil recalled his particular pleasure, as a young child, meeting Benjamin Disraeli.[16] When Salisbury became Chancellor of Oxford University in 1870, it brought the Cecil clan into the literary circle dominated by the Reverend Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll). Although he made a positive impression on the Cecil children, taking them to exhibitions at the Royal Academy and gaining permission to take their photograph, the author of the Alice books is not mentioned in Cecil's memoirs.[17] What is clear is that during the years when he was educated at Hatfield, Cecil preferred the company of his family to that of visitors. He had a special affection for the four cousins produced by the union of his mother's sister, Isabella, and a civil servant at the India Office, Walter Cocks. Cecil appreciated the wit and humour of his mother's brother, Walter, forged a life-long friendship with his cousin Edward Alderson and, most importantly for his future political career, developed a deep affection for the son of his father's sister, Arthur Balfour.[18] Theirs was often to be a turbulent relationship, but one in which the ties of family were never severed.

Throughout their lives, in their different ways, the Cecil children were influenced by their father's Conservative creed. It was Gwendolen who was most

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13 Ibid., p. 14.

14 Later in life, Cecil admitted that he 'knew no German' and that his written French was 'shaky'. Cf. Cecil to Dr Ernst Kunstler, 8 April 1935, BL Add Mss 51145, Cecil Papers. But to Cecil this did not matter because he believed that all international dialogue should be conducted in Esperanto, and took time to learn the language. In 1921, Cecil proposed that Esperanto become the official language of the League of Nations.

15 Quoted in Rose, p. 31.

16 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 20, p. 22.

17 Rose, pp. 30–2.

18 Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 15–16.

devoted to her father's memory, making it her life's work to chronicle his career. From early childhood, she and her siblings were imbued with a brand of Toryism that, even in the 1870s and 1880s, was beginning to appear old-fashioned.[19] Their belief that political power was wielded most effectively when in the hands of the landed aristocracy would not have appeared out of place to many parliamentarians before the 1832 Reform Act. Furthermore, it was also the responsibility of the aristocracy to protect personal liberties because only they possessed the education and experience of government necessary to do this. Salisbury viewed democracy founded on a wider electoral base with deep suspicion. Furthermore, the idea that government should be swayed by that artificial medium created by journalists and pressure groups – public opinion – was dangerous because the concept was too imprecise and too vulnerable to subjective exploitation. In short, government should be exercised by a social elite of rational men who would not allow themselves to be influenced by considerations other than the upholding of convention.

While Cecil felt considerable sympathy for these points of view, the gradual shift towards the political left that occurred during his long career in public life made it more difficult for him to adhere to them. The influence of his mother was equally evident in Cecil's thinking. From her, he had learnt a strong sense of social responsibility that went beyond the tradition of *noblesse oblige*. The children had been encouraged to identify directly with those less fortunate than themselves. In Cecil's eldest brother, James, this sombre message led to bouts of melancholy throughout his life. Cecil's response was more measured. More outgoing than his elder brothers, Cecil had little compunction about expressing his feelings and his opinions, although he shared his siblings' tendency towards excessive seriousness. At an early age, Lady Salisbury saw in her third son the attributes of a moral crusader, writing that he was always concerned with 'two grievances and a right'.[20] Cecil's tutor, Dr Coppini, saw another side to his character – a logical mind and a close attention to detail that bordered on pedantry. Noting his pupil's '*esprit très caustique*', Coppini predicted a career either at the Bar or in politics.[21] Cecil's nephew was later to comment that he embodied the positive qualities of both his parents more than any of his siblings. He 'lack[ed] his father's melancholy and scepticism … [and] … was sanguine and positive and impetuous like his mother'.[22]

In 1877, Cecil followed his older brothers to Eton, where he remained for the next four and a half years. His experience of life at public school was not pleasant. Once again he found himself apart from the crowd and struggled to conform to the rigorous routine of school life. He disliked team sports, found the academic emphasis on Classics tedious, and the teaching style uninspiring.[23] But Cecil was

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19 Rose, p. 32.

20 Quoted in Rose, p. 127; Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 13.

21 Ibid.

22 D. Cecil, *The Cecils of Hatfield House: A Portrait of an English Ruling Family* (London: Constable, 1973), p. 294.

23 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 16.

not daunted by his career as a misfit. Even at this tender age, his response to an injustice was to propose the wholesale reform of the system that created it. Often the champion of the underdog, he tried, without success, to rally boys in his year to take independent measures to combat the bullying that was endemic in his house, and to which the masters appeared to be turning a blind eye.[24]

Despite these acts of rebellion, at the age of 19, Cecil proved to be good enough academically to follow his brothers up to University College, Oxford. The Master, Franck Bright, recommended that he should read Greats, but Cecil applied to study law.[25] Cecil's education thus far left him with little tolerance for areas of the syllabus that he believed had little relevance to the practice of contemporary law. Roman law, he noted, was 'no doubt … historically interesting as one of the earliest attempts at a systematic legal treatise. But [it] had little relevance to the facts of the present day.'[26] By contrast, he reserved a special affection for studying constitutional law. He also developed an abiding respect for the great law works of the period written by his tutor, Albert Dicey, and those by Henry Maine and Oliver Wendell Holmes Junior.[27] Cecil later noted that 'from those books I gained ideas which have been of great service to me throughout my life'.[28]

Cecil's university career proved to be respectable rather than exceptional, and he left after three years' study with only a second in jurisprudence, much to his disappointment.[29] Dicey endeavoured to raise his spirits by writing a glowing testimonial about his suitability for the legal profession, but for two years after he left university, Cecil was unconvinced that his future lay with the law.[30] While at Oxford, he had enjoyed honing his debating skills at the Oxford Union and in the Conservative debating society, the Canning Club.[31] As he later wrote: '[Debating] brought us up against the great problems of life and exercised our minds in a way that attending lectures and reading text-books never could have done.'[32] While a member of these societies, Cecil was also not averse to pursuing opportunities for small-scale reform. He cast a critical eye over the *modus operandi* of the Oxford Union and produced a paper outlining ways in which this nurturing ground for

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[24] Ibid., p. 18.

[25] Ibid., p. 24.

[26] Ibid.

[27] H.S. Maine, *Ancient Law* (London: Dent, 1886); A.V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (London: Macmillan, 1889); O. Wendell Holmes Jr, *The Common Law* (Boston: Little Brown, 1882).

[28] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 25. Wendell Holmes had a particular interest in the relationship between war and peace in international law.

[29] Lady Salisbury to Balfour, 28 June1886, in R. Harcourt-Williams (ed.), *The Salisbury–Balfour Correspondence 1869–1892* (Linton: Hertfordshire Record Society, 1988), p. 149.

[30] Rose, p. 128.

[31] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 26.

[32] Ibid., p. 25.

so much political talent could be streamlined.[33] During this time, in a joint Union debate with Cambridge University, Cecil crossed swords for the first time with the future Conservative leader, Austen Chamberlain.[34] Cecil also formed friendships with Cosmo Lang, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, and with Edward Grey, the future Foreign Secretary, as well as with the Warden of Keble College, Edward Talbot, and with Canon Scott Holland.[35] But despite the edifying experience of Oxford, for Cecil, the priority of first family then friends remained a constant feature of his life.

With the view that it took a Cecil to understand a Cecil, in the summer of 1886, when Salisbury became Prime Minister for the second time, he appointed his third son as his private secretary, despite his lack of political experience.[36] However, Salisbury was unable to delegate anything except the most basic chores, and under this sinecure, Cecil frequently found himself idle, a situation which he considered 'intolerably depressing'.[37] He thus welcomed his almost immediate call to the Bar at Inner Temple, where he discovered a renewed enthusiasm for the law. He became a pupil barrister at the firm of Swinfen-Eady, earning 50 guineas per brief.[38] Here he enjoyed friendship and debate with his fellow pupil barristers, especially Theobald Mathew and Malcolm MacNaughten, both the sons of judges.[39]

After six months, Cecil came under the tutelage of the future High Court Judge, Joseph Walton, with whom he studied common law.[40] His reflections on Walton highlighted the store that he placed on judging people against religious stereotypes. '[Walton] and his wife were convinced, but by no means bigoted, Papists, quite without that acid touch which sometimes makes the society of "converts" rather difficult.'[41] Despite Walton's influence, however, Cecil's initial interest was in constitutional law, and he sought to specialise in parliamentary work. Once again, Cecil's family connections proved important. In 1883, his eldest sister, Maud, had married William Palmer, the son of the recently retired Lord Chancellor, the first Earl of Selborne.[42] Not only did Selborne bestow on Cecil most of his law books, but

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[33] D. Cecil, *The Cecils of Hatfield House*, p. 295.

[34] Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 27–8.

[35] An account of Cecil's friendship with Lang can be found in Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 30–1.

[36] Cecil admitted this himself. Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 39. R.H. Hobart to Lord Robert Cecil, 24 August1886, in Harcourt-Williams (ed.), p. 158.

[37] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 39.

[38] Ibid., p. 42.

[39] Ibid., p. 43.

[40] Ibid.; R.F.V. Heuston, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors, 1885–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 60.

[41] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 43.

[42] Selborne was also Cecil's godfather. Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 65–6. See D.G. Boyce, 'William Waldegrave Palmer, Second Earl of Selborne (1859–1942)', *Oxford National*

he also ensured that he came to the attention of his successor on the Woolsack, Lord Chelmsford. Thus Cecil became known in the upper echelons of the legal profession, as well as in the world of politics. It was always made clear to him that, if his legal practice failed, a switch to a career in politics would be easy to accomplish.

Cecil completed the final stages of his training by making his way north, to become marshal to two judges, William Grove and Fitzjames Stephen, on the North Wales Circuit, based in Chester.[43] His duty was to swear in the Grand Jury, but although he enjoyed a good relationship with both, the judges did not take him into their confidence.[44] In the spring of 1888, Cecil followed them to South Wales, where they became presiding judges on the Swansea Circuit. However, shortly after his arrival, he was offered a job by Judge Henry Lopes as marshal on the North-Eastern Circuit. Cecil shared 'splendid lodgings' with Lopes and judge Sir Lewis Cave, in Durham.[45] Cecil's relationship with Lopes and Cave was undoubtedly as rewarding as it had been with Grove and Stephen, but it is also apparent that they believed that his commitment to a career in the legal profession was not absolute.[46]

It has been suggested by later writers that Cecil always viewed politics as his true vocation, and that he pursued his career at the Bar simply to accumulate sufficient funds to bring this about.[47] This is a tempting argument. Cecil was not completely enamoured by a career at the Bar. But it is also misleading to suggest that he had a burning desire to enter Parliament as soon as possible.[48] He undoubtedly maintained an interest in politics, reflecting that 'when I was becoming a barrister, my interest in politics did not abate'.[49] But it was just that, an interest. It would also be misleading to assume that Cecil saw the world of parliamentary politics as glamorous and attractive. When, during the General Election campaign of 1885, he acted as an agent for his brother, James, who was standing on an anti-Home Rule ticket in the predominantly Conservative Lancashire town of Darwen, he was horrified at the infighting between the candidates.[50] Two years later, after a particularly fraught meeting at Hatfield of the Primrose League, the Conservative organisation founded in memory of Disraeli, Cecil once again expressed his dismay at the lengths to which the speakers would go to ensure that their views prevailed. 'People to be soothed, others to be abused, this man to be poked, that

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Dictionary of Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

43 K.J.M. Smith, *James Fitzjames Stephen: Portrait of a Victorian Rationalist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 248.

44 Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 32–3.

45 Ibid., p. 34.

46 Ibid., p. 35.

47 Rose, p. 128.

48 D. Cecil, *The Cecils of Hatfield House*, p. 295.

49 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 36.

50 Ibid., pp. 38–9. His sister tried to convince him that he had formed a distorted view of the electoral process. Gwendolen Cecil to Cecil, 3 December 1885, CHE 53/11, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House.

one to be mollified – the kind of work which makes me doubtful if I could ever endure politics.'[51] Cecil also tried to dissuade his friends from entering politics. More than half a century later, Cosmo Lang credited Cecil with saving him from the 'corrupt life of a politician' because he had believed that 'the pursuit of politics was a far poorer thing than the witness to religion'.[52]

In January 1888, Cecil became distracted by a new passion. While visiting his Eton contemporary, George Wyndham, at his home, Clouds, in Wiltshire, he fell in love for the first and only time in his life.[53] The object of his desire was the 21-year-old daughter of the second Earl of Durham, Lady Eleanor Lambton, known as Nelly. The granddaughter of 'Radical Jack', the Earl of Durham who had been one of the authors of the Great Reform Act of 1832, Nelly had 'inherited his lively mind, his incisive pen and his contempt for the conventions'.[54] While less intense than Cecil, she was nonetheless similar to him in personality and also his intellectual equal. Their courtship was notable for the intense disquiet it caused Cecil. Brought up on a diet of dispassionate reasoning, he was bewildered by affairs of the heart. He turned for advice to two sources: his sister-in-law, Alice, whom James Cecil had married in 1887, and his sister, Gwendolen.[55] Their resulting responses were vastly different. Alice gushed enthusiasm for the union, urging Cecil to act quickly and assuring him that he would receive a favourable response to a proposal of marriage.[56] Gwendolen, on the other hand, told her brother:

> I don't know if anybody who has not felt a thing can really sympathise with a person who is feeling it. That would be a very metaphysical question to decide, and I suspect that lovers always are at the moment a little incomprehensible to people who are not lovers.[57]

Cecil was also tormented by doubts about whether his income was sufficient to support a wife, a concern shared by Nelly's vast family.[58] Moreover, he felt that he had little in common with the Lambtons. While staunch Protestants, Nelly's nine brothers and three sisters shared none of the Cecils' interest in religious discourse or political debate, preferring instead to discuss horse breeding and

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[51] Quoted in Rose, p. 129.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 44. J. Biggs-Davison, *George Wyndham: A Study in Toryism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p. 37.

[54] Rose, p. 129.

[55] Lady Alice Gore, second daughter of the fifth Earl of Arran (1867–1955).

[56] Alice Cecil to Cecil, 20 August 1888, CHE 52/7, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House.

[57] Gwendolen Cecil to Cecil, 21 December 1888, CHE 55/15, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House.

[58] Rose, pp. 130–1; Lady Salisbury to Eleanor Cecil, 12 October 1890, CHE 51/9; same to same, 1 January 1894, CHE 51/13, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House.

military affairs.[59] In time, however, Cecil was to learn that the Lambtons were far from being philistines. Through Nelly and her legions of nieces and nephews, he came to have a greater appreciation of art and literature than his own education had permitted.[60]

Emotionally drained and beset with doubts about his future with Nelly, Cecil departed for the West Indies in the spring of 1888 with James and Alice for a brief rest cure. The tour, which included visits to Barbados, Trinidad, Grenada and Jamaica, was notable for introducing Cecil to the poverty in which much of the native population lived. The economic degradation he saw inspired only revulsion. He confessed that he was not 'attracted' by the plight of people of colour, something he later recalled with shame, not least because he had been impressed by the religious convictions of the 'coloured people' and their dedication in attending church.[61] Cecil was unusual for someone of his social class in that he had not embarked on the 'Grand Tour' of Europe and the British Empire on reaching maturity.

On his return to England in the summer of 1888, he became betrothed to Nelly, after maintaining an intense twice-daily correspondence with her during his absence. Years later he observed that asking her to marry him was the 'cleverest thing that I have ever done'.[62] He also told her: 'I was by nature second-rate … it was therefore almost incredible to me, and is so still, that you should like me better than any one else.'[63] Nelly, by contrast, exhibited more composure, dismissing his comments 'as full of humours as a sick schoolgirl'.[64] Throughout the remainder of their lives, one of her principal objectives was to persuade him to take himself less seriously, berating his tendency to 'pick letters to pieces like a carrion-crow!'[65] But even she was unable to dislodge such entrenched habits. Two months before their marriage, on 22 January 1889, Cecil composed a private declaration: 'I solemnly resolve that I will do my utmost never to allow the slightest shadow of distrust of Nelly to grow up in my mind so that I may avoid among other things distressing her by "unprofitable" questions.'[66]

The Cecils lived on the £1,000 per year that Salisbury settled on his son on his marriage, a small Lambton endowment and Cecil's income from the Bar. Their mutual love of frugality persuaded them to decorate their home, off Manchester Square in London, themselves, with Nelly performing most of the domestic chores herself.[67] Excursions abroad were for medicinal purposes only, on doctor's

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59 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 46.

60 Rose, p. 130.

61 Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 47–8.

62 Ibid., p. 49.

63 Quoted in Rose, p. 132.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 66.

orders for Nelly, whose hearing, almost completely lost from the age of 26 due to a congenital condition, was thought likely to improve in a warmer climate. On his marriage, Cecil resigned his membership of White's, although significantly he retained his membership of the Junior Carlton Club, a traditional haunt of up-and-coming Conservative politicians. In 1898, partly driven by a belief that country air would help improve Nelly's health, and in an attempt to recreate the carefree existence of his childhood, Cecil bought a plot of land near East Grinstead. The small house, which he commissioned a local architect to design and build, and named Gale due to its exposed location, remained their country retreat for the next half century.[68] There, among other things, he embraced modern technology, being one of the first in the county to own a 'Locomobile', an American-built steam-driven car.[69]

In the years immediately following his marriage, Cecil divided his time between the Bar in London and the Northern Circuit. Although never gaining a reputation as a brilliant advocate, during the 1890s he did, nevertheless, begin to attract a wide variety of briefs. In the belief that a return to the south of England would bring more lucrative clients, Cecil transferred to the South-Eastern Circuit based in Hertfordshire and Essex in 1891.[70] Weekends were spent either at Hatfield or at Terling, the Essex home of his cousin, Lady Rayleigh, Balfour's sister.[71] Much of his time was concerned with long-running litigation concerning water rights between the late nineteenth-century equivalents of the Greater London Council and Hertfordshire County Council.[72] Of the judges before whom he appeared, Cecil was most impressed by those who struck a fine balance between liberal tolerance and a willingness to sentence severely if the circumstances of the crime warranted it: men such as Bernard Coleridge who, as a barrister, had been renowned for his forensic debating skills.[73] Cecil was sceptical about the use of expert witnesses in court cases, especially when excessive reliance was placed on their testimony. He believed that the practice of the law should only be the province of lawyers. There was too much scope for outside 'experts' to act according to personal interest or prejudice.[74] It was the same argument that he would use to criticise Lloyd George's propensity for deferring to influential cronies rather than his Cabinet colleagues during his second term as Prime Minister, between 1918 and 1922.

In the late 1890s, Cecil's career at the Bar and the world of politics converged. It is from this time that he began to view his legal career as a means of providing the financial security to enter politics. In 1897, he told Nelly that 'I could probably make

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68 Ibid., p. 81.
69 Ibid., p. 91.
70 Ibid., p. 64.
71 Ibid., p. 64.
72 Ibid., p. 54.
73 Ibid., p. 64.
74 Ibid., p. 55.

£50,000 in five years if my health stood and then go into Parliament if that pleased me'.[75] But in the late 1890s, Cecil was not ready to make such a decision. In 1897, he began some of his most important legal work to date, when he represented the British South Africa Company in the Private Bill Committee established to examine the causes of the Jameson Raid. The purpose of the committee was to establish what connection, if any, there was between the circumstances that had led to the raid and the actions of the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. The proceedings rapidly descended into farce, with counsel for both the government and Chamberlain engaging in trivial point scoring. Cecil began to doubt the effectiveness of the work of such Commons committees. 'To me the main interest of the case was to watch how helplessly such a Committee carried out its duties,' he later recalled.[76]

Family matters also occupied Cecil's mind during the closing years of the century. In November 1899, Lady Salisbury died. Cecil was devastated, noting that it was 'impossible to exaggerate what her loss meant to us'.[77] Cecil later claimed that the combined effect of the death of Lady Salisbury, and that of Queen Victoria two years later, eventually made his father lose the will to live.[78] The Marquess' grief certainly triggered a desire in him to bring his family closer.[79] Indeed, in 1900, the professional worlds of Salisbury and Cecil briefly converged. Cecil, who had taken silk the year before, represented his father at Manchester Assizes in an action for defamation of character brought against him by an Irish Nationalist MP, William O'Brien. The Irishman had objected to a speech made by Salisbury in the House of Lords accusing him of inciting murder and unrest in Ireland. Salisbury did not deny that he had made the claim, but in his defence cited speeches made by O'Brien advocating civil disturbance.[80] Cecil was joined in his father's defence by the Solicitor-General, Sir Edward Clarke, and by a Mr Danckwerts, a South African barrister. He was uncertain about Clarke's merits, believing that he 'lacked the personality' which made the lawyers for the opposition so effective.[81] Nonetheless, despite these doubts, the Cecil team prevailed.[82]

However, being the son of the third Marquess was a mixed blessing. In the 1890s, Cecil was subjected to the petty jealousy of contemporaries who believed that this competent but not outstanding advocate had become a Queen's Counsel primarily because his father had been Prime Minister.[83] For his part, Cecil resented the way in which some barristers, such as Gorell Barnes, tried to further their

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75 Cited in Rose, p. 135.

76 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 62.

77 Ibid., p. 82.

78 Ibid., p. 83.

79 Roberts, pp. 747–8.

80 Cecil, *All the Way*, pp. 51, 79, 81–2.

81 Ibid., p. 51. Russell was appointed Attorney-General by Gladstone in 1892.

82 Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 52.

83 Rose, p. 133.

careers by trading on their association with him because of his name.[84] There were occasions when he believed that judges ruled in his favour for the same reason, writing in the early 1890s that one had 'strain[ed] justice to give me a success'.[85] In 1895, when he appeared before the notoriously brusque Mr Justice Hawkins, Cecil told Nelly of how struck he had been by the unexpected courtesy with which he had been addressed in court. 'It is just possible that he only realised my name today for the first time … Perhaps he wants a baronetcy when he retires – or to be asked to Hatty next Sunday?'[86] It was impossible for Cecil to distance himself completely from this, but one of the most consistent features of his long career in public life was his unwillingness to trade openly on his name. If it brought him opportunities that would not otherwise have arisen, then well and good, but he did not expect special treatment and preferred not to receive it.

A further way in which the world of parliamentary politics loomed larger in Cecil's life came when he joined the London practice of John Gorell Barnes.[87] A specialist in commercial and maritime law, Gorell Barnes was well known at the Admiralty. It was partly through Barnes' connections in Whitehall that Cecil's involvement in the work of parliamentary committees continued. In the early 1900s, these included a series of bills opposing the spread of omnibuses in London that led to a lasting friendship with the future Conservative Cabinet Minister, William Joynson Hicks, then head of the London General Omnibus Company. Although on opposing sides in this dispute and, later, over the more momentous subject of tariff reform, Joynson Hicks and Cecil nonetheless respected each other as 'true' Conservatives.[88]

Cecil's work at the parliamentary Bar also broadened his understanding of industrial relations and of the shifting tides of political power that were beginning to shape local and national politics. More than most men of his social background, he came to respect the work that trade unions performed in protecting the interests of poor or disadvantaged workers. He believed that employers had a duty of care to their employees.[89] He was especially impressed by the plans of Sir George Livesey, head of the South Metropolitan Gas Company in 1883, to improve productivity and reduce the likelihood of worker unrest by introducing a profit-sharing scheme. But on this occasion, Cecil, although a future Free Trader, was not convinced that a system based on free market economics was the answer to what had been an increasingly troubled period fraught with strikes. Cecil believed that there was little point in adhering to an economic creed if it had ceased to yield profitable results. Likewise, there was little reason to reject on ideological or party political grounds a course

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[84] In 1892, Gorell Barnes claimed the right to promotion to the Divorce Division because he had been Cecil's tutor when the latter had been a pupil barrister. Heuston, p. 46.

[85] Quoted in Rose, p. 133.

[86] Ibid.

[87] John Gorell Barnes, first Baron Gorell (1848–1913).

[88] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 55.

[89] Ibid., p. 59.

of action that might work. Consequently, Cecil saw no objection to a Conservative Member of Parliament voting for greater powers for trade unions if he believed that it was right to do so, even if such a policy was more associated with the Liberal left and with the Labour movement. He was, however, doubtful whether relations between employers and employees in British industry were currently so poor as to render nationalisation necessary. This should only be a last resort. It was his ability to think laterally across traditional party boundaries that led one Conservative grandee to conclude that 'Robert has the future before him'.[90] Cecil's own explanation of this part of his life was simple: 'when I was at the Bar I received much more help and countenance from those who belonged to the Liberal Party … than I ever did from those who were then my political friends.'[91] He was later to view this mixture of Conservatism and liberalism as one of the great continuities of his life.[92]

If it is possible to judge the level of influence that a parent had on a child by the amount of grief the progeny exhibits at their passing, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Cecil was closer to his mother than to his father. Cecil's reaction to the death of the third Marquess of Salisbury in 1903 was muted.[93] Like the rest of his siblings, Cecil appears to have been content to allow Gwendolen's never-to-be-completed biography of their father to act as the family's principal written memorial to his achievements.[94]

Cecil spent large periods of the two years immediately following the death of his father abroad. In the summer of 1905, he was asked to appear for a company wishing to sell the docks in Singapore to the government of the colony, represented in the case by Sir Michael Hicks Beach and Balfour Browne. The first leg of Cecil's journey was a transatlantic crossing from Liverpool to Quebec. When in Canada, he was impressed by the tolerance shown between the predominantly Roman Catholic French and the more Protestant English-speaking regions of the country. But he disliked the Canadian 'character', which he found 'too Americanised' and too inclined to 'a great deal of boasting'. He was, however, concerned by the esteem in which the fiscal ideas of 'the greatest Colonial Minister of modern times', Joseph Chamberlain, were held. By 1905, Cecil had come to the conclusion that Chamberlain's ideas about tariff reform, discussed in the next chapter, were little more than a recipe for commercial 'civil war'.[95]

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[90] 6 January 1896, J. Vincent (ed.), *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay Twenty-Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres, 1871–1940 during the Years 1892–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 32.

[91] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 72.

[92] Ibid., p. 74.

[93] A letter from Lord Hugh Cecil to Winston Churchill summarised the family's sense of loss. Hugh Cecil to Churchill, [?] August 1903, CHAR 1/39/17, Churchill Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge.

[94] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 83.

[95] Cecil to Salisbury, 31 August 1905, CHE 52/23, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House.

Crossing Canada by train, Cecil joined Hicks Beach in Vancouver for the voyage across the Pacific, arriving in Japan in the immediate wake of the Russo-Japanese War. Cecil stayed with the British Ambassador to Tokyo, Sir Claude MacDonald, a friend of his father. Using the embassy compound as a base, he toured Nikko, Kámakura and Kyoto, being particularly interested in places of religious significance.[96] Despite claiming to have 'enjoyed myself more in Japan' than he had 'ever done in any country outside my own', he eventually concluded somewhat perversely that Japan was 'not a very beautiful country' with 'almost a total absence of spirituality'.[97] In mid September, Cecil and Hicks Beach had an audience with the Japanese Emperor, which was also less than a success. Cecil told his eldest brother: 'he looks like a narrow-minded and ferocious tyrant and glared at Beach and me as if he would like to order both for execution.'[98]

When in Japan, Cecil showed little interest in the lives of the ordinary citizens of the country. In the case of his Japanese visit, this also extended to their religious conventions. He told his brother: 'Their standards of truth and chastity are certainly not ours. But for Pagans they are not low.'[99] Cecil disliked what he saw as the muscular militarism of Japanese men that was further fuelled by tales recounted to him by MacDonald of atrocities committed during the recent Russo-Japanese War. He later wrote: 'We did not like the Japanese men much … If a man was killed in battle, then he had done all he could and was entitled to the gratitude of his fellow-countrymen. If he had been disabled, he was merely an uninteresting failure.'[100] Reflecting on this episode in his life during the Second World War, Cecil attributed this brutality to the tendency of the Japanese military to model themselves on their German counterparts.[101]

Cecil's prosecution of the sale of the Singapore docks effectively marked the end of his career as a practising barrister. On his return to England in August 1905, he decided to abandon the Bar and to stand for election to the House of Commons. He did not have what could be described as a 'road to Damascus' experience. Sudden changes of direction were alien to him throughout his life. As has been seen, this was a decision that he had contemplated making for several years.

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[96] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 95.

[97] Cecil to Salisbury, 28 September 1905, CHE 52/30, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, Hatfield House.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Cecil, *All the Way*, p. 96.

[101] Ibid.