WELSH

CALVINISTIC METHODISM

A Historical Sketch.

BY

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CHAPTER XIII.

Anomalous position of the Connexion—Scarcity of places for the administration of the Lord’s Supper—Dearth of ordained ministers—Rev. N. Rowlands—Entertainment of the idea of ordaining ministers—Opposition of the clergy—Mr. Jones, Llangan—Mr. Griffiths, Nevern—Their objections intelligible —Rev. J. Williams of Lledrod’s resolve—Mr. Charles and Mr. Ebenezer Morris—Decision at the Bala Association—The same at Swansea—The first two ordinations.

The first ten or twelve years of the present cen­tury was the most critical period that the Welsh Methodist Connexion ever passed through. Its position with regard to the Establishment from the beginning of its existence was an exceedingly ano­malous one, and it was becoming increasingly so as it increased in numbers, and as its first founders were one after another passing away. It was not a Dissenting Body, and it took great pains to impress upon the world that it was not anything of that kind. But what was it? Was it a part of the Establishment? It regarded itself in that light, but the Establishment did not recognise it. Several of the clergymen who were at its head had been turned out of the Church for their Metho­dism, and their brethren who were allowed to retain their place in the Establishment found their position anything but comfortable. In going beyond the limits of their own parishes, and ministering in unconsecrated places, they transgressed the laws to which they were amenable, and might any day be called upon to suffer the penalty. And these brethren, while subject to the courts and the laws of the Establishment, assisted, indeed took the leading part, in constituting courts, and framing laws and regulations which the Establishment did not recog­nise. All the members of the Methodist body re­garded themselves as members of the Established Church; but there were multitudes belonging to that Church who would not on any account have been received, as they were, into the Methodist body. We have seen how careful they were to avoid, as far as possible, everything that looked like seceding from the Church. When they built a place of wor­ship, it was called “a Society house,” or “a house for religious purposes,” or anything else which they could think of that was most likely to make the impression that they had no desire to secede from the Church. They communicated in the Established Church; but in very many instances the clergyman of their own parish was not such as they felt at liberty to receive the Communion from, and many of the com­municants were not such as they felt at liberty to communicate with. Was it right, they could not help asking, that, after withdrawing from the un­godly and immoral people of their neighbourhood, they should meet them again at the Lord’s Table? In some instances, after the brethren of the Metho­dist Society had expelled a member for immorality, they would have the mortification of meeting him again at the Communion in the parish church. To avoid such offences they had either to remain for many months, and in some cases for years, without the privilege of partaking of the Lord’s Supper, or to travel many miles in order to obtain it. The Metho­dist clergymen, as those of their ministers who had been episcopally ordained were designated, were few in number,—about sixteen in South Wales at the close of the last century; but most of those confined themselves to their own parishes, and for many years there were only six other places in the whole of South Wales where the Methodists were in the habit of solemnizing the Lord’s Supper. Some of those were places belonging to the Establishment, such as Gyfylchi Chapel in Glamorganshire, and Llanlluan Chapel in the county of Carmarthen, and some were “Society houses” to which the privilege had been extended by the favour of the Association. In North Wales there was a still greater dearth of clergymen,—three being the largest number of this class that had ever existed together in that portion of the Principality. A great number of able preachers had by this time risen in the body; but they were not ordained. Sometimes an ordained clergyman and an unordained exhorter would preach in succession to the same audience; the former inside, and the latter outside the church. There was a room built against Gyfylchi Chapel, near Neath, and a door was opened leading from it into the chapel. Clergy­men officiated in the chapel, but exhorters in the room; and when two of these different classes of teachers met, as it frequently happened, the former would address the audience from the pulpit, and the latter from the doorway, taking great care that his feet should stand within the room.

All these privations and inconveniences suggested to some of the brethren the idea of ordaining ministers of their own; but it was not without fear and trem­bling that this thought was first expressed. It would be a momentous step; in fact, nothing less than a secession. Nearly all the Episcopal clergymen met the first proposals in that direction with the most determined opposition. Nathaniel Rowlands, a son of the great reformer of Llangeitho, had married the daughter of Howell Davies, the great reformer of Pembrokeshire, and he seems to have supposed that being son of one of those eminent men, and son-in- law of the other, gave him the right to rule in the Connexion which they had done so much to bring into existence and to foster. We have not been able to find out that he possessed qualifications to exer­cise dominion; but it is certain that he did rule with a high hand for some time in the Associations of South Wales. Although a large number of chapels had by this time been erected in the south, there were only some three or four in which permission had been obtained to solemnize the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, and Mr. Rowlands opposed with all his might every attempt to increase the number of those privileged places of worship. At an Associa­tion held at Carmarthen, there was something like a scene in connexion with a request for leave to com­municate in the chapel of that place. Mr. D. Charles, brother of Mr. Charles of Bala, who was a deacon of the Church, and who afterwards became an eminent minister, rose up and said, “The church in this place has requested me to ask permission to commemorate here the death of our Redeemer.” Upon this Mr. Nathaniel Rowlands sprang to his feet, and said in a determined voice, “You *shall not;* Llanlluan Chapel is sufficiently near for you.” This chapel was ten miles off. “I ask again,” said Mr. Charles, “shall we have this privilege? We are permitted to preach Christ, to believe on Him, to profess Him; shall we commemorate His death for us?” “You shall *not* in this place,” said N. Rowlands. “It so happens,” said Mr. Charles coolly, “that it was not *your* per­mission that I was requested to ask.” Things were beginning to look serious, when the Rev. David Jones of Llangan got up and exclaimed, “You shall, dear David, you *shall.* When do you wish it to be? I will come over myself to assist you.” And so in process of time it came to pass; but this concession on the part of the eminent clergyman of Llangan brought upon him, on the spot, a furious onslaught from Nathaniel Rowlands. It could not but be ex­pected that this man would have determinedly op­posed any step of the kind which we have above indicated; but in the year 1807 a charge of mis­conduct was brought against him, and this led to his expulsion from the Connexion over which he wanted to be king. Mr. Jones was Vicar of Llangan, in Glamorganshire, and had settled in that place in the year 1768. His ministry soon began to attract great congregations, and it was not long before Llangan became that which Llangeitho had been for many years before,—the centre of great gatherings from the surrounding districts, especially on the Communion Sabbath. He did not confine himself to his church, but went about doing good, preaching in the surrounding villages, and taking occasional tours to distant parts of the Principality. He was inti­mately acquainted with the Countess of Huntingdon, and it was by her influence that he had been pre­sented to his living. He paid periodical visits to London to preach in her ladyship’s chapels, and in other places, and was one of the most zealous and active among the founders of the London Missionary Society. On the second anniversary of that great Institution he was appointed to preach the anniver­sary sermon at Zion Chapel. This was on the 13th of May 1796, and two months before the first batch of missionaries sailed for the South Sea Islands. Wherever he preached he drew together a great concourse of people, and his ministry was generally overpowering in its effects. His first visits to North Wales were made before the scum of the people had quite given up mobbing Methodist preachers, and disturbing their services; but the mild accents of his voice never failed to melt the hearts of even those who had come within its reach for the purpose of making a disturbance. He once preached at an Association at Rhuthin, where a disturbance had been planned, which was to be led by a burly butcher. Mr. Jones’s text was, “No man ever spake like this man.” The butcher stood to listen, and, as he listened, his courage to attack the preacher was getting smaller and smaller, and at length he ex­claimed, “By –––! no man ever spake like *you* either. Never in my life before have *I* been so completely mastered.” Complaints were made against him more than once to his bishop, and, on one occasion, at a visitation at Cowbridge, he was called to account for his irregularities. The bishop earnestly remon­strated with him, and begged him to desist in future from those Methodistical practices. Mr. Jones was very sorry that he could not yield to the persuasions of his superior, but he really could not. He must go about to preach the Gospel to perishing sinners; and, as to preaching in unconsecrated places, he did not believe that any place was unconsecrated. His belief was, that when the blessed Saviour had put His foot on this earth of ours, He had consecrated every inch of it. That bishop was too good and kind a man to wish to do any injury to the earnest evangelist, and finding that he was prepared to suffer any pains or penalties rather than give up his Metho­distical ways, he only begged him to be careful not to intrude into two particular parishes in the Vale of Glamorgan, adding, that the clergymen of those parishes were very much annoyed by his interference with their charges. This Mr. Jones readily pro­mised to do, regarding of course the prohibition to go to those parishes as good as a license to go to all the world besides. When this interview was over, there were many who were astonished, and some not a little chagrined, to see the bishop walking along the street with Mr. Jones leaning on his arm.

The loving and liberal spirit of this great and good man made him immensely popular among all the Methodists, especially in South Wales; and this was a very serious difficulty, perhaps indeed the most serious of all, in that portion of the Principality, that was lying in the way of the ordination of ministers. It was well known that he was opposed to it, and the friends felt a great disinclination to take any step that would be painful to the feelings of the good, kind Mr. Jones. There were other clergymen who stormed and threatened—that the brethren did not much mind; but Mr. Jones wept and entreated, and that was something serious to withstand. “I have risked my bread,” said he at one Association where this subject was discussed; “I have risked my bread in order to be with you, and with you so far I have been permitted to be; but if you are resolved thus to break up the cause, you shall, as far as I am concerned, go along by yourselves; I will remain with you no longer.” Again and again he entreated the brethren not to take such a step while he lived, and if a sense of duty to God and to the thousands who were de­prived of religious privileges had constrained them to deny the request of one whom they so greatly loved, it would have been with the deepest sorrow; but the Providence of God spared them and him the trial which seemed inevitable, by taking Mr. Jones to his rest some time before the step had been fully decided on. He died in perfect peace at his own residence, Manorowen, on the 12th of August 1810, in the seventy-fifth year of his age.

There was another clergyman in Pembrokeshire, the Rev. D. Griffiths of Nevern, whose high posi­tion in society, extensive family connexions, great preaching talents, and blameless character, gave him great influence in the Methodist Connexion. He determinedly opposed the ordination of ministers, and not always, perhaps, in the best temper. The subject was brought before an Association held at Cardigan, by Mr. Evan Davies, one of the deacons of that county. Mr. Davies had attempted to broach the matter at a previous Association, but had been summarily put down. As soon as he began to speak on this occasion, Mr. Griffiths stood up and said with great warmth, “Turn out that man who follows the Associations to create a disturbance, and injure the cause—out with him!” “Mr. Griffiths,” was Mr. Davies’s cool reply, “the chariot of God is going onward. Beware of standing in its way, lest you be crushed, as it happened to that prince in the gate of Samaria.” There were not a few painful scenes, which we do not care to describe, at the Associations and Monthly Meetings of those days, in which the chief actors were the deacons, or, as they were then called, leaders, who desired the change, and the ordained clergymen who opposed it. Most of the preachers were in favour of it, but they were under a necessity to keep comparatively silent, for any warm advocacy on their part would be naturally regarded as the result of a desire for the honour it would confer on themselves.

We are not at all disposed to find fault with the Episcopal clergymen for opposing the measure that was now in contemplation. Most of them retained their places in the Church, but had suffered not a little in consequence of their Methodism. They were for the most part able men, and therefore more likely than many to obtain preferment in their own Church; but they had sacrificed every such pro­spect to their attachment to the Methodist body. They considered that body as a part of the Church, and regarded their labours in its behalf in the light of labours for Church extension. This was their excuse to their bishops, to their Episcopal brethren, and to their own consciences, for persisting in prac­tices which they admitted to be irregular. But the ordination of ministers by the body itself would place them in an entirely new position, and oblige them either to give up their connexion with people whom they greatly loved, and relinquish labours to which they were strongly attached, or leave the Establishment. They could not remain ministers of the Church *and* ministers of that which would now be an avowedly Dissenting denomination. It was the necessity of the case that had brought matters to this painful crisis. The body had become by far too numerous to be supplied with ordinances by the few Episcopal clergymen who had identified them­selves with it. The people had become many thou­sands, scattered over the whole of Wales, and the great majority of them would prefer communicating in the Dissenting Chapel to receiving the ordinance from such men as the greater number of the then parish clergy were. They must either have minis­ters of their own, or suffer a most important ordin­ance, which the Redeemer had instituted in His Church, to fall into comparative desuetude, or offend their consciences by receiving the ordinance from ministers whom they regarded as anything but ear­nest servants of Christ, and in company with people whom they knew to be ungodly, or go over to the Nonconformists. Some Churches had already taken the last course—had ordained ministers for them­selves, and from that day become independent Churches. But the body decided upon taking the first of the courses which we have indicated, and it is to its having done so it is indebted for its separate existence. But let not our brethren of the Estab­lishment imagine that, if that step had not been taken, the Church would have been one whit stronger in Wales at the present day than it is. There is one Dissenting denomination the more, and, as we believe, a greater number of religious people in con­sequence; but if that had not been, it is the other Dissenting denominations, and not the Church, that would have been more numerous. The position of the Church has been made, not by any steps which have been taken outside of it, but by the character of its own ministers.

There were a few clergymen who had already either been compelled to relinquish their connexion with the Establishment, or had left it of their own accord, and had fully identified themselves with the Methodists; and there were others who did so when the decisive moment came. Among the latter was the Rev. John Williams, the parish minister of Lledrod, in Cardiganshire. He was a good and earnest man, and does not seem to have ever been strongly opposed to the ordination, and whatever objections he had felt to it were completely over­come at an Association which he attended at Bala. On his way home from this assembly he resolved, after a severe mental struggle, to cast in his lot with the Methodists, and to throw himself on the Provi­dence of God for the means of subsistence; after this, he reasoned and preached in favour of the con­templated movement. To some of the members who opposed it he said, “You are strange people; you are not satisfied with a regular clergyman, and a Dissenting minister won’t do for you: nothing will satisfy you but an expelled parson.”

Mr. Charles was at first opposed to this step, but he was gained over at the same Association as Mr. Williams. He was chairman at the time, and the subject was discussed with some warmth on both sides. Mr. Ebenezer Morris was present, and while the discussion was going on, he rose from his seat and stood leaning against one of the pillars that sup­ported the pulpit. At the first pause every eye was turned towards him. For a while he remained silent, but at length said, with his deep, solemn, and commanding voice, “I have a question to ask the chairman.” After another pause he went on. “I am here representing hundreds of people in this congregation and elsewhere, and I call on Mr. Charles to answer me, adjuring him to give an honest and straightforward answer to my question—Which is the greatest and most important work? Is it the preaching of the Gospel or the administering of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper?” Mr. Charles rose at once from his seat, and answered, “The greatest work is preaching the Gospel.” “Then,” exclaimed Ebenezer Morris, “*we are one.* Satan had thought to divide us, but thanks be unto God, *we are one.*” With these few words, slowly and solemnly uttered, a thrill of feeling passed through the whole congregation, and all felt that the struggle was over. And so it was. It was unani­mously resolved to proceed, and to send a letter to the brethren in South Wales announcing the decision which had been arrived at, and inviting them to take the same course. The subject was accordingly brought before an Association held at Swansea in the year 1810, where there was a long, and, on the part of one or two, rather angry discussion. Mr. Rowland Hill was present, and warmly and elo­quently advocated the ordination, and it was even­tually resolved to indorse the decision arrived at by the brethren in North Wales. Pursuant to this resolution, eight brethren chosen from among the preachers of North Wales were ordained at an Asso­ciation held at Bala, on the 20th of June 1811, and thirteen chosen from among those of the South, were ordained at an Association at Llandilo Fawr in the month of August in the same year. The brethren from the North were Thomas Jones and John Davies, Denbighshire; John Elias and Richard Lloyd, An- glesea; Evan Richardson, Carnarvonshire; John Roberts, Merionethshire; Evan Griffiths and William Jones, Montgomeryshire. Those ordained in South Wales were, from Carmarthenshire, John Evans, David Rees, Arthur Evans, and David Charles. The first of these had previously received Deacon’s Orders in the Church of England, and the last was brother of Mr. Charles of Bala. From Breconshire there were James James, David Parry, and Evan Evans; from Cardiganshire, Ebenezer Morris, John Thomas, and Ebenezer Richard; from Pembrokeshire, Evan Harris; from Glamorganshire, Hopkin Bevan; and from Monmouthshire, John Rees.

We have before us a report of the proceedings at the former of these solemn occasions, which we sub­join:—

“Mr. John Evans of Bala, the oldest and one of the most respected preachers in the Connexion, commenced the service by reading the third chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy, making appropriate remarks on the qualifications which, in that chapter, are pointed out as requisite in ministers of the Gospel, and then offered prayer in a very devout and solemn manner.

The Rev. Thomas Charles then read the names of the persons who had been chosen by the monthly meet­ings of the several counties. Having done so, he asked the representatives of the different churches, of whom about three hundred were present, whether they wished him to put a few questions to the brethren who were to be ordained, on the fundamental articles of the Christian religion, and if that was their desire he requested them to signify the same by raising their hands, which all immediately did. Then he submitted the following queries to those who were about to be set apart, and obtained highly appropriate and satisfactory answers:—

“What are your views of—

“1. The Being of God and His attributes?

“2. The Trinity?

“3. The Word of God?

“4. The decrees of God, and Election?

“5. The Providence of God over the world?

“6. The Fall and Corruption of Man?

“7. The Moral Law?

“8. The Person of Christ?

“9. The Offices of Christ?

“10. The Sacrifice of Christ and Redemption?

“11. Justification?

“12. The Person of the Holy Ghost?

“13. The Work of the Holy Ghost in the plan of Salvation?

“14. The Call of the Gospel?

“15. Perseverance in Grace?

“16. The Resurrection?

“17. The general Judgment?

“18. Which are the ordinances of Divine appoint­ment?

“19. What are your views regarding Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: their end, their use, and their signification?

“20. Do you sincerely approve of the present order of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Connexion?

“21. Do you intend, as far as lies in you, to pre­serve the unity of the Connexion in the manner in which the Lord has so greatly prospered it? and do you purpose to withstand all useless and contentious debatings which have a tendency to create strife? ”

Having obtained their solemn and enlightened re­plies to these questions, he asked the representatives whether they chose these brethren to administer the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper among them; and if they did, to signify the same by hold­ing up their hands. This was done by all present, without exception.

“He then asked the brethren, whether they as­sented to the call of the Connexion, and whether they willingly yielded themselves to be faithful, laborious, and diligent, to feed the flock of God, by devoutly administering the ordinances according to the assistance which they should receive of God.

“They answered in a humble and serious manner, that they did, and earnestly desired the prayers of the whole Connexion in their behalf.

“The venerable brother, Mr. Robert Jones of Carnarvonshire, gave them in conclusion a word of exhortation, and offered up an earnest prayer appro­priate to the occasion.”

The same method was observed, and the same questions asked, by Mr. Charles, at the ordination of the thirteen South-Walian brethren a few weeks later, but the devotional portions of the service, on this latter occasion, were conducted by two Episcopally ordained clergymen, the Revs. John Williams, Pantycelyn, and John Williams, Lledrod, who had now, like Mr. Charles, finally seceded from the Establishment.

Ordinations in the Welsh Methodist Connexion are to this day conducted in the same manner, and have come of late years to be attended by vast congregations. Often have we found them “seasons of refreshing,” and furnishing evidences which to us were most conclusive and satisfactory, that they obtained the sanction of the Great Head of the Church.