

WELSH
CALVINISTIC METHODISM

A Historical Sketch.

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CHAPTER IV.

OPPOSITION AND PERSECUTIONS.

Harris mobbed at Newport and other places—Peter Williams at Kidwelly—At Wrexham—
In the dog-kennel—At Trevecca—At Penrhos—The grey mare—Rowlands mobbed
at Llanilar—Mike and Dick—A persistent church choir—Patent rattle—A small Gun-
powder Plot—Lewis Evan and the magistrate—Imprisoned—Morgan Griffith ar-
rested—Sent on board a man-of-war—A Sermon *en route*—Furlough—Again sent
away—Dies.

WE have already intimated that those earnest men were not permitted to pursue their work in peace, and we shall devote a few of the following pages to give the reader some idea of the strong opposition they encountered, and the varied forms of persecution which they were called to endure. We have materials enough to fill a volume on this subject alone, but shall content ourselves with citing a comparatively few instances, not exactly in the order in which they occurred, but all relating to the earliest days of Welsh Methodism. We have already alluded to the sufferings of Howell Harris. It appears that he had to endure more personal abuse than any of his brethren, and probably the mob took more liberty with him, because, unlike the other leading men in South Wales, he was not an ordained clergyman. On one occasion, having barely escaped with his life from the hands of a mob in Monmouthshire, he made in the direction of his home. About two o'clock in the morning, and almost fainting from loss of blood, he was able to reach a farm-house called Torygaer, on the slope of the Black Mountain, just above Crickhowell, occupied by a Mr. Walter Rumsey. He knocked at the door and feebly asked for admittance. Mrs. Rumsey heard and recognised the voice and at once let him in. He presented a sad picture. His clothes were torn, his face covered with blood, his body bruised, and his head cut in no less than thirteen places. Mr. and Mrs. Rumsey were zealous friends of the cause for the sake of which he had thus severely suffered, and all that the tenderest love could devise was done in his behalf, but he was obliged to remain under their hospitable roof for a week before his strength was sufficiently recovered to enable him to leave.

We shall give a few extracts in his own words, in an Autobiography published in 1791:—

“My life being now in danger in several places by the mob, especially in February 1739, when they found I could not be prosecuted as a rioter, because it did not appear I disturbed the peace, yet in Montgomeryshire, a knight, a clergyman, and two justices, whilst I was discoursing, came, attended by a constable, with the mob, and took cognisance of me, and such

as met together to hear my exhortation in a place unlicensed; then they began to charge me with a breach of the Conventicle Act. I told the magistrate that I was a Conformist, and for that reason not subject to the penalties of that Statute. Then they said that they would consult the best lawyers in order to know if there was a law to be enforced against me, and if there was, that I might expect to suffer its utmost extremity. My persecutors thus continued to threaten me until Session came on, at which time a lawyer was consulted, and the case was dropped.

“After my dismissal I went to Merionethshire, where I trust the Lord blessed the seed sown to some. In my return from thence I came by Dinas Mawddwy, and discoursed there, and at the request of a friend I went on to Machynlleth; but at my first entrance there, I found none were disposed to receive me. However, I proposed to preach the gospel to such as met in the street, being placed in an open window or door in an upper room, but I was obliged to desist by the noise of the multitude, who continued hallooing, threatening, swearing, and flinging stones or anything they could lay their hands on; and especially by an attorney’s coming up to me with such rage and fury in his looks, and his mouth so full of the language of hell as if his name was *Legion*, and with him a gentleman and a clergyman in the same spirit and language to head the mob. One of them discharged a pistol at me. I received no hurt, but was obliged to go among them into the street, not expecting that I should escape alive, seeing every circumstance threatened me with death. But my hour was not yet come; though they used me ill, yet I was miraculously preserved; and at last one of the mob was disposed to fetch my horse, and as soon as I mounted they observed which way I went and crossed my road, and began again to throw sticks and stones at me, till the Lord delivered me out of their hands.

“In the summer of 1740, as I went through Glamorganshire, I met with Mr. Seward at Cowbridge. From thence he came on with me to Cardiff, and then we went on comfortably together to Monmouthshire and preached at the several towns of Newport, Caerleon, Usk, and Monmouth, when Satan was permitted to rage against us in a most horrible manner. At Newport the mob rushed on us with the utmost rage and fury. They tore both my coat-sleeves, one quite off, and took away my peruke, I being now in the rain. *O, sweet bareheadedness—under the reproach of Christ!* Having little silence I discoursed on, but soon they hallooed again and pelted me with apples and dirt, flinging stones in the utmost rage about me. I had one blow on my forehead, which caused a rising, with little blood. Many friends would have me give over in the tumult, but I could not be free to do that till the storm would be over, and God be glorified over Satan. When we came to Caerleon everything seemed calm and quiet, whilst Brother Seward prayed and discoursed sweetly by the Market-house; but when I began to discourse after

him, then they began to roar most horribly, pelting us with dung and dirt, throwing eggs, plum-stones, and other hard substances even in our faces, and hallooed so loudly as to drown my voice entirely. Brother Seward had a furious blow on his right eye, which caused him much anguish; and as it affected his left he was obliged to be led by the hand blindfold for some days, till at last he became totally blind of it. When we came to Monmouth, we had much the same treatment as at Newport and Caerleon. It happened to be the horse-race there, and both high and low were assembled against us. As I began to discourse on a table over against the Town-hall windows, where the Duke of B. and Lord N., and a great number of gentlemen and ladies, were at dinner, they ordered a drum to be beat by our sides; although the Lord enabled me to bear my testimony against their balls, assemblies, horse-races, whoredom, and drunkenness, the drum continued to beat, and the mob pelting with apples, pears, stones, dirt, and a dead dog. During this storm Brother Seward was much afraid of hurt, yet he endured it with much calmness of spirit, saying, 'Better endure this than hell.' Thus all their opposition could not hinder our progress, but in the strength of the Lord we went on from conquering to conquer. . . .

"In the beginning of the year 1741 I went to North Wales, and as I proceeded the enemy was provoked at my attempt thus to propagate the gospel in his territories, and resolved to make a stand against me, and endeavoured as much as he should be permitted to take away my life. Having been importuned to visit Bala in Merionethshire, and to proceed to the north, though I had been there once or twice before, after prayer and consultation I intrusted God with my life, relying on His faithfulness, and went on. Accidentally, as I was near Bala, I overtook the minister that belonged to that place, who cautioned me to desist at my peril. I meekly replied I was fully persuaded it was my duty—that I had no other intention but to publish the glad tidings of salvation, and would not wilfully offend any person. However, he gave me very ill language, and came towards me with a great club to strike me. I told him when I was reviled I was taught not to revile again, and rode on quietly. But when I entered the town I found a numerous assembly waiting for me, and it was said that all the county mob were met together purposely to abuse and hinder me. At the request of my friends I quitted the streets, and went into a house to discourse.

"During all this I was happy in my soul, and full of power and courage, my voice being lifted up like a trumpet, so that people could hear in spite of all the disturbance that was made at the door and window, which was broken to pieces by the mob, and thus I discoursed on for some time. But when the mob, who had been preparing themselves for the work by excessive drinking—it was supposed that the minister had given them the drink—came among the people, a friend desired me to leave off, though I was yet full of

power in my spirit; yet, preferring my friend's advice before the call in my own soul, I ceased to speak, but I immediately felt the power withdrawn from me, and then I understood that I had done wrong. However, I retired to an upper room, but the mob, instead of withdrawing, appeared to be more enraged. Some surrounded the house, while others climbed to the top of it, threatening me with instant death as soon as I should come out. As night drew on I thought it my duty to go out among them, committing myself to the hands of God, but as soon as I went out of the house one seized me by the handkerchief; by it giving way I was prevented from falling to the ground. Another hit me on the face, whilst others flung stones and dirt at me. I then thought it was my lot to die Stephen's death in the midst of them. I spoke to them and prayed for them, but whilst I did this one desired me to go away, telling me that I tempted the Lord by staying there, and no sooner had I turned my back on my enemies to go away, than I was somehow left to myself, and sank under the waves, though I was not afraid of death, knowing it was an entrance to eternal rest; having no fear of hell or doubt of God's favour through the blood of Christ my Saviour; yet being rather unwilling to die by the hands of these villains, gave me some uneasiness. They still inhumanly continued to beat me with sticks and staffs, and to pelt me with stones, etc., until I fell under their merciless feet, where they continued to beat me until the Lord touched the heart of one of them with pity, or fear of being prosecuted for killing me. He swore that they should beat me no more, and rescued me out of their hands whilst they were employed in giving my friends the like treatment; although they were able to make defensive resistance, yet they imitated Christ the Lord, their Master, in bearing all patiently, as I desired them to do. So at last we came to our lodging, and dressed our wounds, and there also I exhorted my fellow-sufferers, and we rejoiced together that we were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake."

Writing to a friend in the year 1748, respecting a recent journey in North Wales, he says, "I was seven nights in succession during this journey without undressing, and travelled a hundred miles from the morning of one day to the evening of the next, without having any rest, preaching at midnight or in the early morning on the mountains. This I was obliged to do to avoid persecution. The week before my visit a man near Wrexham had been fined £20 by Sir W. W. Wynn, and several of the hearers had had to pay five shillings each, and one ten shillings, a sum which he had been obliged to pay once before. This is the third time that the brethren have been treated in this manner; and on the last occasion there was only one brother present praying with a family." In this case the zealous magistrate overshot the mark. Representations were made in high quarters by the Countess of Huntingdon, and Sir W. was obliged to return the fines, the number assembled being too few to bring the case under the Conventicle Act. A few months

afterwards this merciless persecutor was killed by a fall from his horse.

Peter Williams was likewise oftentimes roughly handled. At Kidwelly, within four miles of his home, he attempted to hold a service in the open air on a Sabbath afternoon. A number of roughs assembled together, and as soon as he began to pray, they pulled him down and savagely beat him. When he mounted his horse they led the animal to the neighbouring marsh and compelled it to leap across the dykes which abound there, promising themselves the mighty fun of seeing the preacher tumbling over. But he was too good a horseman to afford them that kind of amusement. They afterwards dragged him into the public-house, swearing that they would make him drunk. This again proved fruitless labour, for instead of drinking the beer which they continued to put into his hands, he poured it into his boots. He remained there a prisoner in the hands of the mob, until some of his own servants, whom Mrs. Williams, alarmed at his lengthened absence, had sent in quest of him, came to his rescue. Preaching in the neighbourhood of Wrexham, he was arrested by the orders of Sir Watkin, and brought into his presence. We have no account of the examination which he underwent, but at the close of it he was committed to the dog-kennel, where he had to remain for the night. In the morning he was set at liberty, and bent his steps towards the friendly roof of Moses Lewis, a farmer in the neighbourhood. Here he was followed by the constables who had arrested him on the preceding day, not, it is supposed, by the order of the magistrate, but wishing to do a little business on their own account. His host seeing them approach the house, and suspecting their purpose, took possession of his watch. He was obliged to submit to be searched by these worthies, and they appropriated to themselves all the money which they could find upon him, which amounted to three shillings and sixpence. Our readers will not be shocked when we say that he took snuff. The constables took possession of his snuff-box, but at his earnest entreaty were kind enough to return it. Possibly they would not have returned it unopened if they had only known that besides containing a quantity of the sweet-scented dust, it contained half a guinea. At Trevriw, near Llanrwst, he was set upon by a great crowd, which was headed by two "gentlemen," dragged into a public-house, where he was kept prisoner from six o'clock in the evening until two next morning, a butt to the gibes and badinage of the rabble, and subjected to the most disgraceful outrages. At length the two "gentlemen" called for their horses and departed, having first paid the score, including the cost of food and lodgings for their victim. By and by the roughs left, and the preacher, finding a clear coast, hastened to make his escape, "sorry in his heart that he had not been permitted to preach."

A rather ludicrous incident happened in connexion with an attempt to

disturb his preaching at a place called Penrhos in Anglesea. A crowd of rioters had assembled and were making for the place where Mr. Williams was preaching. Among them was an elderly man riding a grey mare and armed with a bludgeon, as eager for the fray as any of the tumultuous throng. When they came near the congregation, some one quite accidentally touched the grey mare in the vicinity of the crupper, and she resented the insult with a tremendous fling, which produced no little amusement. Another tried the experiment, with the same result, and it all at once struck them that it would be quite as good fun to tickle the mare as to beat the preacher. To this they applied themselves in good earnest. The infuriated animal scampered off, plunging and kicking, followed by the crowd, each eager to get one chance more to touch the crupper, in spite of the angry protests of the rider, who had as much as he could do to keep his seat in the saddle, and the preacher and the few who had come together to hear him were left in peace.

Daniel Rowlands was mobbed on some occasions, but not so frequently as some of his brethren. When attempting to preach at Llanilar, in his own county, a great crowd, under the leadership of Squire Jones of Abermade, a mansion in the vicinity, assaulted him so fiercely with stones, brickbats, and other missiles, that he was obliged to desist and escape for his life, exclaiming, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

He soon made another attempt, and on this occasion the "Squire" did not put in an appearance, but not willing that the service should pass undisturbed, he treated two of his servants, a stalwart Welshman named Dick James, and an Irishman named Mike Daniel, to a liberal quantity of *the* drink, and sent them to the place of meeting, with orders to give the preacher a sound thrashing. When they came to the spot they agreed to listen for a while before beginning their assault. It struck Dick that the preacher was saying something very solemn, looking very grave, and crying withal, which had the effect of shaking him in his purpose. After a few minutes says Mike, "Let's at him now." "No," says Dick. "Then I will go my own self and hit him," says Mike. "If you do," says Dick, "I'll hit you, and such a blow that you shan't want another." The service concluded in peace, and Dick and Mike returned to their master. "Did you beat him well!" asked the Squire. "Not at all at all, Masthur," replied Mike. "Why?" "Sure enough it was all Dick's fault: he threatened to bate me instead of the preacher," was Mike's reply. "How is this, Dick?" inquired the master. "Indeed, sir," replied Dick, "when I came to his sight he looked so serious and wept so uncommonly, that I could not think of hitting him while he cried." "Ah, well," said the Squire, "I see that you frightened him. He will not be in haste to venture to this neighbourhood again."

At Nevin in Caernarvonshire, a very original device was had recourse to to prevent him from preaching. The church choir were instructed to sing the

119th Psalm from beginning to end, and they sang on for hours without intermission. Possibly their music was none of the best, but it was less painful to endure than stones and mud, and yet it answered precisely the same purpose—for it effectually prevented the preaching.

There was a good deal of ingenuity exercised in those days in devising means and methods to annoy the preachers and their friends. When Peter Williams was with some friends passing through a little town in Anglesea, most of the population followed them, hooting and pelting them with stones and other missiles. Some had bags loosely filled with stones, and tied to the ends of stakes, which they rattled away with all their might *to frighten the horses*.

At a place in Denbighshire, on the road leading from Wtherin to Llan-sanan, there was a Gunpowder Plot on a small scale. An excellent man, named Lewis Evans, had engaged to preach on a Sabbath afternoon on a small mound in a field near the roadside. A person happened to come to the place some time before the hour for beginning the service, and walking up and down he observed a singular-looking bunch of straw coming up out of the ground. On examination he found it filled with gunpowder, a small train of which he traced to the top of the mound where the preacher was expected to take his stand. Here he found a hole two feet in diameter filled with powder, and carefully covered over with turf. He was no Methodist himself, nor a friend to the Methodists, but he thought that he would like to disappoint the ingenious plotters. He accordingly scraped the powder from the hole, replacing the turf, separated the train which led from the straw in several places, and put himself in a convenient position to watch the event. While the service was proceeding, he observed a man who was servant to a solicitor in the neighbourhood, and dressed like a waggoner, approaching the straw and setting it on fire. There was a flash, but it was only “in the pan.” The seeming waggoner was greatly disappointed, a feeling which very possibly was shared by his master, while the preacher and his friends escaped what might have been a very serious injury.

The above Lewis Evans was one of the mightiest workers in the Methodist movement, and one of the few of their number who suffered a lengthened imprisonment. On one occasion when he was preaching at Bala, a magistrate residing in the neighbourhood sent officers to arrest and bring him into his presence. He was ushered into the parlour, when the following dialogue took place between the magistrate and himself:—

Magistrate. “Art thou the man who has been preaching at Bala?”

Preacher. “Yes, sir; it is I who have been giving a word of exhortation to the people.”

M. “Where art thou from?”

P. “From the parish of Llanllugan, Montgomeryshire.”

M. “What is thine employment when thou art at home?”

P. “A weaver, sir.”

M. “Hadst thou not enough work at home?”

P. “Yes, sir, abundance.”

M. “What for then didst thou come this way?”

P. “To give a word of exhortation to my fellow-sinners.”

M. “Thou art not wanted here. We have clergymen brought up at Oxford at great cost for the work of preaching.”

P. “There is enough work for them and me, for the people in great multitudes go to ruin in spite of us all.”

M. “I shall send thee to prison for thy pains.”

P. “My better has been in prison before me. The Lord Jesus himself was put in prison after he had come to the world to save sinners. The Lord Jesus—”

M. “Stop! Dost thou intend to preach in my parlour?”

P. “I do not think that your parlour is too good to speak in of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Eventually the preacher was committed to Dolgelly jail, where he lay for six months. Some of his friends, feeling that they ought to interfere in his behalf, inquired into the case, found that the magistrate had overstepped his authority, and commenced legal proceedings against him. It appears that the great man himself made the same discovery, and began to fear that a storm was brewing. He therefore hastened to Dolgelly to have an interview with his prisoner.

“Well, Lewis,” said he, “here thou art still.”

Preacher. “Yes, sir; here I am.”

Magistrate. “And here thou art likely to be for ever.”

P. “No, sir; neither you nor I shall be here for ever.”

M. “If thou wert but to give me a little money I could get thee out.”

P. “Indeed, sir? I think that you ought to get me out for nothing, for you had most to do in putting me in.”

M. “Tell me, are there many of you!”

P. “O yes, sir, a great number, and there will be many more of us by and by.”

M. “May you all be hanged by the same tree! ”

P. “You shall have been turned to dust, sir, long before that happens.”

The preacher was set at liberty “for nothing,” the magistrate, as it appears, bearing the expenses, and the legal proceedings against the latter were stayed; but he was given to understand that a sharp eye would be kept on his movements, and that he should not be permitted to play such a freak again at so little cost.

Another exhorter of the period was Morgan Griffith, commonly known

as Morgan the Sievemaking, who lived near Pwllheli in Carnarvonshire. He understood music, taught classes, and was leader of the choir in his parish church. While discharging this service it occurred to him that the kind of singing in which he was engaged was not praise unto God; that he and his companions of the choir were not singing in their hearts to the Lord, and that their performance therefore was mockery and not praise. This thought haunted him continually, and it so affected him that he durst not say at the giving out of the psalm, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God." He applied himself earnestly to read the Bible and to hear the Word preached when opportunity offered, and at length found rest to his troubled conscience through the blood of Christ. About the year 1744 he began publicly to exhort his neighbours to flee from the wrath to come. But he lived in the neighbourhood of one of the most furious persecutors of the Methodists, a tyrant out and out, namely, the Rev. John Owen, rector of Llanor and chancellor of Bangor. Poor Morgan Griffith was not long before he had to enter upon a course of suffering. On his return home from a place where he had been preaching, he was arrested and taken to Pwllheli, where he was lodged in prison to await his examination. He was at the time a widower with two children, one of whom was a boy of eight years of age, and the other a girl of six. A maternal uncle of the poor motherless children took them to Pwllheli to present them in court, hoping, simple man that he was, that the sight of them and their helpless condition would melt the magistrates' hearts. But he was mistaken. The harmless little ones were the means of greatly aggravating their father's case. A book was put in the hands of the boy, and to the disgust of the bench he was found to be able to read. The same experiment was tried on the girl, and with the same result. This was intolerable. It was evident that the man was a disorderly person, and that he was bringing up his children to the same ways with himself, and therefore he must by some means be got rid of. There were other Methodists examined at the same time. No law existed by which they could be committed to prison, and merely to fine them for their breach of the Conventicle Act would not answer the magistrates' purpose. But the Royal Navy was at the time in need of sailors, and the whole batch were sent on board a ship of war. They were taken first to Carnarvon, and afterwards halted at Conway. At the latter place it was for some reason a holiday, and a large number of people assembled before the place where the prisoners rested, anxious to catch a glimpse of them. Morgan Griffith stood up and addressed the crowd, telling them that he and his companions in suffering were there not for murder or robbery or any other crime against the laws of the country, but for reading the Scriptures, praying together, and exhorting one another in the interests of their souls; and with great earnestness he entreated them to con-

sider their ways and to turn to the Lord. "As for us," he added, "our consciences are at peace, and we rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer reproach for the sake of Christ." Two young men among the audience were impressed by this discourse, and became zealous helpers in the cause of the gospel.

After remaining for some time on board ship, Morgan Griffith and one of his companions were permitted to return to their homes on furlough. It was generally believed that they would have been allowed to remain at home unmolested if they had only refrained from the doings which had given offence to the authorities. But refrain they could not; the word was in their hearts as a burning fire shut up in their bones, and they were weary with forbearing and could not stay. On one of the first Sabbaths after their return, Morgan Griffith preached in the neighbourhood, and his friend introduced the service. They were consequently sent away before the expiration of their furlough, and word was sent with them to the commander of the ship, that they were disorderly people, creating a disturbance in the country, and that Morgan Griffith was the worse of the two. The latter was told by the officers that they had had complaints against him from Government that he was a ringleader of seditious men, and that he must put away his religious sentiments and practices, and become a "quiet Churchman," otherwise he should be shot. Time was given him to make up his mind on the momentous subject. At the expiration of that period he was asked what he had determined to do, and this was his heroic reply: "I must obey God rather than man. I give myself to the care of Him who is able to keep that which is committed to Him, and am determined that neither reproach nor suffering shall induce me to dishonour my Master." He was consequently placed at the end of the ship, and a file of men were ordered to fire on him. The poor exhorter had no idea but that he must die, but his tormentors only intended it for a lark, and the guns were only charged with powder. Possibly the officers considered it a good joke, but it was, to say the least, a very cruel one, and one that might have ended in a catastrophe which would have made it an expensive one to themselves. From that day he was treated with greater respect, but that respect came too late, for he soon afterwards sickened and died, abundantly enjoying in his last moments that peace which passeth understanding. He had to die far away from the helpless orphans from whom he had been so ruthlessly torn; but it is comforting to know that a kind Providence took care of the little ones, and that they never wanted any good thing.