WELSH

CALVINISTIC METHODISM

A Historical Sketch.

BY

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CHAPTER V.

More persecution and oppression—William Pritchard—Hugh Thomas hiding in caves—Edward Parry—Margaret Hughes— Owen Thomas Rowland—Thomas Lloyd sold up—Sale at Wrexham—Richard Hughes and the agent.

Preachers and exhorters were not the only sufferers in those troublous times. Those who re­ceived them into their houses, as well as those who were in the habit of attending on their ministrations, were equally exposed to the displeasure of the great, and the fury of the rabble. There was living at Glasfryn Fawr, near Pwllheli, a farmer who was somewhat wealthy, and better educated than most of his neigh­bours, of the name of William Pritchard. He was a religious man before his neighbourhood had been visited by any of the Methodist preachers, and his conversion had been brought about in a remarkable manner. On one Sunday evening, having remained later than usual at a public-house where he had been drinking with some of his wild companions, he missed his way home. He wandered for a while in entire ignorance of his own whereabouts, but at length see­ing a light he made towards it, and had no sooner reached the place than he understood where he was, and at once he moved on in the direction of his own residence. But he soon lost himself again, and again found himself by the cottage from which the light emanated. He looked in and saw the occupant reading the Bible, and after some time he beheld him fall on his knees to pray. William Pritchard, who could hear every word that was uttered, stayed to the end of the prayer, and then found his way home without any further difficulty. Some of the words to which he had listened clung to his mind, made him feel unhappy, and he could find no rest until he had been made willing to give himself to the Lord. There was a small Independent church at Pwllheli, and of this he became a member. It was at his house that Howell Harris preached his first sermon in that part of the country. He ad­mired the zeal of the Methodists, and encouraged and helped them in every way, but he thus brought numberless troubles upon himself. It seems that he was in the habit of occasionally attending the church in which Chancellor Owen officiated, and when re­turning from the service on one Sunday, he was asked how he liked the sermon. He answered that he did not like it at all, and expressed it as his opinion that the doctrines it contained were not in accordance with the Word of God. These words were carried to the ears of the Chancellor, and the result was that William Pritchard was cited before the Ecclesiastical Court of Bangor to answer for the slander. With much difficulty and expense the case was removed from that court to the county assizes, where it was decided in favour of the defendant. But the vengeful Chancellor succeeded in inducing W. Pritchard’s landlord to turn him out of his farm, and finding no other place in the neighbourhood, he was obliged to remove to the Isle of Anglesea. Here he settled in a farm called Plas-pen-mynydd; but the report that he was a man having embraced a strange kind of religion, and followed some unheard-of prac­tices, had reached the place before him, and he was subjected by his new neighbours to numberless an­noyances. Cattle were turned in his hay and corn crops, his implements of husbandry were broken to pieces, and his property damaged in every possible way. But he still continued to seek his neighbours’ spiritual benefit. He had a cottage near his house licensed for preaching, and made every effort to get the little building supplied with the ministry of the gospel. The injury done to his property he suffered patiently until one Sunday evening, when matters reached an unbearable point. He was from home at the time, but the report had gone abroad that he had been seen returning on Saturday evening, and in company with a preacher. Mrs. Pritchard was within with an infant of three months old and a young maid-servant, the other servants having gone to church, when a great crowd assembled in front of the house, and seeing Mrs. Pritchard shouted to her, “ We are come to kill thy Roundhead and his preacher.” “If Roundhead you call him,” she replied, “he is not at home now.” “It is a lie!” they all answered, but they did not think it proper to put it to the proof by searching the house, but broke all the windows, and then entering the cow-houses and stables, they broke stalls, mangers, racks, and every other breakable thing which they could find. After this they went into the barn, and mixed together all the winnowed barley and oats which they found lying there. When Mr. Pritchard came home, and saw the wreck which had been made of his property, he resolved that he would suffer such doings in silence no more. He was well aware that a Roundhead had but a poor chance of justice from the magistrates of his own county, and therefore put the case in the hands of an English lawyer who was known as a friend of religious liberty. He gave this gentleman a list of the leaders in the work of ruin about his house, and an action for damages was brought against these at the Shrewsbury assizes, and they were obliged to pay in full for the mischief they had done. But it was resolved that he should not remain in the neighbourhood, and he had therefore to quit his farm. It was but a short time that he was allowed to remain at his next farm, but when driven from this last, he was happy enough to meet with a landlord who believed in liberty of conscience. The enemy gained nothing by causing this good man to be driven about thus from place to place. The things that hap­pened unto William Pritchard fell out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel, for wherever he went he was immediately followed by the Methodists.

At the time when Morgan Griffith was sent on board a man-of-war, there was a friend of his named Hugh Thomas, against whom a warrant was issued, but who managed to escape being arrested. A religious friend of his who had been doing harvest work for two successive summers at a farm called Caeglas, near the foot of Snowdon, advised him to flee thither, assuring him that the family at Caeglas would not refuse to give him shelter. “The first year I was there,” said he, “ I asked permission to hold family worship in the house, and the people did not know what I meant. They looked stupid and confused; but I did it every day, and was tole­rated. The following year the Bible was brought to me the first day, and I was asked to conduct family worship regularly. I think that those people would be disposed to give you protection.” Towards Caeglas therefore, Hugh Thomas bent his steps. The place was about thirty miles from his home, and he was obliged to start by night lest he should be discovered. We give the sequel in his own words.

“When I had reached the place, and had told the family my troubles, they showed every disposition to afford me shelter; but it was easy to see that they were afraid, lest they should, in harbouring me, bring evil upon themselves. In this perplexity it was resolved that a bed should be fitted up for me in a cave which was far up on the side of Snow­don, where I should remain day and night, and where the shepherd should bring me food daily in going up the mountain to look after the sheep. Here I remained concealed for several weeks: after which I was permitted to sleep in the house, escap­ing to the cave every morning before the dawn, and not returning until after dark. At length the vigi­lance of the search for me having somewhat relaxed, I was allowed to dispense with my hiding-place and to remain in the house day and night.

“Meanwhile my wife did not know what had become of me, and I had no means to know how she fared; and my heart being well-nigh broken with a sore longing for seeing her, I resolved to go home. I left Caeglas a little before night, in the hope of reach­ing my house while it was yet dark. As I was drawing near my own neighbourhood I was more afraid lest any should see me and report my arrival. I succeeded, however, in reaching home before day­light. I spent the whole of the first day after my arrival in bed; but when night came I was afraid to remain any longer in my own house, thinking that very possibly it might have become known to some people that I was there. I therefore, with the assistance of a friend, made a hole in a high bank which was covered with furze, and this I made my refuge. Whenever I entered this cave I pulled a quantity of furze after me against its mouth to con­ceal it. My poor wife had not the means to support me here in idleness; I therefore employed my time in making small nets for family uses, which she took about the neighbourhood to sell, or to give in ex­change for morsels of food. I went on thus for some time before I ventured to sleep in my own house; and even then, I took care to return to my hole every morning before daylight. At length the news came that Morgan Griffith’s companions were allowed to return to their homes. I then ventured to show myself, and was permitted to remain in peace.”

Poor Hugh Thomas felt that his own case con­trasted unfavourably with that of his friend Morgan Griffith. “He faced the storm,” said he, “but as for me, my heart is sore now because I fled like Jonah.” It did not occur to him, perhaps, that he had been given the honour of adding one to the number of those worthies of whom it is written, that to escape the fury of savage persecutors, “they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

At a farm called Cefnbyr in the parish of Llansanan, Denbighshire, there lived a man named Ed­ward Parry, who having been brought to know and to love the gospel, offered an open door to its ministry. Services were held at his house, which were attended by a number of his neighbours. This gave offence to several, and especially so to the clergyman of the parish. The proprietor of Cefnbyr was made ac­quainted with the conduct of his tenant, and the result was, that the latter was given to understand that if he did not refrain from harbouring those strangers who tramped the country taking upon them to preach, he should be turned out of his farm. This was told him by his master, and his reply was, “Your land, sir, is only temporal, while religion is eternal.” He refused to yield, and was expelled from his home and obliged to leave the neighbourhood, to the great sorrow of the little flock who usually as­sembled to worship at his house, and who felt that his departure involved their utter deprivation of those services which were to them the only social means of grace. But it was not so. A widow named Margaret Hughes, who held a farm in the vicinity, ventured, with Edward Parry’s fate before her eyes, to open her house to receive the Methodist services. Complaints were made to her landlord by the accuser of Edward Parry, and she was served with a notice to quit her farm. At the expiration of the notice, however, no one came to take possession, and she was therefore induced to remain, in the hope that her landlord had relented. Probably he would have let the poor widow alone if he had been let alone him­self; but the indefatigable informer of the parish would not let him rest until she had been ejected. She was accordingly turned out with all her goods and chattels, in the month of August, and having no home to go to, she was obliged to take up her abode under a temporary shelter thrown up in the corner of a common in the vicinity, where she had to remain till the close of the year. It was a wretched home, which could not protect her or her little house­hold from either wind or rain ; but she bore it bravely for the sake of Christ. And even here she did what she could. Her poor habitation was made a house of Cod, and the services which had been ex­cluded with her from the comfortable home from which she had been so mercilessly expelled, were continued under her roof of twigs and branches. As the winter advanced, a gentleman in the neighbour­hood took compassion upon her, and allowed her to dwell in a house of which he was the owner, until the following spring.

This was not all that Margaret Hughes had to suffer for the sake of the gospel. On one Sabbath-day she went to Denbigh to hear a sermon at the house of one Thomas Lloyd. While the service was proceeding, a great crowd came up to the house, rushed in, and began to abuse the few worshippers, so that they were obliged to escape for their lives. They were pursued in the direction of Nantglyn, and Margaret Hughes was overtaken, pulled off her horse, and most brutally treated. Her clothes were par­tially torn off her body, and it is not known to what other lengths the ruffians would have proceeded if a gentleman had not happened to pass at the time and rescued her out of their hands. This kind gentle­man charged her to make complaint to a neighbour­ing magistrate, adding, that if he did not do his duty, he would see him punished himself. Some of the actors in that dastardly outrage belonged to the wealthy class, and were possibly called “gentlemen;” and it is some satisfaction to know that the proceed­ings of that day turned out to be far more expensive to them than they had anticipated.

Owen Thomas Rowland was a blacksmith living at Llechgynfarwy in Anglesea. In his youth he was remarkable for his ungodliness, but he was induced by a friend to accompany him to hear a sermon by one of the Methodists. Owen did not at all enjoy the early part of the service, and made an attempt to go away, but the press was so great that he was obliged to remain where he was to the end; and from that day he was another man. He soon be­came as remarkable for his religious zeal as he had been for his wickedness. But those who had let him alone in his ungodliness would not tolerate his earnest religion, for he was not satisfied with quietly and peaceably seeking the salvation of his own soul, but he must likewise, to the great annoyance of some of his respectable neighbours, exert himself might and main for the salvation of others. The clergyman of the parish and a lady in the neighbourhood engaged a poet to write a satire on the Methodists, in which Owen Thomas Rowland was made conspicuously to figure. The following is a free translation of one of the stanzas:—

“The Blacksmith in pointing his nails,

Thinks in his heart no less

Than that he has more learning, and wisdom by far,

Than a host of the bishops possess.”

A copy of these doggerel verses was left at every house in the parish, and great was the excitement which they produced. But the blacksmith was not a man to be sung away from his religion, and there­fore recourse was had to more stringent means. He held a little land under Lord Boston, and he was summoned into the presence of his Lordship’s agent, and was given to understand by that great man that he must either break off his connexion with the Methodists or give up his little farm. He chose the latter alternative; but depriving him of his few fields answered but little purpose, for he could not be turned out of his smithy, and he continued to work, to sing, to pray, and to exhort his neighbours as before. But he was a man that must be got rid of, and since there were no means by which he could be *turned* out of his workshop, there was nothing for it but to *starve* him out. Orders were accordingly sent to all the farmers on the estate that they were not to employ Owen Thomas Rowland on pain of losing their farms. By this tyrannical measure he was driven to the greatest straits, and to escape utter starvation was obliged to leave the country.

Thomas Lloyd of Denbigh was the owner of the house in which he lived, and because he made it a house of God, he incurred the displeasure of his per­secuting neighbours. They could not turn him out of his habitation, but they seized all his furniture, leaving him nothing but the bare walls, and sold it publicly in the marketplace. The same thing was done with the furniture of a house near Wrexham, where religious services were held. Every stick was taken to the town and publicly sold, and the whole of the proceeds was spent in drink. It was sport to some of the magnates of those days to plunge inno­cent families in the deepest distress, and to make their little property afford to the ruffianly tools of their despotism the means necessary for a “jollifica­tion.”

Possibly all this was done under colour of law, and nothing was more easy. Complaint was made to a magistrate that a certain person held a “conventicle;” the offender would be heavily fined, and the rest followed as a matter of course. We could greatly multiply instances of this nature, but it would be a mere repetition to do so. Let it suffice to say, that this kind of oppression was allowed to go on for many years over a large portion of the Principality. If it is martyrdom to suffer, and to suffer much, for the sake of the gospel of Christ, the glorious host of martyrs will be greatly increased from the ranks of the Methodists of the last century.

But it was useless to attempt by any such means to arrest the mighty stream. The Methodists were like Israel in Egypt,—the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied; and they multiplied by means of the oppression. Those who were driven from their farms because they allowed preaching in their houses, found farms in other localities where earnest religion was unknown before, and were soon followed there by the preachers. Though driven from their homes for the crime of making them houses of God, as soon as they found other houses they did it again. Richard Hughes, a small farmer in Anglesea, was a fair sample of hundreds of his brethren. He was summoned with a number of his Methodistical neighbours into the presence of his landlord’s agent and that of the clergyman of the parish. The former held in his hand a paper con­taining a list of the obnoxious tenants, and all those unhappy people were given to understand that they must either give up their Methodism or quit their farms. One of their number ventured to plead that the law gave full liberty to every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience; but the only reply he obtained was, that such were the landlord’s orders, and that these must be carried out. Some of them gave way under the hard pressure, but Richard Hughes was so overwhelmed with a sense of the honour bestowed upon him in being thus called to suffer for conscience’ sake, that he clapped his hands and shouted, “Blessed be God!” “Hosanna to the Son of David!” This unexpected outburst frightened the agent so much, that he let the paper to which we have referred drop on the floor. The clergyman stood it bravely, and attempted to prevent the noisy Methodist from making such an uproar, but it was of no avail. The more the reverend gentleman re­monstrated, the louder did Richard shout “Hosanna to the Son of David!” At length he went out, saying as he went, “Farewell, dear brethren ; who­ever is willing to sell an everlasting kingdom and a glorious crown for a poor farm at a high rent, it is not I; no, by the help of the Brother born for ad­versity—*no, never!*” And there were many and many in those days who, in similar circumstances, said again and again, “*No, never.*”