

WELSH
CALVINISTIC METHODISM

A Historical Sketch.

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CHAPTER VI.

The instigators of the persecution—False representations—Sensible gentry—Mr. Lewis, Mr. Bulkeley, and the strange preacher—A sermon at Llysdulas Hall and its results—Mr. Bulkeley and Chancellor Wynne—Hugh Williams the blacksmith and Hugh Williams, Esquire—Mrs. Holland Griffiths—Young Holland Griffiths's opinion—Griffith John and his master.

MANY of the Welsh magistrates and gentry were sufficiently inclined of their own accord to persecute the Methodists, but it must be said, that even when they were themselves disposed to let them alone, they were frequently moved to take severe measures against them by the representations and persuasions of others; and it is painful to add, that those others were, for the most part, the clergy of the Established Church. There are not many instances of services having been disturbed and preachers abused and beaten by the mob, or of people haled before the magistrates and fined, or turned out of their farms on account of their Methodism, which could not be traced to the influence and efforts of some clergymen. The invariable excuse for persecuting them was, that they were "against the Church." But it is not true that they were against the Church. Wherever the truth was earnestly preached in the parish church, they gladly availed themselves of its services, and the men whom for many years they acknowledged as their leaders were nearly all episcopally ordained clergymen. But many of the clergy of the time were men of immoral lives, and there were many more who were regarded by earnest people as anything but able ministers of the New Testament; for although not chargeable with conduct which might be regarded as unworthy of gentlemen, they yet lacked the earnestness and the life which, in their opinion, should characterize ministers of the gospel. From these they consequently turned away, and met in dwelling-houses and in barns to pray together, and to exhort, admonish, and encourage one another. The clergyman therefore felt insulted when he found his parishioners neglecting his ministrations and showing a preference for those of the blacksmith, the weaver, or the shoemaker. The measures which he would take to put down that which he looked upon as an opposition depended upon his own character. He would head a rabble to mob a preacher and scatter his hearers; or persuade a magistrate to take legal proceedings against the conventiclers; or make representations to the landlords of those people, with a view to induce them to turn them out of their farms or habitations: he would do either of those things, or the whole three, according to the sort of man he was himself. A drunken clergyman would not mind doing the first, and it was done by not a few, and the second and third were done by a great many.

False representations were made of those men and of the services which they held. Church services were only held by daylight, but those Methodists frequently met in the evenings, and conducted their services by candlelight. It was reported by their enemies that they put out the candles after a while, and that then followed the "dark prayer," which came to be the general designation for Methodist services; and there were base things said of their proceedings in the dark by men who ought to have known, and who *did* know, better.

But there were some magistrates and landed proprietors who had sense enough not to take those slanderous reports on credit, but who examined the matter for themselves; and there were others who, for a time, sorely oppressed the Methodists, but who forbore, and even encouraged and helped them after they had become better acquainted with their character. Mr. Marmaduke Gwyn, of Garth Hall, who was a magistrate of the county of Brecon, had heard such evil reports of Howell Harris, that he resolved to avail himself of the first opportunity that offered itself to have him arrested and sent to jail. Finding that Harris was to preach at a short distance from Garth Hall, he went to the place fully intending to carry out this resolve, and taking the Riot Act in his pocket for the sake of dispersing the congregation. As he was leaving his house, he said to Mrs. Gwyn, "I will hear what the man says before I lay a hand upon him." So he did; and the result was, that at the close of the sermon he went up to the preacher, shook hands warmly with him, apologized for the mistake into which he had been led by false and malicious reports, and took him home with him to supper. From that day Mr. Gwyn became the protector and friend of the poor persecuted Methodists, and eventually one of his daughters was married to the Rev. Charles Wesley.

An aged preacher was going about exhorting in the neighbourhood of Amlwch in Anglesea, in the year 1740, and was very roughly handled by the populace. A magistrate in the vicinity, Mr. Lewis of Llysdulas, heard of the poor preacher's troubles, and sent for him to his house, where he invited a brother magistrate, Mr. Bulkeley of Bryndu, to meet him. The whole family were collected together into the hall, and Mr. Lewis, addressing the stranger, said, "We are here like the family of Cornelius, assembled to listen to your sermon, and you must preach to us now just as you are in the habit of preaching about the country." The preacher obeyed, and at the close of the sermon the gentlemen remarked to each other, "If this kind of thing is all the crime of this poor man, we must protect him and silence his persecutors." So they did; and an end was put for the time to that kind of persecution at Amlwch and its vicinity.

There was a dignitary of the Church known as Chancellor Wynne living at Bodewryd in the same county, who was greatly vexed in his spirit

by Methodistical services which were held at a house called Careglefn, not far from his residence. The house was the property of the above Mr. Bulkeley, and the Chancellor sought to induce him to put an end to the annoyance. A servant was despatched to Bryndu with a letter to Mr. Bulkeley, asking him to pull the house down if he could not put an end to the services in any other way. Mr. Bulkeley replied that he was very sorry that he could not accede to the Reverend Chancellor's request, and begged to be allowed to commend to his attention the fifth chapter of the Book of Acts, and especially the advice of Gamaliel to the Sanhedrim of the Jews. He received no more letters from the Chancellor. At Pentir-isaf, Carnarvonshire, there lived a blacksmith named Hugh Williams, who, after spending his early years in ungodliness, was deeply impressed by listening to one of the Methodist preachers, and from that hour became a zealous and devoted disciple of Christ. His landlord happened to be of the same name with himself, only he was called Hugh Williams, Esquire. The blacksmith was a special favourite with the Squire, for he found him to be an honest, trustworthy, and industrious man. The change in the former was for a while unnoticed by the latter, but an Association was held at Beaumaris, and Hugh could not resist the temptation to attend it. The Squire soon found that Hugh had been absent from his smithy, and, what was more important, he found where he had been. Next day he was sent for to the master's house, but before he had reached the place, he saw him coming to meet him in a terrible rage, and brandishing his staff in such a way as led poor Hugh to the conclusion that the first thing he was going to have was a beating, whatever might come next. He escaped, however, without blows, but his master bitterly reproached him for his ingratitude after all the kindness that he had shown him since he was a boy. Had not he been always kind to him? and here he was, now changing his religion and joining these Roundheads, without as much as acquainting him with his intention to do so, or asking his permission.

"By your leave, master," said Hugh, "I have a word or two to say."

"What have you to say?" replied the master. "Have not I spoken the truth? If you have anything to say, say it. Let me hear what it is."

"I acknowledge, sir," said Hugh, "that all you have said is true. You have been very kind to me from my childhood to this day, for which I feel very grateful to you."

"Well," said the master, "and what next?"

"I need not tell you, sir," said Hugh, "that the way in which I have lived since I have grown up is well known to you. There was not a fair held within reach, nor a revel, nor any other wicked and sinful gathering, but that I was present, and yet you never intimated to me that I was doing wrong; but now that I am seeking the good of my soul, you are offended

with me, call me by ill names, and threaten to turn me out of my home. Oh, master! I have only one soul; and the time that is left me to provide for its welfare is very short. And I am resolved, if need be, to suffer being turned out of my habitation rather than do wrong to my immortal soul.”

This appeal was too much for the Squire. He threw up his hands in amazement and exclaimed, “Go! and in the name of God I shall never molest you.” He was as good as his word; Hugh was allowed to remain in his smithy, and was as great a favourite as ever as long as his master lived. At Mr. Williams’s death his estate fell to his brother, a clergyman, and then the blacksmith was obliged to leave.

After long seeking in vain for a place to live in, he heard that a Mrs. Griffiths had a house and smithy and a little land which would just suit him, to let at Llanidan in the Isle of Anglesea. Thither he bent his steps, and having obtained an interview with the lady, preferred his request. One of her tenants was already under notice to quit his farm on account of his Methodism, and Hugh being aware of this fact, said, “I must tell you the truth, madam; I belong to the people who preach in dwelling-houses.” “Which sect?” inquired the lady. “I belong,” said Hugh, “to the Methodists.” Upon this her son, Mr. Holland Griffiths, appeared on the scene, and his mother remarked to him, “I was about to let Tygwyn to this man. He seems to me to be an honest man enough, but he tells me that he belongs to the people who preach in houses.”

“Pooh!” said the son, “what does that signify? If I were not ashamed to do so, I would go to hear them myself.”

“You would, Holland!” asked the mother in astonishment.

“I would indeed,” was the son’s reply. “They are a great deal better people than most who find fault with them.”

“Then if it is so,” said the mother, “Hugh Thomas must be allowed to remain in his farm after all, and this man shall have Tygwyn.” And so it came to pass.

Griffith John of Ynysypany, Merionethshire, was a zealous Methodist, who kept his house open for religious services, and occasionally preached himself. But the meetings at Griffith’s house were frequently disturbed by the clergyman of the parish, who came in making a great uproar, scolding by name those of his parishioners whom he found present, and occasionally making havoc among the plates and dishes on the kitchen shelves. On one occasion he entered during a prayer-meeting. A young man was at the moment engaged in prayer, and the parson recognising his voice, shouted aloud, “Is it you, Jack!” and forcing his way to the worshipper, roughly grasped his arm. Griffith John was a man of great physical strength, but remarkable for his good temper. This, however, was more than he could bear. He laid hold of the reverend gentleman’s arm

with a mighty grip, dragged him out of the house, and flung him on the dunghill opposite the door. The clergyman did not care to encounter that sort of thing any more, and accordingly changed his tactics. He drew up a memorial in which Griffith John was represented as disturbing the peace of the parish and opposing the church and the laws of the land. To this document he procured the signatures of some of his parishioners, and it was sent to the poor Methodist's landlord, Mr. Price of Rhiwlas, near Bala, where it promised to produce the desired result, for Griffith John immediately received notice to quit his farm. The latter, understanding full well from whence the storm came, had a memorial in his favour drawn up and signed by a number of his neighbours, and with this he resolved to go to Rhiwlas and see Mr. Price for himself. He earnestly begged to be allowed to retain his little farm, but his master replied, "You shall not, Griffith, for I find that you disturb the neighbourhood, and prevent people from going to church." "In truth, master," said Griffith, "I am not doing any such things." "It is useless your denying," said the master; "and you shall not on any account live on my estate, for do you not hold the dark prayer, and bring men and women together to do mischief?"

"We are doing nothing of the kind, sir," was Griffith's reply.

"What then? You are in the habit of meeting in the evenings?"

"Yes, sir; we do sometimes meet after the work of the day is over."

"And what is it that you do in those meetings?"

"I will tell you, sir," said Griffith. "We read the Bible and sing psalms. We exhort one another to be honest and truthful, and to pay all rents and taxes. We pray for the Church, the King, and our country. This indeed, sir, is what we do, besides exhorting each other to cease from sin and to seek the favour of God and everlasting life; and since we do no injury to any man, I hope, sir, you will allow me to remain in my farm."

"Well, Griffith," said the master, "if you promise me that you will give up those meetings you shall remain."

"Master!" said Griffith in a determined tone, "I cannot do *that*. If you were to give me the half of your estate I could not make *that* promise. *No, never.*"

Mr. Price, who had been for some time melting, was now completely vanquished, and bursting into tears, said, "Go home, Griffith, go home. You shall *keep* your farm; and when you come to Bala to attend your Association, remember to bring your horse to Rhiwlas." From that day Griffith John was a great favourite with his master. On one occasion when he wanted to see him on business, Mr. Price was attending a magistrates' meeting at Bala, but finding that his tenant was waiting outside, he went out to speak with him. On his return he was asked by one of his brother magistrates who his visitor was, and he answered that he was a preacher.

“Is he a great preacher?” one of the bench asked. “I do not know about that,” replied Mr. Price, “but I know one thing about him,—*he is a godly man.*”