

WELSH
CALVINISTIC METHODISM

A Historical Sketch.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Self-sacrificing zeal—Thomas Hughes and his wife—Another Thomas Hughes—Examination by the Vicar of Conway—A ruse—Conversion of a bully—Lowri Williams “the Apostle”—Griffith Ellis—Church of eight females—Three sisters—Robert the shoemaker—Thomas Edwards the turner—Catherine Owen’s journeys to Llangetho.

THE indomitable zeal of the Methodists, their hearty consecration to the work of their Master, and the mighty influences which attended their ministry, at length completely did away with that which the occurrences which we have narrated in the preceding chapter only served to check. Not only were their preachers remarkable for their zeal and devotedness, but also the private members, both men and women, were characterized by the same spirit. There were a great many small farmers, farm-labourers, artisans, and women in the humblest walks of life, who saw no sacrifice too great to make for their Lord, and who made every other consideration subservient to His cause and the salvation of their neighbours.

There was a Thomas Hughes living near Llangollen, who was a poor man, but a zealous and devoted Christian. His wife was of the same spirit with himself, and she had a brother who was older than herself by many years, and who was the owner of considerable property. This gentleman regarded her religion with much disfavour, and made several attempts to dissuade her and her husband from attending the Methodist meetings. He thought that he had a powerful auxiliary in the “almighty guinea,” but had the disappointment to find all his efforts, even with that assistance, proving of no avail. He told his sister, that if she and her husband gave up their Methodism he would leave her the whole of his wealth, but that otherwise she should not have a shilling. “Never mind, brother,” was her reply; “if you only gave me three halfpence I would give two of them towards the cause of Christ, and keep only the third for myself.” In great anger he declared that she should never have a penny after him; and such no doubt was his intention, but his poor sister was not called upon to make the sacrifice, for he died suddenly and intestate, and she inherited all the wealth she had been so willing to forego for the sake of the gospel.

Another Thomas Hughes lived at Moughtry, in Denbighshire, who was in very humble circumstances, but a man of great Christian energy and zeal. He was an exhorter of small talent and slender knowledge; but his sense of the darkness and danger in which his neighbours lay constrained him to labour, in season and out of season, to see if he could by any means save some of them. He occasionally went to Conway to exhort, where he stood forth in the street, or under the old walls of the town, or anywhere that he could get a few people to stand and listen. But the clergyman of the place

and others would often disturb him in these efforts to do good; and at length, seeing that he persisted in intruding himself and his doctrines into the town, the reverend gentleman gave orders that he should be arrested and brought before him. There were many of the Established clergy of those days who had but very little religion; but we would fain hope that there were not many who had as little common sense as the then vicar of Conway. When the poor exhorter was brought into his presence, the following dialogue took place:—

Clergyman. “You ought to be a learned man to go about to preach, and able to answer deep questions.”

Exhorter. “What questions, sir?”

Cler. “Here they are,—those which were asked me by the Lord Bishop. Let’s see whether you will be able to answer them.—Where was St. Paul born?”

Ex. “In Tarsus.”

Cler. “Hem; I see that you know something too.—Well, can you tell me who took charge of the Virgin Mary after our blessed Redeemer was crucified?”

Ex. “John.”

Cler. “Well. Once again: Who wrote the Book of Revelation? Answer *that* if you can.”

Ex. “John the Apostle.”

Cler. “Ho! you seem to know a good deal after all.”

Ex. “Perhaps, sir, you will allow me to ask *you* one or two questions?”

Cler. “O yes, only they must be religious questions.”

Ex. “What is holiness? and how may a sinner be justified before God?”

Cler. “Ho! we have no business to bother ourselves with such things; and you have no business to put such questions to a man in my position. Go out of my sight this minute.” And to the men who had brought him, “Take care that you do not bring such men into my presence any more.”

After this interview Thomas Hughes was allowed to pursue his labours at Conway in peace, and this encouraged him to extend them to other quarters. There was a place called Towyn Ferry lying about midway between Conway and Llandudno, the inhabitants of which were steeped in ignorance and sin, and our exhorter resolved to make an attempt upon it. He got a report circulated in the neighbourhood that a sermon would be preached at a place where crowds of the people usually assembled to play, on the next following Sunday afternoon. The report, as it appears, said nothing at all as to who the preacher was to be, or where he was to come from. When the time arrived, he went to the place accompanied by a religious friend, and he found there a great number of people, some pursuing their games, and others looking out for the preacher. The appearance of things was by no

means promising, for there were several heaps of stones put up in readiness for the stranger's reception as soon as he made his appearance; but Thomas Hughes being unknown in the neighbourhood, and as unclerical in his garb as any among the crowd, no one for a moment suspected that he was the man, and he laid himself down on the grass among the rest and entered into conversation with them. After a time, and when their patience was beginning to fail, he stood up and said, "Well, lads, there is no sign at all of a preacher coming; very likely the man has heard that we were going to stone him, and that he won't come after all. Let one of us go on the top of that heap of stones and exhort, and the rest sing; would not that be first-rate play?"

"Capital," said a bully, who was the recognised leader of the crowd. "Go you now on the heap and preach to us."

"Yes will I," said Thomas Hughes; "but what shall I do for a book?"

"I have a book," said the friend who had accompanied him to the place, handing him a Bible.

"Very well," said the exhorter. "I am willing to try; but mind you, you must be civil, and not laugh if I make some blunders."

"I'll make them civil," said the bully.—"Listen here, lads: whoever dares to laugh, *I'll* put one of these stones into his head."

"Stop you," said Hughes, "the first thing to do is to pray, is it not?"

"Ay, ay," said the bully, "and I'll be clerk. I'll stand before you and you shall use my shoulder for a pulpit."

Prayer was offered, and that in right earnest, and which elicited at its close several favourable remarks such as "Pretty well indeed!" "Pon my word, as good as a parson!"

The preacher proceeded to read his text, when the bully shouted, "Hold on, you fool! let's sing first." And they sang a Welsh hymn after a fashion. Then came the sermon, which was listened to most attentively, and one at least of the hearers, and he the bully and extempore clerk, left the place a changed man.

There was a poor woman named Lowri Williams, who with her husband was living at a fulling-mill, called Pandy Chwilog, near Pwllheli. The husband was not a decidedly religious man, but he encouraged Methodistical services by attending them with his wife, and for that reason they were turned out of their home. But Providence led them to another "Pandy" "in the parish of Maentwrog, Merionethshire. This was called Pandy'r-ddwryd, which, being interpreted, means the fulling-mill on two streams. Here they were at a great distance from the religious means which the wife so greatly loved. The two nearest places at which they were held were Brynengan on one side and Bala on the other, and the former of these was at a distance of fifteen and the latter eighteen miles. By dint of much labour

Lowri Williams succeeded in getting preachers now and again from great distances to hold services at her own house. Their ministry and her godly conversation were blessed to the conversion of a number of people. A Society was formed in the place, numbering eight members, who continued for a time to be called "The Noah's ark family." This was a small beginning, but the increase was truly marvellous. The earnest prayers and persevering zeal of this humble woman were the means of establishing in the north-western portion of Merionethshire no less than eighteen churches, and those before she was called to her rest had so increased as to number together about a thousand communicants. It is not strange, therefore, that to this day she is designated "Lowri Williams the apostle." There were places in a neighbouring wood where she spent much time alone, wrestling with God, and it is said that there were red paths, leading from her house to those Peniels, where many a time she had prevailed and carried away with her a blessing for her own soul and for her perishing neighbours. She would not let any living man alone. As sure as any one talked with Lowri Williams he would have to listen to something about his own soul and about Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost, and often were her words a blessing to those to whom they were spoken. On one occasion a young man who was on his way to one of the merry-makings which were then so frequent in Wales, called at her house to inquire for the safe place to cross a neighbouring stream. She accompanied him out and gave the necessary directions. Just as she was turning back she asked him, "Now, my young man, are you in the habit of inquiring the way to everlasting life sometimes on the Sabbath?" "No, never," was the reply; "I do not care at all about such things." "Then," said she, "come here to my house at such a time, and there will be a man showing the way to heaven." "Not I, indeed," said the young man, and away he went to his amusement. But Lowri Williams had spoken, and her words did not usually fall to the ground. She had prayed, and her prayers were not often left unanswered. The words cleaved to the young man's conscience, and he found himself constrained to go to her house at the appointed time to hear about the way to heaven. From that time he became himself a traveller in that way, and God made him an eminently useful one. Griffith Ellis, for that was the young man's name, joined the company of eight in the little church, and so made them one too many to be called "The Noah's ark family" any longer. He proved a great blessing to his district, and travelled frequently and far to procure preachers to proclaim the everlasting gospel to his perishing neighbours. His lofty piety and holy conversation made him the terror of all the sinners in his neighbourhood, and even the clergyman of his parish, much as he loved cock-fighting, would never venture to meet him with a cock under his arm. It mattered nothing whom else he would come across; he would walk along bearing his game

bird without the least shame or fear, but if he caught a glimpse of Griffith Ellis coming to meet him, one of two things would surely happen,—either the reverend gentleman would turn round and walk hastily away, or the captive bird would be set at liberty. The times of which we write produced a great number of such men as Griffith Ellis, scattered over the whole surface of the Principality, and it is the weight of their character that completely crushed persecution. Their eminently pure, unselfish, and godly life caused a whisper in the consciences of the people, which made itself known as the voice of God, and which said, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.”

There are many and many instances in which the earnest and persevering efforts of a very few eventually resulted in the establishment of strong and flourishing churches. Let us give a few examples.

Tonyrefail is a lonely hamlet of the parish of Llantrissant, in Glamorganshire, and situated in a deep glen some five or six miles from the little town which gives the parish its name. On a mountain, which rises from the village towards the south, and which is known as Peterstone Mountain, there was an annual gathering, which in Wales went by the name of “Mabsant,” which, being interpreted, means “The son of a saint.” From the name we infer that in its origin it was a religious gathering, and that its object was to celebrate the anniversary of the patron saint of the parish church; but it had become the source of sin and immorality. It extended over several days, and great numbers came together from the surrounding districts to eat, drink, dance, and play; but they seldom separated without a considerable amount of fighting; and the great day of the feast was Sunday. An eminent clergyman, who was as remarkable for his preaching power as for his Methodism, had been presented to a living about eight miles to the south of this scene of riot. This was the Reverend David Jones of Llangan, of whom by and by we shall have much more to say. Mr. Jones conceived the idea of going to the Peterstone “Mabsant” to preach the gospel; and so effectual was his ministry that an end was put to the dancing and the games, and the annual festival became an annual sermon, which was continued for many years on the same day and the same spot. There lived at a comfortable little mansion known as “Collenau” (The Hazels), near Tonyrefail, a gentleman of the name of Mr. Evan Pritchard, whose love for rural pleasures had induced him to refuse a University education with a view to the ministry in the Church. On one occasion he and Mrs. Pritchard resolved to go to Peterstone to hear the renowned clergyman. They were both prejudiced against him on account of his Methodism; but that prejudice was not sufficient to restrain their curiosity to see and hear him. He preached from Rev. vi. 17: “For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” A thrill of fear passed through the lady’s soul at the announcement

of the text, and that feeling greatly increased during the sermon which followed; and Mr. Pritchard himself was likewise deeply affected. After the service they went on towards Cowbridge to visit Mrs. Pritchard's mother. They were gloomy enough as they rode along; but the lady found a crumb of comfort, which she sought to impart to her husband, in the hope that, after all, there was not such a verse in the Bible as the clergyman had taken for his text, and that it was only his Methodistical device to frighten people. Anyhow, she had been frightened enough, and attended a ball at Cowbridge, in the hope that it would be the means of dissipating her painful feelings. But it proved to be a miserable ball. The louder the merriment, the unhappier she became; and very unhappy she and her husband continued to be until a few weeks afterwards they heard another sermon, which, by the blessing of God, was the means of leading them to seek rest in the Lord Jesus. After this religious services were held at Collenau; and those being blessed to the conversion of several of the neighbours, a little church was formed in the house. After some time, in consequence of the severe illness of Mr. Pritchard—an illness from which he never recovered,—the services were removed to a house in the village, where, for a while, the cause wore a very prosperous aspect; but in the course of time the death of some, and the removal of others from the neighbourhood, reduced the church to eight members, all of whom were females. Under such discouraging circumstances, it would not have been strange if the little community had dissolved itself; but the sisters clung together, and held their weekly "Societies" among themselves, at which Mrs. Pritchard discharged the duties of an elder, while Jane Morris led the singing, and Mary James, who excelled in the gift of prayer, opened and closed the meetings. On the Sabbaths, and whenever besides it was practicable, some minister or exhorter was obtained to preach. By and by the church began again to grow, several men joined it, and among them one David Evans, an exceedingly gifted young man, who proved of great service to the cause, and who in process of time married one of the young sisters. Mr. and Mrs. Evans had a numerous family; and one of the youngest of their sons is now living, and has been for many years one of the most talented and popular among the ministers of the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion. The Reverend William Evans of Tonnyrefail is now verging on eighty years of age, but is still a mighty preacher. A few weeks ago, on the 7th of June 1871, we had the pleasure of hearing him preach in the open air to a very large congregation, within a few yards of the spot where Howell Harris first breathed the spiritual life. He had a complete mastery over his subject and his audience; his spirit seemed to burn with the love of Christ and of souls; while his silvery voice made the welkin ring. The faithfulness of the eight sisters bore abundant fruit, for

there has been for very many years, and is now, at Tonyrefail, for the neighbourhood, a numerous church.

We give a still more remarkable instance of great results arising from the faithfulness of a small number. The Rev. W. Davies of Neath had been invited to preach at a small chapel at a considerable distance from his home, where, on his arrival, he found three unmarried sisters, somewhat advanced in life, occupying together an adjoining house, and in very humble circumstances. In this house he was entertained, and humble enough was his fare. A few people came together to hear the sermon, and Mr. Davies preached with great pleasure to himself and to his audience. After the service he inquired of the sister who attended on him what was the number of the church. "There are only we three," was the reply. "We are trying between us to keep up the cause. One of us cleans and opens the chapel; another attends to the preachers' horses; while I have the honour of attending on the preachers themselves. We hold a Society in the chapel once a week, and leave the door open to any who may wish to join us." When Mr. Davies was about to leave, she tendered him sixpence for his services. At first he declined to receive it; but she pressed him, saying, that it had been dedicated from their small means unto the Lord, and that they were very sorry that their deep poverty made it impossible for them to devote more to the same purpose. After some years Mr. Davies visited the place again, and found the church increased to 180 members. Religion was with those people the one great business of life, to which every other consideration must be made subservient; and they made very light of every obstacle that was thrown in their way to the enjoyment of its privileges, or the discharge of its duties.

Robert Lloyd was a journeyman shoemaker living at Rhuthin, in Denbighshire, and was very popular in the town in consequence of the kindness of his disposition and the extent of his intelligence. He seems to have been the oracle of the place, and it was a very common occurrence, when a difference of opinion upon any subject arose between men who were much higher in station than himself, for the disputants to refer the matter to "Robert the Shoemaker." He could read English well, and was able to give the last news of the war that was then raging between England and France. This made him a general favourite, but there was one drawback, and that was that he was a Methodist. His master greatly valued him as a skilful and conscientious workman, but he was bitterly opposed to his religion. There was a small church then formed at a place some three or four miles from the town, and of this little community Robert was a member. They met weekly for spiritual conversation, and, in consequence of the great distances at which some of their number resided, it was found necessary to hold those meetings at mid-day, and on those days Robert's master usually

gave him some work of great urgency, on purpose to prevent him from going to the service. He was too religious either to disobey his master or to lose the opportunity to meet his brethren to worship God, and he would, therefore, on those occasions, rise at one or two o'clock in the morning, and never fail to finish his allotted task in time for the service. But his mother was as opposed to his religion as his master, and it sometimes happened, when he went home from his work, that he could find neither his coat nor his hat, both having been hid by the old lady, to prevent her son from going to the meeting of "The Roundheads." But Robert could not be hindered by his mother's device any more than by his master's. When the search for his hat and coat would prove fruitless, as it often did, the only difference it made was, that the young shoemaker would then appear among his brethren in his paper cap and shirt-sleeves. On one occasion, when on his way to Bontuchel to hear a sermon, he was met by one of his neighbours, a man of wealth and position, who remonstrated with him on the folly of attending such meetings, adding, that it was a pity that such a respectable and intelligent young man as he was should demean himself by mixing with such a poor lot as the Methodists, and urging him to withdraw from them altogether, and to live like a man among his neighbours. A discussion ensued, which resulted in the gentleman's going with Robert to hear the sermon, and a very effectual sermon to him it proved to be. He returned to his home in great distress, and on that night he could not help relating to a friend who slept with him some of the dreadful things the preacher had said. On the following night, when they were retiring together to rest, the friend said to him with great earnestness,—“Upon my soul, if you mention anything of that which you talked about last night, I'll pay your skin tomorrow. I was so desperately frightened by what you said after the preacher, that I could not sleep the whole of the night.” But the sermon had reached the hearts of both, and they soon became the companions of Robert Lloyd in his journeys to the services, and zealous members of the same community.

For many years there was in North Wales a great dearth of preachers. In the South, as we have seen, ten episcopally ordained clergymen had at an early period joined the Methodist movement, several of whom made frequent journeys into distant localities to preach the gospel, and there soon arose a large number of "Exhorters," many of whom were men of great preaching power. But in the North it was very different for a long time. It was chiefly through the evangelistic labours of preachers from the South that the churches in the northern province of the Principality had been formed; and, though the members of these churches regularly met together for mutual prayer and edification, it was to the South they had for a number of years to look for preachers, and many and long were the journeys made

by those zealous brethren and sisters for that purpose. They derived spiritual edification themselves from the converse of each other, but they ardently thirsted for the salvation of their neighbours, and they saw no labour too arduous to undertake, and no sacrifice too great to make, in order to secure the preaching of the gospel in their respective localities. They had unbounded faith in the power of the ministry, which they had found so efficient towards themselves. They were firmly persuaded, if they could only secure a visit from a preacher of the gospel, that the Spirit of God would accompany his ministry, and that some of their neighbours would be saved; and it was very rarely that they were disappointed. When the cry, "Come over and help us!" went from them towards the South, there went forth another cry to Heaven from the depths of their heart. It was, "Come, O breath, from the four winds!" When the preacher came, he went forth like Ezekiel in the Spirit of the Lord, and the hand of the Lord was upon him, and therefore it is not strange that there should have been a noise and a shaking, and that many who had been so far dead in trespasses and sins were made partakers of the life of God.

At Caergwrle, in Flintshire, there lived a good man named Thomas Edwards, but who was known among his neighbours as Thomas the Turner. Being a bachelor, and an industrious man, it seems that he had been able to save some money, and this he laid out in the building of a small chapel. The only assistance he had towards the erection was the sum of five shillings from one Ithell Hill. He made several journeys to Llangeitho, a distance of more than a hundred miles, to procure preachers for his little sanctuary. When they had come, it was very rarely that he had the pleasure of listening to their ministry, for the rabble would gather around the door and make a great disturbance, and it was as much as he could do to prevent them from rushing in to abuse the preacher. He was able to manage the outside mob pretty tolerably, for he was a man of great physical power,—and this satisfied him, while he hoped that the preacher, by the blessing of God, would be able to do something greater and better inside. But he had a way to compensate himself for these deprivations. The preacher was on a tour, and only took Caergwrle in his way, preaching two or three times a day as he went along. Thomas would follow him from place to place as long as his money held out, and when that was exhausted he would return home and work away at his trade, while waiting for the blissful time when another preacher would pass.

But all were not like Thomas the Turner. When he had five-and-twenty shillings in his pocket it was all his own, and he felt in his conscience, when his wealth had so increased, that it was full time for him to start south to look for a preacher, and if he found it all gone by the time he returned, he had only to go to his lathe for more. Those who were not so favourably

circumstanced usually made a subscription to enable one of their number to go to Llangeitho against the great monthly gathering, where there would be an abundance of preachers and exhorters, in order to invite some of them to take a tour through portions of the north. This was the custom at Berthen-gron in Flintshire. The subscription usually amounted to about twenty shillings, and Catherine Owen, the wife of John Owen, who was himself a humble exhorter, was generally the chosen messenger of the Church. With that small sum in her pocket this woman would start on her pilgrimage of upwards of a hundred miles of rough roads and bleak mountains. She made that journey seven times, and on several occasions returned jubilant, having not only heard Rowlands, and enjoyed the delightful feasts of Llangeitho, but having likewise secured promises of visits to the north from as many as fifteen preachers.

Such were the men and women of those days: such their zeal for the cause of Christ, their self-sacrifice and entire consecration to His interests. The result was only such as might have been expected. The Word of the Lord grew and multiplied, and in almost every district throughout Wales great multitudes were converted to the faith.