

Life and Times  
of  
Griffith Jones  
sometime Rector of  
Llanddowror

by

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*"I have looked on the institution of Charity  
Schools, which of late years has so  
universally prevailed through the whole  
nation, as the glory of the age we live in."*—  
ADDISON.

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*“And herein is that saying true, ‘One soweth and another reapeth.’ I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.”*

ST. JOHN iv. 37, 38.

## PREFACE

THE object of this volume has been explained elsewhere, and little remains to be said here. The author, however, would like to repeat his conviction that the study of the religious history of Wales in the eighteenth century is calculated to serve important purposes. It offers subjects for deep reflection to all, both Nonconformists and Churchmen alike. To ponder over its lessons in humble earnestness might, under God's blessing, lead to an active desire for Christian reunion on the part of those who are now in a state of separation, and, we fear, sometimes of antagonism. The religious condition of Wales can hardly commend itself to those who are imbued with the spirit of the Intercessory Prayer of Christ; and there is some ground for apprehension lest Welsh Christianity should fail to maintain its efficiency, while it is thus "*a house divided against itself.*" There may be, and doubtless, there sometimes has been, a kind of union worse than division; but few will deny that there is a union which, beyond all dispute or comparison, is preferable to disunion. Towards the attainment of that, it is the duty and privilege of every Christian teacher and worker to contribute his share, however humble. It is the ideal state of the Church militant; it will be the actual state of the Church triumphant.

Among the first steps necessary to bring nearer the broken fragments of our Christianity, must be placed a true estimate of the loss of power and efficiency incurred by our present anomalous and wasteful condition; a due appreciation of both the ideal and the practical value of unity; the spirit of discernment wherewith to determine the relative importance of things that differ, and to guard with jealousy that which is essential; a disposition to emphasise points of agreement rather than of difference; an earnest endeavour to approach the question in the spirit of the Apostolic counsel: "*Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves;*" a full recognition of the bond and basis of union that already exist, and a godly yearning for the restoration of a closer Christian fellowship and communion among all that "*love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*"

It must, however, be admitted that we are not as yet "within measurable distance" of Christian reunion, though both time and circumstances seem ripe for a full and frank discussion of the subject. If brought about under

healthy conditions, and by the constraint of the higher impulses of religion, it cannot be doubted that it would be followed by incalculable blessings. Looking at it, as we necessarily do here, from the point of view of the reunion of Churchmen and Nonconformists, we feel convinced that each side would greatly profit by it, as each would contribute its own special strength to the resultant Church. The freshness and the vigour, the initiative and the elasticity, the sense of the privileges and the responsibilities of the lay members, which the Nonconformists would bring with them, would be an unquestionable gain to the Church of England; while the respect for order and authority, the conservative instinct inherent in so ancient a body as that Church, and the spirit of wise toleration and comprehensiveness which a long experience has taught her, would, if we mistake not, be joyfully welcomed by a large number of thoughtful Nonconformists. Each would, in some degree, *supply* the deficiencies of the other; and the fusion of the two elements, under favourable conditions, could not fail to strengthen our common Christianity, and to equip it for the more effective discharge of the tremendous responsibilities with which it stands face to face at the present moment.

We believe that a better acquaintance with the men and the movements discussed in this volume may tend, in some measure, to soften the asperities of religious life and controversy in Wales, and to work in the direction of reunion. It will concentrate attention on “the parting of the ways;” and it may be well for us all to recollect why and how they became divided. It will show, if we mistake not, that there were no sharp contentions, leading to abrupt separations from the Church, or disclosing irreconcilable divergences from her doctrines. The extract about to be given was an accurate statement in the time of Griffith Jones; and it applies with even greater force to the Methodist secession, which occurred seventy years later. And if the Church can show that the original causes of Dissent have very largely disappeared, it is, theoretically, a distinct gain to the cause of reconciliation and reunion; though it is readily admitted that the question is by no means so easily solved as thus suggested, inasmuch as other obstacles have arisen during the interval that has since elapsed. Referring to the Dissenters of his own day, Griffith Jones wrote that “it was not any scruple of conscience about the principles or orders of the Established Church that gave occasion to scare one in ten of the Dissenters in this country to separate from us at first, whatever objections they may afterwards imbibe against conformity. No, Sir, they generally dissent for

no other reason than for want of plain, practical, pressing, and zealous preaching, in a language and dialect they are able to understand; and freedom of friendly access to advise about their spiritual state. When they come (some way or other) to be pricked in their hearts for their sins, and find, perhaps, no seriousness in those about them, none to unbosom their grief to, none that will patiently hear their complaints, and deal tenderly by their souls, and dress their wounds, they flee to other people for relief; as dispossessed demoniacs will no longer frequent the tombs of the dead. For though the Church of England is allowed to be as sound and healthful a part of the Catholic Church as any in the world, yet when people are awakened from their lethargy, and begin to perceive their danger, they will not believe that there is anything in reason, law, or gospel that should oblige them to starve their souls to death for the sake of conforming, if their pastor (whose voice perhaps they do not know, or who resides a great way from them) will not vouchsafe to deal out unto them the bread of life.”<sup>1</sup> The earnest and devoted men, whose labours contributed towards the formation of Welsh Methodism, and imparted a new life to the older Dissenting communions, were firmly attached to the Church of England, and regarded her to the last with tender affection. And if the course of the evangelical revival brought to light serious defects in the administration of the Church, for which she has not yet paid the full penalty, it also provoked suspicion, distrust, and even active hostility on the part of some of the Dissenters of that time. And even among the revivalists themselves, a spirit of dissension broke out comparatively early in the history of the movement, and continued to mar its progress for many years. Neither side, in truth, had a monopoly of Christian virtues. Both the Church and Nonconformity received an accession of spiritual power through the revival, and both, alas! impaired its efficacy through the perversity and pertinacity of human infirmities.

We have, almost unconsciously, fallen into a reverie on Christian reunion. But reunion in the present temper of Christian bodies in Wales is hardly possible; neither is it perhaps advisable, as it would apparently bring but little gain, and might even bring loss. Reunion will doubtless come in God’s good time; but it is not unlikely that our share in its accomplishment will be limited to the tedious and toilsome though essential task of preparing the way for it—of rectifying past errors, of

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<sup>1</sup> *Welsh Piety*, 1740-41, p. 12.

atonement for past blunders, and of exorcising the prevailing spirit of religious strife and sectarianism. Meanwhile, there are great duties lying hard at our doors. The pressing necessity of meeting the growing indifference and irreligion of our land requires no illustration or enforcement here; it is recognized and lamented on all hands. And the fact being so, the Church need not wait for the arrival of reunion, before applying herself to a task for which her position and her privileges render her primarily responsible. Among her first and greatest needs is the enlistment of the active and intelligent sympathy of the great body of her own lay members, and a well-defined sphere in which that sympathy can be exercised effectively on her behalf. She has the experience of a long past, with both its failures and its successes, to guide her; and we cannot help thinking that she may profitably learn a lesson from the State, at least in the matter of bringing her organisations into better accord with the rights of her lay members, and the altered conditions of the times. The State has done this with incalculable benefits. That what was suitable in the sixteenth century is out of date in the twentieth, is no less true than trite. The extension of political rights in this country has been concurrent with the development of loyalty and respect for law. The sense of responsibility has increased with the acquisition of power. Our monarchy exists to-day in more than all its ancient prestige and authority, and has suffered no diminution of its value as a force in the government of the country through the admission of the masses to a share in its dignity and responsibility. It has fearlessly taken the people into its confidence, and has been nobly rewarded for the trust. Distribution of power has resulted in the consolidation of empire. The freedom of the subject guards the stability of the throne. The analogy between the State and the Church in this matter is both fair and forcible; and the latter might, with unquestionable advantages, follow the example set before it by the former. It cannot be said that, at present, the laity of the Church are in full possession of their rights, as members of the Body of Christ. To admit them without delay would probably result in a great and immediate accession of strength and influence to the Church, and would indubitably bring into activity new forces which, in due time, would add immeasurably to her popularity and efficiency.

The writer of the following pages has neither authority nor desire to write an eirenicon; but he has endeavoured throughout to maintain an eireniconic tone and temper. The period under review is not one that a Welsh

Churchman can look back upon with complacency, or would specially select in illustration of the services which the Welsh Church has rendered to the Welsh people. And, moreover, when an attempt is made to bring home the charge of inefficiency against the Church, her critics seldom fail to choose the eighteenth century as furnishing the most flagrant instances of neglect and incompetency. It is readily admitted that there are facts not a few in the history of that period, which Churchmen find it impossible either to defend or to excuse. But there are other facts of substantial importance, which group themselves around the names of Griffith Jones and his fellow-workers, and which, when they are set forth in their proper place and proportion, modify very materially the portrait usually drawn of the Welsh Church in the eighteenth century.

That the task attempted in this little work is imperfectly done, no one is more ready to acknowledge than the writer; but if it helps to promote the sacred interests of truth, it will so far serve the purpose for which it was written. If it enables the reader to form a fuller and more just estimate of the good and gifted man whose life and labours it attempts to set forth; or if it succeeds in showing that the Welsh Church, even in the eighteenth century, was not altogether so unworthy of her mission as she has been generally represented, but that, even in that era of apathy and neglect, she conferred great benefits upon the Welsh people, and that there were many among her clergy who grappled manfully with their duties, under manifold and trying difficulties; or if it helps to impress upon the present generation of Welshmen the fact that the religious awakening of that age came, not as some unexpected, unasked-for supernatural manifestation, but in response to the prayers and preparations of faithful men, and that spiritual forces are still the most powerful and essential to purify and elevate the life of a people; or if it recalls to reflecting minds another fact of no less significance, namely, that the moral and intellectual progress which has marked the history of Wales during the last hundred and fifty years, received its original impulse from a movement, of which the principal aim as well as the immediate result, was the religious education of the people; or if it serves to remind the Church and the country of their great indebtedness to the evangelical revival, which saved our Christianity from drifting into Arianism, or rationalism, and which, if it did not actually avert,<sup>2</sup> certainly rendered

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century*, by Canon Overton; Longman, Green, & Co., 1886, p. 140.

impossible in this country, such a revolution as that which, at the close of the eighteenth century, devastated France, and destroyed much that was precious, along with what was worthless and noxious; or if it tends to bring home to the Christian conscience in Wales the great hindrance to the success of the Gospel occasioned by our divisions and dissensions, and the imperative need of closing our ranks, in order to meet the indifference and the unbelief which appear as not unlikely to issue from the present divided state of our Christianity; or if it serves, be it ever so little, to "*turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers;*" if, in short, it contributes its share towards any of these ends, the writer's purpose will not be unattained.

The author has spared no effort to obtain information at every possible source, and begs to record his sincerest gratitude for the ready help he has received. Among those who are no longer in the land of the living to whom he is indebted, he would gratefully mention the late Bishop of St. David's, Dr. Basil Jones; the late Archdeacon Griffith; the late Rev. J. B. Herbert, and the late Mr. Joseph Joseph, of Brecon. He also gladly acknowledges his obligations to the authorities of the British Museum, for their most courteous assistance in searching out Welsh Books in that vast repository of literature; to the Rev. E. McClure, the editorial secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, for his kind permission to search the Minutes and Abstracts of Letters belonging to that Society; to Sir John Williams, Bart.; to the Rev. Thomas Jones, the present rector of Llanddowror; to Mr. C. Morgan-Richardson; and lastly, to his friend and colleague, the Rev. E. D. Lloyd, for help in drawing up the Index, while the book was passing through the press. In transcribing extracts, the writer has not deemed it necessary to retain the archaic orthography of some of the originals; and he has endeavoured, in almost every case, to give exact and full reference to his authorities.

PENMAENMAWR VICARAGE,

May, 1902.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

**T**HE religious history of Wales in the eighteenth century has not yet been written. It deserves, especially from Churchmen, far more serious attention than it has hitherto received. It offers an inviting and an instructive field of study, not only to the historian, but to the ecclesiastical statesman, and to the educational and religious reformer. It is true that that field has already been ably explored from sundry points of view; but a painstaking and exhaustive research into all the facts, and a due estimate and co-ordination of the various forces which were at work during that period, have yet to be undertaken, before the student can obtain a fair and full view of their conflict or co-operation, in the production of those results, which began to assume their ultimate form about the close of the century. The spiritual, moral and educational condition of the Welsh people at the commencement of the century; the first movement that was made towards the revival of religion, and the removal of the general ignorance which prevailed; the great services which the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge rendered to the cause of education, and the dissemination of religious literature in Wales; the genesis and progress of the evangelical revival; the attitude towards it of the Bishops and Clergy, as well as of Churchmen and Dissenters generally; the forces that operated during its progress towards its partial alienation from the Church within which it began, until the final separation of the main body of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in the early years of the last century; the literary movements of the second half of the eighteenth century; the financial poverty of the Church, clerical absenteeism and pluralism, the bilingual problem, the occupation of Welsh Sees and other high positions, as well as many of the most important parochial benefices, by Englishmen, in their bearing upon the life of the Welsh Church during the period under review; these are some of the questions which demand a careful investigation and an impartial treatment, before a just and comprehensive view can be obtained of the development of the religious condition of Wales in the eighteenth century.

An attempt is made in the following chapters to ascertain the position

which Griffith Jones occupied, and the part which he played in relation to these questions. We are fully aware that the attempt can at best be only a partial success, for he has now been in his grave for well nigh a century and a half. Apart from the information which can be gleaned out of his own writings, all that can be authentically known of him at this distance of time, as far as we are aware, is almost entirely derived from a Sketch of his life and character, consisting of twenty-four pages, and published in 1762, the year after his death. The other early memoirs of his which we have seen are little more than reproductions of this. It would be unprofitable to enquire here, at any length, into the question why a biography of so remarkable a man was not published before the facts of his life had faded from the minds and memories of his countrymen. There may have been several reasons for this, and among them the fact that, after his death, those who were in full sympathy with his principles rapidly declined in number and influence within the Church, while the leaders of the evangelical revival, who largely entered into his labours, came to be looked upon by those in authority with increasing suspicion and disfavour.

Be that as it may, the loss entailed by such an omission or neglect is great and irreparable. We should like to know all about one who played so conspicuous a part in the history of his Church and country. We are, however, fortunate in the fact that most of his somewhat voluminous writings, though scarce, are still accessible. Some of these, and especially his letters, of which there are nearly two hundred extant, either in print or in manuscript, and his *Welsh Piety*, or the Annual Reports of his Schools for twenty-four years, besides affording us occasional glimpses into his personal and private history, contain varied and valuable information on matters of the highest moment, connected with the educational and religious condition of his countrymen in his time, and with his own efforts to improve that condition. No other contemporary witness is so competent. No one studied so anxiously the needs of the people, or laboured so extensively to benefit them. He lived through sixty years of the century, and worked as a Clergyman for fifty-three years, under nine successive Bishops of St. David's; he was a trusted correspondent of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for forty-eight years, when he was its principal agent in the noble work it did for Wales; he saw the first twenty-five years of the evangelical revival, and was on more or less intimate terms with its principal leaders; his preaching excursions and his Circulating Schools brought him in contact with a large number of churchmen, both