

Welsh Publishing and Bookselling.¹

WALES is indebted to Englishmen for its earliest printed books. The pioneers of the Welsh press were London men: Edward Whitchurch who, in 1546, published the first Welsh book; John Waley, publisher of William Salesbury's *Welsh-English Dictionary*; Robert Crowley, Richard Nattyl, Henry Denham, who issued the first Welsh Testament and Prayer Book, and Christopher Barker, from whose press in 1588 was published the first Welsh Bible. Indeed, up to the commencement of the present century, when Welsh publishers at home began seriously to think of catering for their countrymen's needs, the Principality was indebted to the Metropolis for much of its literature.

The first Welshman who seems to have grasped the importance and value of the press was William Salesbury, and it was he that really laid the foundation of printed literature in the vernacular.

Many years before the printing press was established in Wales, provincial towns, chiefly Oxford and Shrewsbury, supplied the Welsh book market. The former, owing to the foundation of Jesus College, had now become a centre of Welsh learning and influence, and the latter, in the days of pack-horses, enjoyed a geographical position of great advantage, being within comparatively easy reach of London on the one hand, and of Wales on the other. Later on, Chester and Bristol bulk large in the history of Welsh printing. But it was the series of Welsh printers who set up at Shrewsbury that chiefly ministered to the wants of Welshmen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the names of Thomas Jones, Thomas Durston, John Roderick, and others less known, should ever be held in grateful remembrance in Wales.

¹ Read before the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Library Association at Cardiff, September, 1895.

The first press in Wales of which we have any knowledge, was set up at Montgomery about 1648. It was one of the printing presses that followed the army, recording its doings and movements in a broad sheet, generally called a "Mercurie." That published at Montgomery was called, *News from Pembroke and Montgomery*. Those "Mercuries" were the first rude beginnings of English journalism.

It may be noticed in passing that a few Welsh books were printed on the Continent, as, for instance, Dr. Griffith Roberts' famous *Grammadog* at Milan in 1567, and Dr. Rosier Smyth's translation of Cansiu's *Catechism* at Paris in 1611. Other works by Welsh authors were printed at Cologne, Amsterdam, Heidelberg, and Frankfort.

It is a moot point where in Wales the first Welsh press was set up. Some give priority to Wrexham, others to Carmarthen, while a third party, led by Chancellor Silvan Evans, who has thoroughly investigated the matter, maintain it was at Adpar, a suburb of Newcastle Emlyn, on the Cardiganshire side of the Teify. The claims of Adpar, or, as it is called in Welsh, Trefhedyn, would seem to be unassailable. It is beyond question that a Welsh book, *Eglurhad o Gatechism byrraf y Gymmanfa* (Exposition of the Shorter Catechism) was printed at "Trefhedyn" in 1719, bearing the imprimatur of one Isaac Carter. That, so far as our present knowledge goes, was the first-born of the native press.

Carter eventually removed to Carmarthen, where he set up in business in connection with one Nicholas Thomas, a native of the neighbourhood of Adpar, and possibly a relative of John Roderick, the famous Shrewsbury printer, also born within a short distance of Newcastle Emlyn, at Cwmdau. Carmarthen, then the capital of South Wales, now became the chief centre of the Welsh book trade, and ever since has held its own as a printing and publishing town.

It has been remarked that a great scarcity of Welsh books was felt for the first two hundred and fifty years. That is easily accounted for. Education was at a very low ebb, readers consequently were few, and books beyond the reach of the masses. It was, indeed, a dark age. In Wales the work of the Reformation proceeded but slowly, and thus the people were deprived of a great educational stimulus, whatever may be said of the spiritual advantages of the movement. For some hundred and fifty years from the date of the first Welsh book, Wales had no

native press; Welsh books were often printed in places inaccessible to the population, and means of transit were slow and expensive. Welsh compositors were seldom met with, and printing was done by English hands. This accounts for the slipshod and slovenly way in which our earlier books were produced. Above all, there was a deplorable lack of patriotism among the people. It was the period when, owing to the influence of the House of Tudor, the gentry of Wales became Anglicised in speech and feeling. The Welsh language was ignored in Church and State; not one in fifteen of the clergy were able to officiate in the vernacular. Bearing this state of things in mind, one does not wonder that no more than one hundred and seventy-three books were issued between 1588—when the Welsh Bible was first printed—and the end of the seventeenth century. Matters, however, greatly improved during the next century, for the number of books published amounted to 1,224.

The earlier Welsh printers were men of little or no training. It is not until John Ross (1743) set up at Carmarthen, that we find a properly trained man. Ross was a Scotchman, and served his apprenticeship in a London firm, where afterwards he became foreman. Then he turned his face westwards, eventually settling down at Carmarthen. In order to further qualify himself for the business of a Welsh printer it is stated that, like Dr. Thirlwall at a later date, he mastered the language. Ross was a characteristic Scotchman, and in his title pages always published the fact that he was "the only printer in those parts properly brought up to the trade."

However badly Welsh printers fared during the earlier years of the trade, Welsh authors must have had little better experience. The author has seldom done well in Wales. The late Kilsby Jones, a man who thoroughly knew Wales and its people, once shrewdly remarked to a friend: "If you want to realise what true repentance is, publish a Welsh book." His books must have frequently proved thorns in the flesh to Williams of Pantycelyn, one of the founders of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism in the last century. In his preface to the first edition of *Theomemphus*, the Welsh national hymnist lets the secret out and writes as follows: "Inasmuch as many books, involving great expense, have remained on the author's hands, he has decided not to print more copies of this work than can be easily sold." But Williams' disappointment was not to be compared to that

of Dafydd Ionawr, a noted Welsh bard. His *chef d'œuvre* is *Cywydd y Drindod*, a long ode on the Trinity, of which 300 copies were printed, not a tenth of which were sold. One day, in a fit of excusable anger, the poor bard cast his learned lumber in a heap and made a bonfire of the lot. The fates were not more propitious in the case of Lewis Morris, of Anglesey, an ancestor of Sir Lewis Morris, of Penhryn, and the pioneer of the Welsh periodical press. At a great cost, apparently with no other than patriotic motives, he set up a printing press in his neighbourhood with a view of publishing periodically the works of mediæval Welsh bards. His appeal to the sympathy and national pride of his countrymen is one of the most eloquent bits of prose in the Welsh tongue. But alas ! it was in vain, for only one number of his *Tlysau y Hen Aesodd* saw the light. Generally speaking, the history of Welsh printing and publishing is the history of failures and losses.

Wales may boast of having had at least one private press, from which were issued several excellent works. It was that of Mr. Thomas Johns, at his seat at Hafod, in North Cardiganshire. Mr. Johns was a gentleman of refinement and leisure, and set up his press solely as a means of diversion. Among the works he published were Froissart's *Chronicles*, in twelve volumes, bearing the date 1797.

Printer and publisher have been somewhat busy in Wales during the present century. Welshmen have long been a reading people, so much so that more books and periodicals are now published in the Principality than probably in any other country of equal size and population in Europe. In proof of this the reader may refer to the catalogues of some leading Welsh firms, such as those of Hughes and Son, Wrexham ; Gee and Son, Denbigh ; Humphreys, Carnarvon ; Foulkes, Liverpool ; Spurrell and Son, Carmarthen ; Evans, Holywell ; and the Welsh National Press, Carnarvon. There are others who do a large amount of printing, mostly denominational, but these are the chief. With a few exceptions, nearly all the leading houses are in North Wales, whence also proceed most of the Welsh weeklies and periodicals.

Welsh works seldom command an extensive sale. The range of what may be called modern Welsh national literature is very limited. North Wales cares little, and knows less, about books published in South Wales. It would be interesting to learn how many copies of *Canwyll y Cymoy*, *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, *Gwinllan*

y Bardd, or *Telyn Dlwïe* works by writers resident in South Wales, have ever been met with north of Plynlimmon and the Dovey. On the other hand, South Walians are somewhat partial to books published in North Wales.

Denominationalism enters largely into printing and publishing in Wales. The average Calvinistic Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist, Wesleyan, or even the broad-minded Unitarian, will seldom travel beyond the limits of his denomination for the contents of his library. However, recently Mr. Owen M. Edwards, of Oxford, by his excellent periodicals and books, and Eifronydd, by his national quarterly magazine, *Y Geumên*, have done a little to pull down Welsh denominational partition walls.

Denominational periodicals and books are nearly always issued by denominational firms, and sold by means of denominational agencies, generally officials connected with Sunday Schools and Chapels. Periodicals seldom go beyond the limits of their own denomination, with the exception of a very few, one being *Trysorfa y Plant*, a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist monthly, the circulation of which is said to be 30,000.

Popular poetical works, such as those of Aircog, Isluyn, Mynyddog, Watcyer, Wyn, Dyfed, or prose works such as Daniel Owen, author of *Rhys Lewis*, writes, or a new edition of some Welsh classic, on which there is no sectarian brand, are given a welcome by the more intelligent in every denomination. They are met with on nearly all Welsh bookstalls, and may be picked up now and again on the "standing" of some travelling vendor at fairs and markets.

There is one method of disposing of books which probably is indigenous and peculiar to Wales. Not infrequently an author, generally a dissenting preacher, acts also as his own bookseller. Having published his book—maybe a memoir of some departed worthy or an eisteddfod prize composition—the author arranges for a lengthened preaching and lecturing tour, during which he visits a great many chapels, at each of which, after a sermon or lecture, he introduces his "little book." The work sells generally at sixpence or a shilling—the two Welsh national prices. If the vendor happens to be a popular man, like the late Rev. Benjamin Thomas (Myfyr Emlyn), or the Rev. Rhys Gwesyn Jones, he drives a roaring trade, and pushes his book through several editions. The sale of *Dafydd Ifaus*, *Ffynonheuoy*, and *Caru Bodi a Byw*—a lecture published in book form—brought a small fortune to their respective authors. This method of sell-

ing books, which is of long standing and once much resorted to, has fallen off somewhat of late years ; although cases are by no means rare of books being sold in this fashion after Sunday services. This, in years gone by, was the chief method employed in Wales.

In the matter of copyright, it is the exception for Welsh authors to dispose of it. The printer generally repudiates all responsibility, preferring—to running any risk—to leave the author in sole possession of the right of publishing.

Subscription lists are still in occasional use, and it is worth while comparing some recent lists with some of the last century. In the latter the squire, the parson, the professional man, with an occasional yeoman, represent the subscribers ; while in the former it is the tradesman, the Dissenting preacher, the farmer, the schoolmaster, and the artisan that flourish—a proof that Welsh literature no longer influences the “upper classes” of society in Wales.

In the matter of publishing, the great drawback hitherto has been the want of system. It is estimated that during the present century no less than one thousand poetical works alone—not to mention prose writings—have been published in Welsh. The greater number, probably, were issued by small local firms and circulated in the immediate neighbourhood of the author. In a few years they disappeared, with no great loss perhaps to Welsh literature. Still, as expressions of local thought, and sometimes of local peculiarities of speech, they had their value, and would add interest to the collection of the Welsh bibliophile. But where to find most of them is beyond mortal ken.

In Wales there is no central emporium where books and periodicals published in the vernacular can be procured. Every Welsh publisher plays for his own hand, and no more. No general Welsh catalogue is ever published, and scores of Welsh books never find their way to the British Museum. Thus it is impossible to say what books are printed, or know where to seek for information. This selfish and short-sighted policy on the part of Welsh publishers recoils to their own disadvantage and does injustice to the author, for it limits the circulation and sets an unnecessary tariff on the sale, with the result that Welsh readers, failing to get what they want in Welsh, are often driven to the English market, where they buy things “cheap and nasty.” Thus the “penny dreadful” and the “shilling shocker” supply the place of interesting and healthy native literature.

Compared with this state of things, the old plan of publishing in London or Shrewsbury had its advantages; at least it enabled people to know where to look for a Welsh book.

But the question is, how to remedy this want of system. For obvious reasons any proposed remedy would be difficult of accomplishment, but with a little effort and co-operation not hopeless. Much depends upon tact being used in taking the initiative, and, of course, upon the printers themselves. What we require is a central agency at which all books and periodicals published in Wales can be obtained at lowest cost. The agency should, at stated intervals, provide the public with a catalogue, which ought to be a complete and authorised register of all publications which pass through the Welsh printers' hands, from the ballad or penny almanac up to the voluminous encyclopædia. Such a list would be invaluable to the Welsh reader, the student and the collector. Moreover, it would afford a guarantee that all new books, wherever and by whomsoever published, would be given due publicity. Such a scheme, one ventures to think, would effect a great saving of expense and trouble, and would benefit both author and publisher, and perhaps might lead eventually to the fulfilment of the late William Rowland's dream in his *Llyfryddiaeth*—the establishment of a Welsh national library and museum.

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