

WORDS FROM WALES

SOME years ago, during a classical congress which we attended, my wife in conversation with a fellow member, an intelligent woman, well connected, well read and widely travelled, happened to say that I had devoted some of my leisure to translating specimens of Welsh literature, and the reply was: "Is there any Welsh literature to translate?"

The story was told by Sir Idris Bell in the broadcast talk he gave to introduce a series on 'The Literary Tradition of Wales' (reprinted in *The Welsh Review*, Winter, 1947), and the question is, as he says, typical and significant. Welsh is spoken today by close on a million people; its literature has more than a thousand years of unbroken tradition, and can claim poets such as Dafydd ap Gwilym and Tudur Aled who need fear no comparison with any European contemporaries; and the modern revival of Welsh writing has, in such men as T. Gwynn Jones, R. Williams Parry and Saunders Lewis, falsified any idea that Welsh is antique—and useless. Yet these facts are constantly received with incredulity. A summary account of books and periodicals that have appeared in the last few months may, then, help to complete the picture of Wales this number of BLACKFRIARS is designed to give.

The silver jubilee in 1947 of *Urdd Gobaith Cymru* (The Welsh League of Youth, which has today over eighty thousand members) was an important event in Welsh life and was fittingly celebrated by the publication of *Y Llynyn Arian* (Urdd Office, Aberystwyth, 15s.), an anthology of original work by Welsh writers, painters and musicians, which is evident proof of the vitality of Welsh culture. It is perhaps only in Wales that one could find so catholic a *Festschrift*, including as it does, on terms of perfect equality, essays by scholars such as Sir Ifor Williams and Professor Parry-Williams, poems by the classical Dr Gwynn Jones and the modernist Davies Aberpennar and paintings by Cedric Morris and Ceri Richards. And the superb production of the book reveals the influence of—and includes many decorations and engravings originally used by—the Gregynog Press, which before the last war did so much to improve the appearance of books in Wales.

At present there are about half-a-dozen Welsh publishers, and the variety of their lists is a faithful enough reflection of the pre-occupations of writers in Welsh. The professional writer scarcely exists in Wales. The maximum circulation of any Welsh book can only be a few thousand, and five shillings is still regarded as a high price to pay. Apart from the scholarly editions of the Welsh University Press, which has issued texts of most of the classical authors, Welsh

publishing is largely a matter of collected essays, plays and short stories, religious books and, above all, poetry. But in the last few years a really popular novelist, T. Rowland Hughes, has appeared. And there have been several successful series inspired by the English *Penguin* and *Pelican* menagerie. Among these, *Llyfrau Pawb* ('Everybody's Books') issued at one-and-six a volume by the historic house of Gee in Denbigh, and *Cyfras Pobun* ('Everyman's Series') published by Hugh Evans, have supplied a real need: a platform for the discussion of problems larger than the denominational topics dealt with by the numerous religious periodicals, as well as the creation of a public for 'popular' Welsh writing. For instance, *Dirgelwch yr Atom*, by O. E. Roberts, recently published in the former series, is a readable account of atomic theory, and it has proved the capacity of the current language to satisfy the most technical demands. In this connection, such publications as the occasional *Efrydiau Athronyddol*, and the newer *Efrydiau Uatholig* (under the editorship of Saunders Lewis), have performed a most useful function. The discussion of philosophical and religious questions is certainly nothing new in Welsh life. But original and important work is naturally to be sought in other languages. It has to be discussed, and its trends must be made available, in Welsh if the claims of the language to be an adequate cultural vehicle are valid. The last few years have seen a great advance in this extension of Welsh and in the greater precision of its use in scientific and philosophical discussions. One could instance the work of Hywel Lewis, the newly appointed Professor of Philosophy at Bangor. And above all, Mr. Saunders Lewis in his weekly articles over the last ten years in *Y Faner* (the principal Welsh newspaper), has given to the large range of subjects with which he deals—political, economic and cultural—an exact and sustained literary distinction which is proof enough that Welsh is an instrument fitted to meet any demand.

And yet the future of the language is a matter for great anxiety. No amount of official support (and the policy of the Ministry of Education is sympathetic, though local authorities are often slow to implement it), no literary revival or youth movement can, unaided, hope to stem the stream of English influences—from wireless, newspapers, films and the universal English immigration. The severe demands of the War Office on Welsh land are, too, a most serious threat to a traditional way of life in hitherto untouched areas. Again, the disintegration of Welsh nonconformity is creating its own social problems, and the decline in the Welsh language is their inevitable symbol.

The truth is that Wales, as the Editor of *Y Faner* has said in an address printed in *Yr Efengyl a'n Hoes* ('The Gospel and our

Times', Gee), 'has two conflicting cultures. The native and Welsh culture is one, and this is much more concerned with intellectual and spiritual values than the other—the English culture, which is more material and practical. Sport and so on has a bigger place in districts where the English culture is predominant: where Welsh is strongest there you will find the greatest interest in the Eisteddfod, adult education, and religious institutions.' Yet a lament that this should be so solves no problems, and Welsh is certainly doomed if it cannot provide a spontaneous expression for the popular, as well as for the more serious, elements in the national life.

In the meantime there are the English-speaking majority who rightly regard themselves as Welsh, and the last few years have seen a remarkable extension of their literary claims. The term 'Anglo-Welsh' is a deceptive one. The inspiration of this vigorous school of writers—Dylan Thomas, Keidrych Rhys, Alun Lewis and many more—is, artistically, English. It must be so, despite the heavily-laden Welsh atmosphere of their writings. George Ewart Evans's recent *Voices of the Children* (Penmark Press, 8s. 6d.), for example, is an excellent piece of Welsh documentation. The elaborate life of the mining valleys is explored with an almost painful accuracy, but the setting might have been the Potteries or Clydeside so far as its literary significance is in question. The same might be said of the vastly different world of Nigel Heseltine's brilliant *Tales of the Squirearchy* (The Druid Press, 6s. 0d.). There can be no transfusion of a highly developed and autonomous literary tradition such as that of Wales into the wholly different bloodstream of English. But there is a large English-speaking element in Welsh life, whose cultural values are widely different from those of the traditional *Cymry* who are now the minority. The important work of interpretation has been undertaken by *Wales* (The Druid Press; edited by Keidrych Rhys) and *The Welsh Review* (Penmark Press; edited by Gwyn Jones). These vigorous quarterlies are serving Wales through an English medium. They can do little to arrest the fragmentation of an indigenous Welsh culture, but they can do—and are doing—a great deal to interpret that culture to English-speaking Welshmen. And they provide a valuable corrective both to stiff-necked Welsh purism as well as to an English impatience of minorities.

John Cowper Powys, who has lived in Wales for the last twelve years, in his recent collection of essays, *Obstinate Cymric* (The Druid Press, 7s. 6d.) has much to say that is relevant here. What strikes him most in rural Welsh life is 'the obliteration of the last four centuries'. Again, 'class-distinction doesn't exist in Wales', and Welsh culture is probably the most truly democratic that may be

found anywhere today. It is a long cry from this world to that of Cardiff or of Colwyn Bay. But the ultimate opposition to Welsh life and its values comes not so much from without as from within: 'the majority of the Welsh people is not withdrawing simply from Welsh life alone, but from the whole tradition of human life as it has been understood in the Christian tradition'. Mr. Saunders Lewis's words are a reminder that a local disaster needs to be related to a whole world's sickness. The work that awaits Wales today is beyond the problem of a language and a tradition: beyond it, but only because it presupposes it.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

OBITER

RECONCILIATION is the subject of two speeches by Victor Gollancz and now published by him for a shilling. The first, delivered at a meeting for Christian action held at the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford last November, resumes the argument of *Our Threatened Values* in terms of our immediate attitude to Germany.

'What is of primary importance is the right relationship, here and now in this temporal world, of men and women to one another'. It is easy—and unjust—to single out incidental fallacies in Mr Gollancz's development of this proposition. What matters is the sincerity with which he expounds what one might call the politics of grace.

'How can we cure them (i.e. the Germans)—we who are called upon to cure them, not only because they are fellow creatures, though that would be reason enough, but because also of our special relationship with them? Remember that these are no machines that we can manipulate, no engines that we can direct to the left or the right by our own muscle or own will: these are souls, living souls with the potentiality of growth and transformation only within themselves, only as part of their own being. All that we can do is to give them—good and evil, just and unjust—the sun and the rain in which their potential goodness may grow: all we can do is to send out our spirit to meet their spirit in a self-surrendering act of unconditioned love'.

In his second speech, addressed to German prisoners of war in England, Mr Gollancz does well to emphasise that this is a reciprocal movement;

'I, and innumerable Englishmen, respect you and wish you well. I ask you to respect us and wish us well.'

Mr Robert Birley, the educational adviser for the British Zone