

of Powys of whom it has been said that the 'intensity of her conversion to spiritual things would have earned her canonization in the Roman Catholic Church'; and the prose-writers, Ellis Wynne and Daniel Owen, tailor and novelist. Above all the poets: Goronwy Owen, son of a drunken tinker, Twm o'r Nant, Ceiriog (a country stationmaster), Islwyn, Wateyn Wyn (a miner), Eben Fardd (a weaver), and many more before and since, from Aneirin to T. Gwynn Jones. What, indeed, do we Catholics know of them?

These gaps of mutual ignorance must be closed before there can be lessened a greater and more significant gap—between the Welsh people and *Eglwys Lân Rhufain*, the Holy Roman Church.

DONALD ATTWATER

A NOTE ON WELSH EDUCATION

THESE is a general impression that the Welsh Nonconformist tradition is hostile to the introduction of religious instruction into education, hostile to denominational schools, and is the ally of secularist principles in education. This article can be no more than a note on the matter, but it may help to give Catholics working in Wales some clue to the understanding of the Nonconformist position.

Most people are aware that the Welsh Nonconformist attitude was developed during the struggle between church and chapel in the 19th century. The 'church' was the established Church of England, the Anglican and anglicising church of the land-owning Tory Welsh-despising gentry. The 'chapel' was the loose confederation of three or four dissenting bodies to which the mass of the Welsh-speaking peasantry belonged. The Catholic Church hardly came into the picture.

Indirectly, it was in it from the beginning of the struggle. It was in 1843 that the Calvinistic Methodist body confirmed its hitherto reluctant 'dissent' by a resolution to join the other Nonconformist bodies in the support of British schools, in which no dogmatic religion was taught, as opposed to the National schools of the Church of England. From that date the battle is engaged. The Calvinistic Methodist resolution was directly due to the progress of the Oxford Movement within the Church of England. The 'Puseyites' roused alarm in Wales. They seemed to herald the capture of the Church of England by Rome. Protestantism was in danger. The Catechism in the schools could be used to Romanise. The last link between the Church and the Methodists was broken, and the British school campaign was the answer of Welsh Nonconformity to the Oxford Movement. From that moment onward to the 1870 Education Act, and on to the twentieth

century, whether elementary schools or secondary schools be discussed, or national colleges to be later federated within a National University, the Welsh Nonconformists are found consistently battling against the teaching of any dogmatic Christianity, against the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in religious worship within the walls of any state or rate-supported educational institution. And it is dangerously easy to leap to the conclusion that they hated Rome and even Canterbury so heartily that they preferred irreligion and an education that ignored God and revealed truth.

To come to such a conclusion would be a grave error. Aversion from dogma was not a characteristic of the century of the *Cyffes Ffydd* and the *Hyfforddwr*. The religious revivals of the eighteenth century had isolated the Welsh peasantry. The land-owners had become English and remained Anglican, and their relations with their tenants were hostile and contractual. The Welsh peasantry organised itself into a society, a conscious social unit, a nation, on a purely religious basis. Nonconformity became the very nationhood of Wales. It was a new nation, formed and unified by its religious conversion. Its literature was the Bible and the hymns of the people. It possessed no other; no secular culture, no history save the story of the Revival that created anew a peculiar nation; its entire cultural life was centred in the chapel. A recently published novel (*Y Cychwyn* by T. Rowland Hughes) accounts for a quarryman's week in the eighteen-nineties in Caernarvonshire: 'The prayer meeting on Monday, the church society on Tuesday, the Band of Hope on Wednesday, the Scripture Class on Thursday, the literary society on Friday', and Sunday had three, sometimes four services and included the Sunday school. At least half of the adult population of Wales attended Sunday school in the eighteen-sixties. This society took hold of the *Eisteddfod* and turned the Chair and the Crown poems into expressions of its religious life. It organised its educational system for the growth and security of that life, the Sunday school for the laity, preparatory schools and colleges for its ministry, the literary society and scripture classes for young and old. Religion was three-quarters of life; it triumphed in poverty and over poverty and ennobled the bitter, ill-requited toil on land, in quarry, in mine.

Education for this people was simply absorption in its religious and social life. The standard description of that education is Daniel Owen's novel, *The Autobiography of Rhys Lewis*. Education was the function of the whole society, from the hearth to the *seiat* and the theological college. Its content was its evangel, its medium the Welsh language. While the society lived and kept its unity, these two were safe.

Rightly this society looked askance at first at the proposal of State

interference in education. But even this community had its economic needs. To read and write English, to do simple arithmetic, were economic utilities; they were skills. They were not regarded as part of the content of the cultural and spiritual life of the society. They were not part of its education. These Nonconformists never thought therefore of including Welsh in the curriculum of the day-school, and they fought long and bitterly against the compulsion of Anglican religious instruction and compulsory attendance for the pupils at the Anglican church services. Let the day school stick to its utilities:

But the souls of Christian people,
Chuck it, Smith.

While 'day school' was a brief episode in the life of the adolescent, and left even then ample hours and days for the religious society to form the child's education, this programme had its consistency and logic. But the story of the last sixty years, culminating in the Education Act of 1944, reveals the invasion of state education into the social life just described, the little-resisting submission of the society itself, the consequent breakdown of its unity, the destruction of its ideal and its authority. Middle-class, worldly ideals, the impact of a wider, modern culture, conquered the religious cultural unity of the Methodist peasantry. Yet the Welsh clung to their traditional position. They never integrated secular education with the rediscovery of their own language and literature and history. They continued obstinately to oppose dogmatic religious instruction in school and university. The twentieth century crisis really demanded a reconsideration of the whole idea of education. The 1944 Education Act, which makes state education compulsory up to nineteen years of age, capped by the edict of military conscription, is a crisis for this disintegrated Wales.

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