

SWEET SINGERS OF WALES

A Story of

WELSH HYMNS AND THEIR AUTHORS

WITH ORIGINAL TRANSLATIONS

BY

H. ELVET LEWIS

DYGYMYDD DUW AG EMYN

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Stoke-on-Trent
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PREFACE

SEVERAL of these papers appeared in the *Sunday at Home* during 1887-8. They were very kindly received; and as a consequence they have been revised and much enlarged, and are now offered in a separate volume.

No history of Welsh Hymnology has been written in the vernacular. But I must acknowledge my indebtedness, in the historical part, to articles by the Revs. Thomas Rees, D.D., of Swansea; Wm. Rees, D.D., of Liverpool; W. Glanffrwd Thomas, of St. Asaph; and W. Alonzo Griffiths, of Sketty. Especially in the case of Mrs. Ann Griffiths, I owe much to her biography, edited by Mr. Morris Davies. Beside this, I have been aided in several matters by my friends the Revs. J. B. Jones, B.A., Brecon, and J. Evans-Owen, Llanberis.

In the hymns themselves my chief help has come from EMYNAU Y CYSSEGR ('Hymns of the Sanctuary,') a national collection published by Messrs. Gee and Son, Denbigh. To them I am also obliged for permission to use some of the copyright hymns; and to Messrs. Hughes and Son, Wrexham, for a similar permission in the case of Islwyn's hymn.

The metres of the original have been adhered to, except in very few and trivial instances.

The selections given are representative only: not exhaustive of authors, and much less so of hymns. Mr. Gee's collection contains 2,685 — and that by no means drains the stream. A few have attempted more or less in this work before me: there is plenty of room for others to come after. May it be to these what it has been to me — a lasting pleasure of love!

H. ELVET LEWIS.
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTORY	5
II. MAURICE AND EDWARD KYFFIN — CAPT. MIDDLETON — EDMUND PRYS — DAVID JONES	8
III. WILLIAM WILLIAMS, PANTYCELYN	16
IV. ANN GRIFFITHS	33
V. MORGAN RHYS — DAVID WILLIAMS — BENJAMIN FRANCIS	44
VI. THOMAS WILLIAMS — CHARLES O'R BALA — DAVID CHARLES	52
VII. HIGH JONES — EDWARD JONES — PEDR FARDD - R. AB GWILYM DDU	59
VIII. DANIEL DDU — NICANDER — IEUAN GLAN GEIRIONYDD	65
IX. HIRAETHOG — EMRYS — ISLWYN	72
X. S. R. — DAVID JONES OF TREBORTH — ROGER EDWARDS — THOMAS REES, D.D.	78
XI. PICTURES AND CONCEITS	89
XII. VERSES WITH A HISTORY	95
XIII. HYMNS OF TO-DAY	99
INDEX	103

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Their Lord they will praise,
Their language they will keep,
Their land they will lose
 Except wild Wales.

So sings an ancient poet of Wales — generally alleged to be Taliesin. On whatever lonesome peak he stood, a companion of clouds and storms and far-off dawns, he heard the prayer, and knew the hope of a nation. Wild Wales is still their home; its ancient speech is still their own. The praise of God has been in the land since early Christian days: it has been often subdued, sometimes almost an exile music, but never quite lost. To-day more than ever the best song of the land is the song of God: and the prophetic words haunt its valleys and hills like an immortal echo — ‘Their God they will praise.’

Where hymnal preludes first entered Welsh literature, it is not easy to say. There are remainders still extant which go so far back as the twelfth century. Naturally, these are tinged with Catholic sentiment; but for the most part the tinge is very slight, and scarcely hurts their delicate simplicity. The following free translation of a bardic hymn out of the *Black Book of Caermarthen* will show the character of these earlier compositions:

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | In the Name of the Lord,
Be it mine Him to praise,
Who is great in praises:
Him as Ruler I adore,
For He hath increased the fruit
Of His charity. | 2 | God hath guarded us,
God hath made us,
God will save us:
God is our Hope,
Worthy and perfect —
Fair is His destiny. |
|---|--|---|--|

- 3 We are ownèd of Him,
Who is in the heights
King of Trinity:
God was sorely tried,
When He was entering
Into affliction.
- 4 God has come forth,
Though He was prisoned
In His gentleness:
Sovereign most happy,
He shall make us free
For the day of doom.
- 5 He shall bring us to the feast,
In His mildness
And His lowliness:
In His Paradise,
Holy shall we dwell
From sin's penalty.
- 6 We have no health
But in His chastisement
And the five strokes:
Unsparing His grief was,
In human defence,
When He took our flesh.
- 7 Unto God we were lost,
Except for the ransom
By a blameless decree:
From the blood-stained rood
Came salvation forth
To the wide universe:
Mighty Shepherd,
Never shall the merit
Of Christ decay.

Davydd Ddu of Hiraddug, who flourished in the fifteenth century, produced a metrical version of the *Officium B. Mariae* and of several psalms. Whether any of these were brought into the service of the Welsh Church of that age, or not, we have no means of discovering. In any case they could not have touched a nation's heart. They are correct and refined, but they have no native warmth. However, before another hundred years had passed, the nation had a Welsh Bible; and with the native Bible appeared the firstfruits of a native hymnody.

If the translations included in this volume have to any extent reproduced the tone of the original, scarcely will any one fail to perceive their national characteristics. They are hymns of the heart, everywhere touched by a light and pleasant fancy. From first to last they preserve a general feature of picturesqueness. Almost every verse is a transcript from Nature —