

The Bible and Education

THE Apostle Paul wrote to his friend and brother in Christ, the young man Timothy, and reminded him that:

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).

Learning to read from the Old Testament was something well known to all Hebrew children of his day. Moses had instructed Israel:

Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Jewish children would attend the synagogue and learn to read from an early age. So it was that at the age of 12 years, Jesus was able to astound the teachers of his day in Jerusalem; not because he could read, but because he could understand and explain what he had read.

The History of Welsh Literacy

In Wales, in the early 18th Century, it appears that the 'Hebrew Model' was also in use. The only books in common circulation were Bibles, and these were used to teach the population to read. This coincided with a religious revival

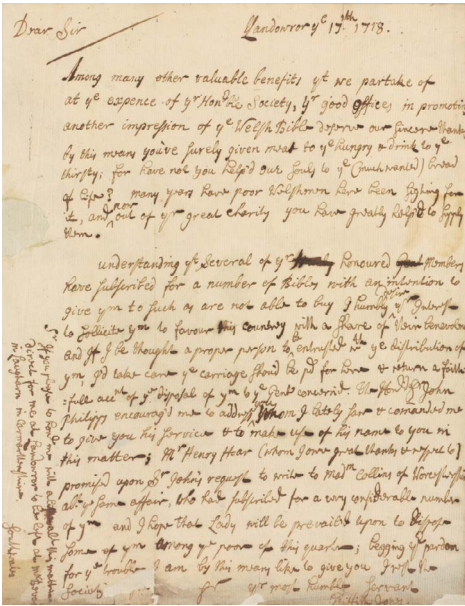
in Wales. Preachers were insistent that everyone should learn to read the Bible for themselves, and not rely on what a select few were telling them about what it said.

So it was that literacy began to spread throughout the country, and it was the 'circulating schools' of Carmarthenshire which fanned the flame of education.

Behind these schools was a famous preacher named Griffith Jones (1684–1771). He was tireless in writing to the local gentry for funds, and to the Society for the Promotion of Scripture Knowledge for more Bibles. These were delivered by ship from London, where they were printed, to Laugharne in Carmarthenshire.

In 1734, Griffith Jones set about organising a way to teach both children and adults basic reading skills in as short a time as possible. He would set up a 'school', teaching them in around three months, before moving the school to the next town. With the Bible as their text these 'circulating schools' reached almost every part of Wales. The language taught was usually Welsh, although English was used in some areas of Pembrokeshire.

It is estimated that almost half the population had attended these schools by the time of his death in 1771. By the second half of the 18th Century, Wales was one of the few countries where the majority of the population could read. This caught the



Griffith Jones' 1718 request for more Bibles

attention of Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, who in 1764 commissioned a report on Griffith Jones' circulating schools.

Mary Jones

It was in one of these circulating schools in the north of Wales that a girl by the name of Mary Jones was educated. She learned not only to read, but like the Psalmist, to love the Bible.

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day (Psalm 119:97).

In the year 1800, at the age of only 16, Mary walked 25 miles to buy her own Bible from a man called Thomas Charles (1755–1814). He had also been brought up in Carmarthenshire and as a young

man would have known of Griffith Jones. It had taken Mary many years to save up for her Bible, and it was her commitment, dedication and love for the word of God which so impressed Thomas Charles.

As a member of the Spa Fields and Religious Tract Society he campaigned for more Bibles for Wales. One member said "Well if for Wales, why not the whole world?" And so the British and Foreign Bible Society came into existence in 1804.

Education Today

Over the last 50 years the Welsh language has been revived. Welsh schools are found all across the country. They teach children from all backgrounds to speak and read in Welsh from as early as the age of 3 or 4.

Although today sadly they don't use the Bible to learn to read, it is interesting to note that many schools in Wales still celebrate their rich history and the Bible's role in the origins of education in Wales.

However in other parts of the world such as Cambodia, the English language is being taught through the medium of the Bible.

There is no doubt that the word of God provides a firm foundation upon which to live a good life. Surely this is what Jesus was teaching about when he gave the well-known parable of the buildings upon the rock and upon the sand (Matthew 7:24–27). How sure are your foundations?

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