

SIR JOHN RHŶS MEMORIAL LECTURE

RELIGION AND WELSH LITERATURE
IN THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION

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WHEN the sixteenth century opened, the Welsh had a vernacular literature earlier in origin than that of almost any European country and one still brimming with life and vigour. It was sustained by a class of professional *littérateurs*, who found widespread appreciation and support for their art among an influential body of laymen and clergy.¹ Much of their output in both poetry and prose was religious in content. For centuries poets had been moved by piety and patronage to sing in the classical metres on a variety of themes: praise of God and His Son; the brevity of life and the sinfulness of mankind; Heaven's bliss and Hell's terrors; the merits of the Blessed Virgin and the saints; the miracles wrought at the centres of pilgrimage, and the like.² Enough also survives in the 'free' metres to suggest that there almost certainly existed a flourishing genre of religious verse in these metres of inferior status, written by household bards and *clêr*, and not regarded as worthy of being preserved in writing,³ with the result that little has come down from before the sixteenth century. An extensive range of prose works on religious subjects

¹ For a comprehensive bibliography of works on Welsh literature, Thomas Parry a Merfyn Morgan (gol.), *Llyfryddiaeth a Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg* (Caerdydd, 1976), together with an addendum by G. O. Watts, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 30 (1982). Cf. also for unpublished theses relating to Wales, Alun E. Davies, *Traethodau Ymchwil Cymraeg a Chymreig* (Caerdydd, 1973). Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, translated by H. Idris Bell (Oxford, 1955); Gwyn Williams, *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry from the Beginnings to the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1953); Geraint Bowen (gol.), *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith* 3 cyf. (Llandysul, 1970, 1974, 1976); A. O. H. Jarman and G. R. Hughes (eds.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, 2 vols. (Swansea, 1976, 1979).

² Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff, 1976), chapters ii, xii.

³ G. J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (Caerdydd, 1948), tt. 117-19; Ceri W. Lewis, *Glamorgan County History: III. Medieval Glamorgan*, ed. T. B. Pugh (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 526-34.

had been produced in the Middle Ages too.¹ Intended originally as professional aids for the less learned clergy, they had long come to serve the additional purpose of providing comfort and guidance to the small minority of devout lay men and women who could read. Preserved and spread abroad orally or, increasingly, by manuscript, this literature had exercised considerable influence among the population. But a dense and impenetrable mass of ignorance and inertia also prevailed: 'the great part of my nation, the Welsh, are in incalculable darkness for want of knowledge of God and His commandments', declared Sir John Price of Brecon in his introduction to the first Welsh printed book, *Yn y Lhyvyr hwnn . . .* (1546).² This lamentable state he attributed to the shortcomings of the clergy, the fewness of manuscripts, and, above all, to the complete absence of printed books in Welsh.³

Price had put his finger on a deficiency that sorely worried all the early Welsh humanists. His own regrets at the failure of the Welsh to take advantage of the printing-press, in spite of the age and vitality of their literary tradition, were echoed by William Salesbury and many others.⁴ This lack of books had already meant that the most enlightened ideals of late-medieval religion had largely failed to penetrate Wales and would, in the sixteenth century, retard the progress of the Catholic Reformation and the Protestant Reformation alike. Good reasons for the absence of a printing-press in Wales there might be,⁵ but the contrast with other countries became all the more painful as a number of Welshmen acquired experience not only of reading books but also of publishing them. It is a sad fact that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many more books were to be published by Welsh authors in languages other than their own—English, Latin, and Italian, mainly—but one which has gone unnoticed.⁶ The

¹ J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'Medieval Welsh Religious Prose', *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 65–97.

² ' . . . vot rhan vawr om kenedyl gymry mewn tywyllwch afriuaid o eisieu gwybodaeth duw ae orchymineu.' [Sir John Price], *Yn y Lhyvyr Hwnn . . .* gol. J. H. Davies (Bangor, 1902), rhagymadrodd; cf. G. H. Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion, 1547–1649* (Caerdydd, 1951), tt. 3–4. ³ *Ibid.*

⁴ For example, William Salesbury, Richard Davies, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, Maurice Kyffin, Huw Lewys, and Thomas Salisbury; Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 10–11, 24, 68, 91–2, 100, 108.

⁵ Williams, *Welsh Church*, pp. 527–30.

⁶ Among well-known Welsh authors of religious books written in a language other than Welsh were: Richard Whitford, Edward Powell, John Gwynedd, Roger Edgeworth, William Salesbury, William Thomas, Lewis Evans, John Penry, Humphrey Roberts, John Nicolls, Meredith Hanmer, David Augustine Baker, Robert Pugh, Anselm Crowther, and George Herbert.

Welsh writer, Maurice Kyffin, therefore had good reason to reflect ruefully in the introduction to his translation of Jewel's *Apology* published in 1595, 'God knows it would have been much easier for me and more to my personal fame to have written such a work in some language other than Welsh.'¹

Moreover, the first stages of Reformation change in Wales, during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, were promulgated only in English, by means of statutes and printed books. English Bibles and other comparable works were well known and popular in those few parts of the country, like Cardiff or Carmarthen or Tenby, where English was spoken.² As more Welshmen went to English educational institutions, or sought advancement in England, there were regular complaints that they forgot or neglected their own tongue.³ Throughout the period there would be influential voices raised, inside and outside Wales, for the use of English rather than Welsh in public worship. So it became increasingly evident to Welsh humanists that, if the language of the Welsh, as well as their souls, were to be kept in good health, a determined effort must be mounted to provide an appropriate literature—a printed one, wherever possible—for those untold thousands who could speak and possibly read Welsh but no other language. This became a central religious and cultural issue for Catholics and Protestants during the sixteenth century.

Henry VIII's reign found Wales in a state largely unprepared to receive or resist the far-reaching changes being introduced by the sovereign and his advisers.⁴ The first effects of the Henrician Reformation, though the poets make little mention of them, were to deprive their verse of important sources of support. The dissolution of the monasteries removed abbots who had hitherto been generous patrons of Welsh poetry.⁵ The abbeys had also been the centres where some of the most valuable of Welsh literary manuscripts had been copied and stored, though when they

¹ 'Duw a wyr e fuasse howsach i mi o lawer, a hynodach i'm henw scrifenny'r cyfryw beth mewn iaith arall chwaethach nog yn Gymraec', Maurice Kyffin, *Deffynniad Ffydd Eglwys Loegr*, gol. W. P. Williams (Bangor, 1908), td. ix.

² Glanmor Williams, *Glamorgan County History: IV. Early Modern Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1974), p. 221; idem, *Welsh Reformation Essays* (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 113, 133.

³ *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg*, gol. T. H. Parry-Williams (Caerdydd, 1954), i. 60; Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, td. 53.

⁴ Williams, *Welsh Church*, chapter xiv.

⁵ C. T. B. Davies, 'Y Cerddi i'r Tai Crefydd fel Ffynhonnell Hanesyddol', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 18 (1973-4), 268-86, 345-73.

disappeared, many of their treasures were rescued and preserved by the more active and enterprising of the gentry.¹ Consigned to oblivion along with the religious houses were the shrines, roods, images, and relics, which had attracted thousands of pilgrims. Their virtues had previously been widely publicized by the poets, and their destruction constituted a further serious loss of patronage.² Remarkably enough, this occasioned virtually no expression of regret at the time. On the contrary, one of the best-known poets, Lewis Morgannwg, widely regarded as one of Henry VIII's chief publicists in Wales, hailed with delight the king's suppression of the 'false religious' as part of his strong-handed assertion of royal authority.³

The later years of Henry's reign can hardly be depicted in terms of a straightforward clash between traditionalists and reformers. Many who were conservative enough in their attitude towards some aspects of doctrine had nevertheless come under the influence of Renaissance concepts of reform. Erasmus's plea that the Scriptures should be translated into all languages and be read by Scots and Irish as well as Turks and Saracens, had awakened stirrings in many minds.⁴ Henry VIII, nudged by Cromwell and Cranmer, had encouraged the use of the vernacular in worship and allowed the Bible to be translated into English. As early as 1538 Bishop Barlow of St David's ordered the prior and vicar of Cardigan to preach and declare the epistle and gospel in the mother tongue, though by that he may have meant English. In 1542 Bishop Bulkeley of Bangor required his clergy, schoolmasters, and heads of households to give religious instruction to their charges in Welsh.⁵ Before 1543 Tyndale's New Testament had become popular enough in Wales not only to be acquired and read but also for parts of it, along with extracts from Cranmer's litany and order of communion, to be translated into Welsh. Such versions were undertaken possibly in support of Protestant trends in the diocese of St David's, though equally possibly as part of the continuing tradition of prose translation in the diocese of Llandaff, where marked Protestant sympathies also became apparent.⁶ In

¹ G. J. Williams, *Agweddau ar Hanes Dysg Gymraeg* (Caerdydd, 1969), pennod 1; N. Denholm-Young, *Handwriting in England and Wales* (Cardiff, 1954), p. 40.

² Williams, *Welsh Church*, chapter xiii.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 547-8.

⁴ Richard DeMolen, *Erasmus* (London, 1973), p. 92.

⁵ William Salesbury, *Kynniver Llith a Ban*, gol. John Fisher (Caerdydd, 1931), td. xvi; R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Yny Lhyvyr Hwnn (1546): the Earliest Welsh Printed Book', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 23 (1968-70), 110-11.

⁶ Henry Lewis, 'Darnau o'r Efengylau', *Y Cymmrodor*, 31 (1921), 193-216;

the last year of Henry's reign there occurred a pioneer development of the utmost importance, when the Erasmian enthusiast and active royal servant, Sir John Price, inspired by a variety of motives—religious, humanist, and political—published the first Welsh printed book, a relatively straightforward religious primer, *Yn y Lhyvyr hwnn*. . . .

Soon afterwards, in 1547, the most creative figure in sixteenth-century Welsh reforming humanism and book publishing, William Salesbury, made his first appearance in print.¹ Salesbury was ineradicably rooted in the ageless traditions of Welsh language, literature, and patriotism, hardly less deeply influenced by the newer humanism and soon to be fully committed to the doctrines of the Reformation. More incisively than anyone else, he grasped and proclaimed the critical need to establish a printed Welsh literature in prose and verse. In his *Oll Synnwyr Pen* . . . (1547), a work appropriately described as the first manifesto of Welsh Protestant humanism, Salesbury, a fervid admirer of Erasmus, following a lead given by his idol thirty years earlier and more recently by Leland,² chided his compatriots for concealing and neglecting their manuscripts and urged them to bend their most pressing efforts to ensure a translation of the Scriptures into Welsh.³ Added urgency was given to the task in 1549, when the first English Book of Common Prayer was published and its use authorized in all Welsh churches. Working at remarkable speed and under severe pressure, Salesbury rushed to complete his translation of the epistles and the gospels of the prayer-book, *Kynniver Llith a Ban*, and published it in 1551. Devoted a reformer, excellent a scholar, and accomplished a prose-author as he was, his work achieved less success than might have been expected. His book lacked official backing, showed signs of haste, and, worst of all, gave proof of its author's misplaced notions concerning orthography.⁴ Even so, there must have been a minority who welcomed his initiative; men like Gruffudd ab Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan (d. 1553), one of the

R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Dau Destun Protestannaidd Cynnar o Lawysgrif Hafod 22', *Trivium*, 1 (1966), 56–66; Williams, *GCH* iv. 214–15.

¹ Much has been written about Salesbury; for details, Parry a Morgan, *Llyfryddiaeth*, tt. 129–31.

² DeMolen, *Erasmus*, pp. 67–8.

³ Saunders Lewis, 'Damcaniaeth Eglwysig Brotestannaidd', *Efrydiau Catholig*, 2 (1947), 36–55; Williams, *Reformation Essays*, p. 195.

⁴ Fisher, *Kynniver Llith*, rhagymadrodd; Williams, *Reformation Essays*, pp. 195–6.

first Welsh poets to employ his muse in order to extend Protestant principles.¹

Evidence of sharp conservative reaction to the introduction of change was, however, much more apparent in the literature at this stage than support for it. The main lines of criticism which now emerged would long continue and would not be easily overcome. Mistrust of what were regarded as new-fangled heresies, lacking any justification in accepted doctrine or past history, and an affront to beliefs long held sacred, ran deep and fierce. The naked scramble for the treasures and possessions of the Church on the part of some of the gentry, under the guise of reform, evoked revulsion and indignation. Not least of the causes for bitterness was the consciousness that the imposition of Reformation doctrine in an alien language constituted a profound betrayal of the patriotism of Wales: the faith of hated Saxons (*ffydd Saeson*) was being substituted for the time-honoured and proverbial loyalty of the Welsh to the Church. *Cynghanedd* poets such as Siôn Brwynog, Owain ap Gwilym, or Siôn Tudur were as harsh in their censures of religious innovation as were the free-metre *cwndidwyr* (religious poets) of Glamorgan like Tomas ab Ieuan ap Rhys.² They voiced their intense dislike of changes introduced in a foreign language, which robbed the mass of its meaning, tore down altars, left churches bleak as barns and bare of ornament and vestment, deprived congregations of the colour, symbolism, and reassurance of venerated practices and ceremonies, and removed from them the patronage and protection of the saints and their shrines.³ That there was a surging outcry of popular protest is undeniable. Yet it may be symptomatic of the caution and confusion which prevailed during these years of rapid change and change-about that the protest was muted until Mary had come to the throne, that Siôn

¹ T. Roberts, 'Gruffudd ab Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 16 (1954-6), 251-3.

² D. J. Bowen, 'Detholiad o Englynion Hiraeth am yr Hen Ffydd', *Efrydiau Catholig*, 6 (1954), 5-12; Geraint Bowen (gol.), *Gwssanaeth y Gwyr Newydd: Robert Gwyn 1580* (Caerdydd, 1970), td. xvi; J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Rhai Agweddau ar y Concept o Uchelwriaeth . . .', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, 12 (1982), 201-49; D. G. Williams, 'Syr Owain ap Gwilym', *Llên Cymru*, 6 (1960-1), 179-93; Enid P. Roberts, *Gwaith Siôn Tudur*, 2 gyf. (Bangor, 1978); W. A. Bebb, *Cyfnod y Tuduriaid* (Wreccsam, 1939), tt. 90-4; Williams, *GCH* iv. 218-21.

³ vo aeth dy demle yma a thraw
oll yn llaw y llygion
ath eglwysi ymhob lle
yn gornele gweigion

(‘All thy churches hither and thither fell into the hands of laymen, and thy

Brwynog did not criticize his Protestant patrons, that Owain ap Gwilym, himself a cleric, never found it necessary to give up any of his benefices, and that Siôn Tudur and many of the *cwntidwyr* were later to sing an undoubtedly very dissimilar lay.

Not that some of the most ardent champions of Mary's religious policies were unaware of the pressing need for the reform of Catholic religion as practised in the Middle Ages. In Cardinal Pole's synod of 1555 he himself had led the way in calling for a translation of the New Testament, the establishment of seminaries, and a new emphasis on vernacular preaching. In Wales there emerged some indications of an appropriate response by leading bishops like Thomas Goldwell and William Glyn and their prominent lieutenants, Morys Clynnog and Gruffudd Robert.¹ Significant pointers to future developments were to be seen in the recognition by Catholic authors of the need to prepare Welsh versions of orthodox literature. It was during these years that Arthur ap Huw translated George Marshall's *Compendious Treatise in Metre*, and it may have been at this time that the unknown translator of the texts in Hafod MS 17, who rendered parts of Mary's primer into Welsh, and the compiler of Llanstephan MS 117, a collection of religious texts, were at work.² In the next phase of the Reformation, during Elizabeth's reign, Catholic authors were to be much more convinced of the need for such literature and more determined to supply it.

The Elizabethan settlement of religion at first evoked negligible overt resistance but little deep-seated allegiance either. Key opponents among convinced and uncompromising Catholics, like Thomas Goldwell, Morys Clynnog, Gruffudd Robert, Morgan Phillips, and Owen Lewis, went into exile to congenial havens in Europe or, like Bishop Henry Morgan, were deprived and imprisoned.³ Behind them they left a tiny body of reformers and the mass of the population, laity and clergy alike, who were disposed to accept, or at least not openly to challenge, the queen's new arrangements, though doubtless with a variety of mental reservations. The majority reacted thus partly out of respect for

churches everywhere have become empty corners') *Hen Gwntidau, Carolau a Chywyddau*, gol. L. J. Hopkin-James a T. C. Evans (Bangor, 1910), td. 39; cf. tt. 43-4, 59-60.

¹ Glanmor Williams, 'Wales in the Reign of Mary I', *Welsh History Review*, 10 (1981), 334-58.

² Brynley F. Roberts, 'Defosiynau Cymraeg', *Astudiaethau Amrywiol*, gol. Thomas Jones (Caerdydd, 1968), tt. 99-110.

³ Williams, *Reformation Essays*, pp. 141-53.

the Church 'by law established', partly because they were uncertain what the future might hold in the event of Elizabeth's marriage or her death, partly out of bewilderment induced by a series of contradictory changes enforced by different governments, partly from an understandable caution about revealing their position too boldly or precipitately, and partly because their commitment to religion, such as it was, was not so intense as to impel them to put themselves at risk. The result was that not only during the first years of the reign but for almost the whole of it there continued to be a great deal of uncertainty, ambivalence, mind-changing, and uneasy compromise. There were some 'church papists', other luke-warm conformers, and a great many stolid and apathetic 'neuters'.

Unmistakable symptoms of all this were readily discernible among leading literary figures and their patrons. Catholic sympathizers believed that they could acknowledge Elizabeth's authority by attending church without compunction; the fact that they took Catholic books or rosaries with them, or showed contempt for the service by coughing, talking loudly, or otherwise interrupting was the queen's problem not theirs. Doubts existed about whether that eminent scholar and public man, Humphrey Llwyd, was a Catholic or Protestant.¹ The author of as rare and interesting a document as an Elizabethan diary, like Robert Parry, revealed his Catholic sympathies only when recording the deaths of martyrs for the old faith.² A hard-line recusant like Robert Pugh nevertheless conformed down to the 1580s, and traces of the protection which Catholics enjoyed from a family as prominent as the Bulkeleys may have survived in Anglesey until the 1590s.³ Outstanding bards such as Siôn Tudur, Wiliam Cynwal, and Hywel ap Syr Mathew showed in their verse sharp conflicts of allegiance which may well betray deeper convictions than the simple need to keep on good terms with patrons of very different attitudes.⁴ The author of a very pedestrian Welsh prose translation of a Protestant apologetic work, Sir John Conway, had

¹ Ieuan M. Williams, 'Ysgolheictod Hanesyddol yn yr Unfed Ganrif ar Bymtheg', *Llên Cymru*, 2 (1952-3), 212.

² 'The Diary of Robert Parry (1559-1613)', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vi, 15 (1915), 114.

³ Emyr G. Jones, *Cymru a'r Hen Ffydd* (Caerdydd, 1951), tt. 30-1.

⁴ Enid P. Roberts, 'Dr William Parry a'i Gefndir', *Llên Cymru*, 5 (1958-9), 193-207; J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Priodolddau Bonheddig yn Nheulu'r Wyniaid...', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1978, td. 143; Glanmor Williams, *Bywyd ac Amserau'r Esgob Richard Davies* (Caerdydd, 1953), tt. 105, 113.

a notoriously recusant wife and may reluctantly have undertaken his literary work only as an attempt to suggest to the authorities his loyalty to the Established Church.¹ Morys Clynnog, author of the only Welsh Catholic book to be printed in Europe during the sixteenth century, leading personality among the religious exiles, and deeply involved in plans to deprive Elizabeth of her throne in 1561 and 1575, could nevertheless write to William Cecil in 1567 of plans to excommunicate her—in an attempt to show, no doubt, as other Catholics did, the sincerity of his desire to win her back to the old religion.² Of all the voltes-face, the most astonishing were those executed by Siôn Dafydd Rhys: physician, littérateur, and grammarian who, having been educated in Italy as a Catholic, returned to the strongly Protestant household of his uncle, Bishop Richard Davies, and there undertook Welsh translations of Protestant literature at his uncle's request, only to revert to the Catholic faith later and become embroiled in the production of Catholic literature on a secret printing-press.³ His own chief patron, Sir Edward Stradling of St Donat's, was himself an enigmatic figure: son of a staunchly Catholic father, client of the earl of Arundel, married into a leading Sussex recusant family, and generous patron to two such obviously Catholic writers as Siôn Dafydd Rhys and Thomas Wiliems, he nevertheless conformed dutifully to the Elizabethan settlement and was on terms of close friendship with leading Protestant clergy and Sir Francis Walsingham.⁴ Such confused and confusing stances were widespread.

During the Elizabethan years, none the less, the lines of demarcation became more sharply delimited and more plainly recognized. From the 1570s onwards, the campaign for Catholic reconversion of England and Wales was launched on its fateful course and, on its side, the Elizabethan government was engaged in an increasingly repressive programme of action to defeat it. Even though the literature published by both sides in Welsh was infinitely more scanty than that which appeared in English, it did serve to make the issues at stake more clear-cut. Catholic authors

¹ Gwendraeth Jones, 'Siôn Conwy III a'i Waith', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 22 (1966-8), 16-30.

² T. J. Hopkins a Geraint Bowen, 'Llythyr Morys Clynnog at y Cardinal Morone', *Nat. Lib. Wales Journ.* 14 (1965-66), 497-500; cf. *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg*, ii. 21-4.

³ R. Geraint Gruffydd, *Argraffwyr Cyntaf Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1972); 'The Life of Dr. John Davies of Brecon', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmr.* 1971, pp. 175-90.

⁴ Ceri Davies, *Latin Writers of the Renaissance* (Cardiff, 1981), pp. 105, 113; Glanmor Williams, 'The Stradling Family', *The History of Saint Donat's Castle and Atlantic College*, ed. R. Denning (Barry, 1983), pp. 17-53.

secretly circulated works which emphasized how completely unacceptable it was to a Roman Church resuscitated by the Council of Trent that Catholics should attend Anglican services; and the return of a growing number of seminary-trained priests drove the point home.¹ Protestant authors stressed the authority of the Scriptures as opposed to that of human tradition and deplored the excesses of the papal church, while the enactment of severe anti-Catholic statutes led to the rigorous prosecution of priests and laymen, especially from the 1580s onwards, when there were some startling Welsh prosecutions, like the Llŷn recusancy case of 1578 or the execution of Salisbury and Jones after their involvement in the Babington Plot, which caused widespread consternation.²

Both sides to the conflict were aware of the realities of the struggle between two dedicated minorities to win over the largely unmoved mass of the Welsh people. That the latter were inert, ill informed, and custom ridden, contemporary sources leave us in no doubt. The medieval church had been able to do little to enlighten the darkness of a mainly illiterate populace and had left them no more than superficially Christianized.³ The comments of many Elizabethan observers on the state of religion, whether they were clerics, lay officials, or literary men, show that most people continued to exist in an ignorance and conservatism as bad as before. Huw Lewys testified in 1595 to the inordinate degree of 'ignorance of spiritual things', and in the seventeenth century George Herbert deplored the existence of congregations who 'needed a mountain of fire to kindle them'.⁴ Superstitious practices of every kind flourished: in church services; the practice of carrying rosaries and 'knots'; vigils, pilgrimages to wells and former holy places; veneration of the saints; and the preservation of roods, lofts, images, vestments, and mass-books. Resort to 'wise men', magicians, and soothsayers was normal, and belief in the powers of fairies, evil spirits, and supernatural forces universal. Such attitudes and practices continued well into Stuart times and

¹ Geraint Bowen, 'Rhyddiaith Reciwsantiaid Cymru' (Ph.D. thesis, Wales, 1978), td. 214; *Drych Cristianogawl*, Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 48-62; *Carolau Richard White*, gol. T. H. Parry-Williams (Caerdydd, 1931), tt. 28-34.

² Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 17-45 (Davies a Salesbury); tt. 89-104 (Maurice Kyffin, Huw Lewys); *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg*, ii. 53-5 (Rowland Puleston); Jones, *Cymru a'r Hen Ffydd*, pennod i; Roberts, *Llên Cymru*, v. 193-207.

³ Williams, *Welsh Church*, chapters xiii-xiv.

⁴ 'Cymaint o anwybodaeth mewn pethau ysbrydawl', Huw Lewys, *Perl Mewn Adfyd*, gol. W. J. Gruffydd (Caerdydd, 1929), td. xxi; George Herbert quoted in Adrian Morey, *The Catholic Subjects of Elizabeth* (London, 1978), p. 37.

beyond. If both sides were in unison about the abysmally low level of religious belief and understanding, they disagreed categorically about the causes of it. Protestant authors attributed it to the failure of the medieval church to instruct the people properly and for having kept them in ignorance of the Scriptures.¹ Catholics, on the other hand, castigated the Protestants for having destroyed the old faith and for being incapable of teaching people the true religion.² The Puritan, John Penry, censured both Catholics and Anglicans for having grievously neglected their opportunities.³ All these critics were partly justified in their comments. The medieval clergy had, indeed, for the most part been poverty-stricken, badly educated, and inadequate for their tasks; but their successors in Elizabethan and early Stuart times, as their bishops admitted, were no better.⁴ As for the laity, all observers—irrespective of their religious allegiance—agreed that they were all too often greedy, materialistic, and largely indifferent to the claims of religion. They had followed with alacrity a lead given them by more than one Tudor administration in plundering and exploiting the revenues of the Church.⁵

Looking back at the two parties to the religious struggle as they tried to implant the seeds of what each regarded as truth in a dauntingly stony ground of ignorance and apathy, we are inclined to remember only the differences between them and to overlook how much they had in common. Both groups were intensely patriotic and shared a powerful awareness, drawn largely from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum*, of what they believed to be that distinctive and illustrious historic identity of the ancient Britons, to which the Welsh were the true heirs.⁶ No

¹ Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 17–27 (Richard Davies), 44–5 (Salesbury), 89–96 (Maurice Kyffin), 97–102 (Huw Lewys).

² Morys Clynnog, *Athravaeth Gristnogawl* (adargraffiad, 1880), rhagymadrodd; Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 49–62 (*Drych Cristianogawl*); Robert Gwyn, *Gwssanaeth Gwŷr Newydd*, td. 4.

³ John Penry, *Three Treatises concerning Wales*, ed. David Williams (Cardiff, 1960), pp. 27–42.

⁴ David Mathew, 'Some Elizabethan Documents', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 6 (1931–3), 77–8; D. R. Thomas, *The Life of Bishop Davies and William Salesbury* (Oswestry, 1902), pp. 41–3; R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Bishop Francis Godwin's Injunctions for the Diocese of Llandaff, 1603', *Journal Historical Society of Church in Wales*, 4 (1954), 14–22.

⁵ Glanmor Williams, 'Landlords in Wales: the Church', *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, ed. Joan Thirsk, iv (Cambridge, 1967), 381–96.

⁶ T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London, 1950); Ceri Davies, *Renaissance Writers*; Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979).

less potent was their confidence in the equally long pedigree of their language and literature which, since the days of the Druids, they believed, following a lead given by Leland and Bale, had had an unbroken continuity as one of the great languages of learning.¹ All the leading figures on both sides had been deeply imbued with aristocratic pride in the Welsh literary inheritance and evinced a passionate desire to serve the best interests, as they conceived them, of their fellow-countrymen. Both parties had an unquenchable enthusiasm for the revival of learning, even while believing that their own literary patrimony was as old and glorious as that of the classical world.² Each derived inspiration, though with a dramatically different end in view, from the late-medieval urge to reform the Church and purify religion. Both were convinced that the quality of the priesthood needed to be drastically improved in terms of its education in doctrine and the sacred languages. Moreover, each saw the crying need for systematic instruction in the elementary truths and obligations of the Christian religion rather than the subtler issues of debate and controversy. Each also appreciated the growing significance of lay literacy and with it the increasing importance of the 'inner life' of commitment and piety. If religious teaching was to be made effective and brought home to the individual and the household, it had to be given in the vernacular and required an appropriate literature for that purpose.³ That meant the production preferably of printed books, though neither group was averse from the use of manuscript texts or oral verse for the benefit of the illiterate or those who could not afford to buy books. Both sides saw literature as an adjunct, though an indispensable one, to the primary efforts of the priesthood. Relatively few Welsh Catholic priests were interested in producing literature, but those who were, viewed it as being of major assistance to them in their missionary efforts and even regarded it as a substitute for the priest in his absence which, on many occasions, was inevitable among small and isolated recusant groups.⁴ Protestants, for their part, looked upon it as

¹ G. J. Williams, *Hanes Dysg*, pennod ii; idem, 'Leland a Bale a'r Traddodiad Derwyddol', *Llên Cymru*, 4 (1956-7), 15-25.

² R. Brinley Jones, *The Old British Tongue: The Vernacular in Wales, 1540-1640* (Cardiff, 1970).

³ Jean Delumeau, *Naissance et Affirmation de la Réforme* (Paris, 1965); A. C. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose, 1559-1582* (London, 1950).

⁴ Geraint Bowen, 'Llenyddiaeth Gatholig' (MA thesis, Liverpool, 1966), td. 161; idem, 'Llanstephan MS. 13 (*A Manvall or Meditation*)', *Nat. Lib. Wales Journal*, 10 (1957-8), 57; idem, 'Llyfr y Resolusion neu Directori Christianogol', *ibid.* 11 (1959-60), 148.

a means of extending the efforts of the conscientious clergy and making good the deficiencies of those who were inadequate, especially as preachers.

In spite of these common characteristics there were, inevitably, patent differences between the two sides. The Catholics believed in the need to maintain intact the medieval church, purified of its more glaring abuses and superstitions. They laid particular emphasis on the essential role of ecclesiastical authority, mediated downwards from a reformed papacy through the hierarchy to the priesthood, in preserving the unity of doctrine and belief in all countries. They set great store on the virtues of the seven sacraments and especially the sacrifice regularly renewed in the mass. They defended strongly the adoration of the Blessed Virgin, the saints and representations of the sacred, and upheld practices such as fasting and pilgrimage. To all this their opponents countered with demands for a much more radical purging and transformation. They insisted upon the unique authority of the revelation of the divine purpose in Scripture and confronted the 'religion of the mass' with the 'religion of the word'. They stressed the role of individual faith and responsibility in the humble and unmerited acceptance of God's grace and becoming reconciled to Him. Rejecting the value of those external and mechanical 'good works' and observances prescribed by the Roman Church, through which men hoped to attain to the freedom of the 'liberated soul' (*enaid rhydd*), they called for a removal of all the 'imaginings', 'idolatry', and 'superstition', springing from human error, which had found their way into worship and custom over the centuries.

The Catholics started off with many advantages. Past history and traditional loyalties were very much in their favour in a mountainous, conservative country, still only partially under the control of the queen's government, and having a dispersed, backward-looking population living in huge, isolated, mainly pastoral parishes, with notoriously bad communications, and served by a poorly educated clergy and an indifferent ecclesiastical administration. These circumstances might, indeed, even as late as the beginning of the seventeenth century, give a misleading impression to Catholics in Europe of the degree of support on which they could count in Wales.¹ Nevertheless, the country was

¹ Geraint Bowen, 'Rhai Defosiynau Reciwsantaid Cynnar', *ibid.* 13 (1963-4), 389-96; T. J. Hopkins a Geraint Bowen, 'Memorandwm Morys Clynnog at y Pab Gregori XIII', *ibid.* 14 (1965-6), 1-34; D. A. Thomas, *The*

to a large extent insulated against the kind of forces making for change which emanated from the royal court and government, large towns and cities, universities, influential and literate land-owning, trading and artisan classes, a Puritan clergy, and the impact of an active printing-press. Furthermore, the Reformation had hitherto been proclaimed in English, a language unintelligible to the majority and widely unpopular because of its previous associations with alien conquerors. Conversely, in the native language there existed an ancient and energetic literary expression linked to conventional forms of piety and proverbial loyalty to the ancient church.¹ To this was to be added the relatively large number of enthusiastic young priests—some 200 or more of them by Charles I's reign—recruited from Wales for the Catholic seminaries, though many of them chose not to write in Welsh or labour in Wales.²

Catholics also suffered under serious disadvantages, however. The leaders of the campaign for the reconversion of England and Wales were deeply divided amongst themselves and many of the Welsh were unwilling to be drawn into Jesuit activities, which they regarded as being too much in favour of Spain.³ Nor did the English exiles who chiefly directed Counter-Reformation enterprises properly understand or take into account Welsh national sympathies or the need to appeal to them through the Welsh language.⁴ Many of the Welsh seminarists found it difficult or impossible to venture back into districts where they were known, and priests who could not speak Welsh would have been virtually useless there. Governmental and episcopal pressure, becoming steadily harsher, resulted in a marked reluctance among a majority of the Welsh gentry to accept the stigma of political and social penalization which recusancy brought down on them.⁵ The existing Welsh poetry to which the gentry had been accustomed to extend their patronage was so consciously conservative and

Welsh Elizabethan Catholic Martyrs (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 22–3; Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays*, pp. 22–7.

¹ Charles Ashton, *Bywyd ac Amserau yr Esgob William Morgan* (Treherbert, 1891), pennod i; W. J. Gruffydd, *Llenyddiaeth Cymru: Rhyddiaith o 1450 hyd 1600* (Wrecsam, 1926), tt. 134–5.

² J. M. Cleary, 'Welsh Recusant Clergy' (MA thesis, Liverpool, 1966); T. P. Ellis, *Welsh Benedictines of the Terror* (Newtown, 1936).

³ Ellis, *Welsh Benedictines*, pp. 28–9, 92–5; W. Llewelyn Williams, *The Making of Modern Wales* (London, 1919), chapter v.

⁴ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London, 1977), pp. 97–9.

⁵ *Drych Cristianogawl* (Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 55–6); David Mathew, *The Celtic Peoples and Renaissance Europe* (London, 1933), p. 48.

wedded so closely to its customary ethos of praise that it could not easily be diverted to unlawful religious opposition. The most effective literary instrument for either instruction or controversy was the printed prose text; but printing was closely controlled by the government. Furthermore, a large proportion of the population was illiterate; nor was it by any means self-evident that the upper classes favoured a wholesale extension of literacy or that, even if they had done, they could have organized an effective campaign to achieve it. Printing recusant books was, in any case, an expensive and hazardous operation, especially when undertaken by compositors who had no knowledge of the language. Welsh books would require generous patrons, as Owen Lewis's touching begging letter of 1579 to Cardinal Sirleto sought to explain,¹ and a public willing to buy and read them. It was the extreme difficulty of enlisting the support of either group in Wales which largely explained why only two Welsh Catholic books were printed in the sixteenth century as compared with about 150 English ones.² To print them at all necessitated convenient access to a press, usually on the Continent, though even such presses were not easily accessible. After the books had been printed, there remained the problems of smuggling them into a distant market and distributing them secretly, in the teeth of spies, informers, and house searches, through the agency of men like George Langley of Caerleon, who was reputed to trade briskly 'for the benefit and maintenance of other recusants beyond the seas'.³ The only alternative open to Catholic authors, the use of secret presses, created even more embarrassments.⁴ Three such presses, established with extreme difficulty and short-lived, have been traced in Wales: one at Rhiwledyn near Llandudno, another at Brecon, and a third possibly in Flintshire.⁵ Their existence testifies to the courage, tenacity, and resourcefulness of those responsible but cannot conceal the pathetically slim output to which the rigours of Elizabethan press control restricted them, even after

¹ R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Dau Lythyr gan Owen Lewis', *Llên Cymru*, 2 (1952-3), 36-45; Geraint Bowen, 'Canolfannau Llenyddol y Ffoaduriaid Catholig', *ibid.* 3 (1954-5), 229-33.

² Southern, *Recusant Prose*, pp. 33-9, 344; H. W. Lloyd, 'Welsh Books Printed Abroad in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Y Cymmrodor*, 4 (1881), 25-69.

³ PRO, Star Chamber Proceedings, 8/308/12.

⁴ Southern, *Recusant Prose*, pp. 279, 349 ff.; Mathew, *Celtic Peoples*, pp. 308 ff.

⁵ R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Gwasg Ddirgel yr Ogor yn Rhiwledyn', *Journal Welsh Bibliographical Society*, 9 (1958-65), 1-23; *idem*, *Argraffwyr Cyntaf Cymru*, *passim*.

allowing for the complete disappearance of books which they may possibly have printed.¹

Another expedient to which Catholic authors might resort was to rely on the very lively practice of copying manuscripts, which some continued to regard as more prestigious than the printed book, to which a plebeian stigma still attached.² The manuscript version of a Welsh translation might be as much a literary medium for its author as a printed book. Medieval manuscript prose texts were still greatly sought after, like those products of the Glamorgan school of copyists, who would undertake the copying in full of the most accomplished of all Welsh Catholic texts of the sixteenth century, *Drych Cristianogawl*, only part of which would also be printed.³ In spite of the slowness of the process of copying and the vulnerability of its products in ordinary circumstances⁴—quite apart from deliberate official seizure and destruction which may have obliterated many manuscripts without trace—devoted Catholic copyists like Llywelyn Siôn and Wiliam Dafydd Llywelyn continued undismayed to copy prose and poetry. Several manuscript copies of popular texts like *Directori Christianogol* or *Sallwyr Iesu* may have been circulating at the same time. Recusants encouraged the circulation of these manuscripts ‘as far as they would go’, even though Catholics under pressure might have to disavow all knowledge of how they had come into possession of them.⁵ Robert Gwyn, a young, zealous, and impatient student at Douai, recognizing the insuperable obstacles in the path of a poor novice like himself when it came to printing a book, deliberately adopted the familiar Catholic expedient of writing a letter to his relatives but hoped that many others would read it as well.⁶ Recusant landowners such as John Edwards of Chirk exercised their authority over their dependants and tenants by reading manuscripts to them when they met for worship in secret.⁷

Welsh Catholic prose literature of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period has been classified under four broad headings by our

¹ Geraint Bowen, ‘Llenyddiaeth Gatholig’, td. 201.

² J. W. Saunders, ‘The Stigma of Print’, *Essays in Criticism*, 1 (1958), 139–64.

³ Williams, *Hanes Dysg*, tt. 10–11; Gruffydd, *Journ. Welsh Bibliog. Soc.* 9, pp. 14–15.

⁴ Glanmor Williams, *Dadeni, Diwygiad a Diwylliant Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1964), tt. 21–2.

⁵ Geraint Bowen, *Nat. Lib. Wales Journ.* 12, p. 242; Thomas, *Catholic Martyrs*, p. 191.

⁶ Geraint Bowen, *Nat. Lib. Wales Journ.* 13, p. 175.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

leading authority on the subject.¹ These are: theological and doctrinal tracts; devotional works; moralistic treatises; and miscellaneous writings. Of the thirty or so works he has been able to trace, Dr Geraint Bowen has found only about half a dozen that were printed, and four of these were catechisms.² The overwhelming majority of the books consisted of translations of well-established Catholic classics. Some, such as the Welsh version of *Imitatio Christi* or Robert Persons's works, are known to have been widely popular; but a number of others have disappeared, leaving no trace of their existence but their titles. Some may not even have left that. The large proportion of works in manuscript and the heavy emphasis on basic instruction in their contents convey a clear indication that they were compilations intended primarily to prop up the faith of loyal recusant minorities in an age of intensifying pressures. The point is further underlined by the avowed intention of the authors that they were writing for the 'unlearned', i.e. for those who had had no formal education in the classical languages, but were not necessarily illiterate.³ The books were the work of a tiny handful of dedicated individuals, mostly priests, writing in accordance with the dictates of their own vision of the needs of their church and not in conformity with any overall plan or direction, which simply did not exist. Faced with heart-breaking difficult obstacles, usually working in isolation from one another, they published as and when they could. Outstanding among them in zeal, if not literary talent, was Robert Gwyn, priest and author of perhaps as many as five books.⁴ Impelled by a burning desire to save his fellow-believers from the wiles of the detested 'opiniadwyr' (his term for heretics) and having a more realistic appraisal of the threat to the Roman Church from Protestants than many of his Catholic contemporaries,⁵ he wrote long and detailed books in manuscript. His achievement was remarkable.

¹ Dr Geraint Bowen's most important and comprehensive works remain in unpublished form in his two theses (p. 380, n. 1 and p. 382, n. 4 above) but he has published extensively, Parry a Morgan, *Llyfryddiaeth*, tt. 132-3.

² Clynnog, *Athravaeth Gristnogawl* (1568); Rhosier Smyth, *Crynnodeb o Adysc Cristnogawl* (Paris, 1609); idem, *Opus Catechisticum D. Petri Canisii . . . Sum ne grynnodeb o Adysc Gristionogawl* (Paris, 1611); John Salisbury, *Eglvrhad Helaeth-lawn o'r Athrawaeth Gristnogawl* (St Omer, 1618).

³ Bowen, 'Rhyddiaith Reciwsantaidd', i. 260.

⁴ Ibid., *passim*; idem, *Gwssanaeth Gwŷr Newydd*; W. A. Mathias, 'Rhai Sylwadau ar Robert Gwyn', *Llên Cymru*, 3 (1954-5), 63-73; W. Gerallt Harries, 'Robert Gwyn: ei Deulu a'i Dylwyth', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 25 (1973-4), 425-38; Geraint Gruffydd, *Argraffwyr Cyntaf*, tt. 7-8.

⁵ For his letter, *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg*, ii. 191-209.

In spite of the pressures on him of exile, loneliness, and persecution, not to mention his own consciousness of his inadequacies as a writer, he nevertheless contributed more than anyone to the Catholic literary endeavour.¹ Another moved by the same kind of enthusiasm was Rhosier Smyth. Of all the Catholics he was the most successful in getting his books printed, being responsible for the publication of two influential catechisms and his Welsh version of *Théâtre du Monde*.²

Though a considerable quantity of Catholic verse went the rounds at this time, much less of it has survived than of that written by Protestants. In view of the hostility displayed towards recusants and their own need to keep their activities secret, that is hardly surprising. Of the poems which have survived, only those by Richard Gwyn found their way into print.³ This was hardly to be wondered at, since it was the greatest rarity for any Welsh poetry to be printed at all, and all copies of Gwyn's printed poems have long since disappeared. Much of this verse is distinctly more combative and controversial in tone than the prose. This may well be because, unlike the prose texts, the poems were not translations of established classics but original compositions, sparked off by the growing strength of heresy and especially the aggressive Puritan version of it. The Catholics were, moreover, only too well aware of the tightening grip upon them of legal and political restrictions and seem to have felt the need on occasion to counter-attack spiritedly in verse. The most celebrated and gifted of these poets, Richard Gwyn, struck out fiercely not only at the arch-enemy of his church, Martin Luther, whom he contemptuously dismissed as 'glaffer glek' ('slavering gossip'), but also at the English Bible, which he described as being 'full of false imaginings', and he denounced with searing economy the sacrilege of Protestant services.⁴ Critics of our own day have commented on the ferocity of Gwyn's attacks, which may have been provoked by some militant Puritans in Wrexham.⁵

¹ *Gwssanaeth Gwyr Newydd*, td. xlvi.

² See p. 387, n. 2; cf. also Smyth, *Theater du Mond*, gol. Thomas Parry (Caerdydd, 1930).

³ R. Geraint Gruffydd, *Argraffwyr Cynnar*, td. 21. Moses Williams recorded in 1717 that he had seen an imperfect copy of 1600; Parry-Williams, *Carolau*, td. 20; Thomas, *Catholic Martyrs*, pp. 48-9.

⁴ yn lle allor trestyl trist,
yn lle Krist mae bara

('In place of the altar a pathetic trestle, instead of Christ mere bread'), Parry-Williams, *Carolau*, td. 32; cf. tt. 20, 28-34.

⁵ Thomas, *Catholic Martyrs*, pp. 88, 93, 149; Parry-Williams, *Carolau*, tt. 6-8; Bowen, 'Llenyddiaeth Gatholig', td. 426.

Other poets incensed by similar Puritan trends in south-east Wales were Matthew Turberville, Llywelyn Siôn, and John Jones of Brecon.¹ Prophecies and other exhortations to rebellion had long been familiar in Wales, and a particularly interesting example was the bellicose poem, copied perhaps by John Davies of Mallwyd, which Bishop William Morgan of Llandaff found it necessary to send to Archbishop Whitgift in 1601; a 'verie lewde and seditious rime or libel', composed by Edward Dafydd.² Believed to have been associated with the Essex Rising, it openly incited Catholics to rebellion. Yet much of the rest of the same poet's *œuvre* was theologically neutral and only occasionally did his Catholic sympathies break the surface. In that respect he was very like Llywelyn Siôn and other Catholic *cwntidwyr* of Elizabethan Glamorgan, who were content to urge a simple and generally acceptable Christian piety, punctuated only by sudden impassioned outbursts like Llywelyn Siôn's denunciation of the Protestant heresiarchs.³ Deeply moving Catholic poetry of a different kind was that of the other martyr, William Davies, whose 'Carol to Holy Lent' gave expression to the serene peace and joy which the poet and his companions, though 'bound fast in a corner of a prison', could attain when face to face with the prospect of a cruelly harrowing death.⁴

As for the Protestants, unpropitious though circumstances in Wales were for the Reformation and slow as its progress had been, they enjoyed crucial advantages all the same. Their church was that 'by law established', which gave them considerable influence in their dealings with the gentry and others. It provided them with a measure of control over dioceses and parishes, whatever the limitations on clerics which the prerogatives of laymen and the

¹ Geraint Bowen, 'Llenyddiaeth Gatholig', tt. 420-6.

² R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Awdl Wrthryfelgar gan Edward Dafydd', *Llên Cymru*, 5 (1958-9), 155-63; 8 (1964-5), 65-9; idem, 'Cywydd, Englynion, a Chwntidau gan Edward Dafydd', *ibid.* 11 (1970-1), 213-38.

³ ve ddaüth heb gel, gan y kythrel
bedwar ny lle, oi wyr ynte
Luther, Calvin, Beza, Zwinglin
velly gelwyr, y pedwargwyr

('There came, without concealment, sent by the devil, four in their stead (i.e., the saints). Luther, Calvin, Beza and Zwingli, that is how the four are called'), *Hen Gwntidau*, tt. 98-9.

⁴ 'Dyn sydd gaeth/mewn kongyl', P. J. Crean, *Sir William Dai* (Dublin, 1958), pp. 40-3; R. Geraint Gruffydd, "'Carol Santaidd i'r Grawys" o Waith Y Tad William Davies', *Transactions Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 1967, pp. 37-46.

apathy of many to religion might impose. Above all, it ensured for them a near monopoly within the kingdom over the media of public instruction and propaganda in press and pulpit. Even so, in view of the strategic significance of printed prose, which mattered more to them than to Catholics because of their insistence upon the indispensable place of the vernacular Bible and order of service, they faced serious hindrances. They had to encounter the stiff opposition of those Protestants who contended that there was no justification for using Welsh in public worship.¹ Again, although the printing of Welsh books was not illegal, there was no printing-press in Wales nor any likelihood of one being established at this time. London printers were ignorant of the language, and proof-correction required a Welsh author to be resident in London for long spells, 'owing to the Welsh language being so hard and unusual a language to set for the press',² all of which added enormously to the cost of printing and the number of printers' errors. Protestants, like Catholics, found that illiteracy was rife and the potential market for Welsh books small and uncertain. What circumscribed it still further was the immovable apathy which many Welshmen showed towards their language, a failing commented on by most authors.³ The number of books printed in Wales during the sixteenth century was only thirty, with a further 150 in the seventeenth century⁴—a depressingly small total, compared not only with the output of presses in other European countries but also with what Welsh authors and scholars had themselves hoped for. Yet Wales should not be compared only with the larger and more productive European countries; a more appropriate scale of comparison would be that with other smaller countries, especially other Celtic-language countries. Looked at in relation to them, what was achieved in Wales constituted a breakthrough of decisive significance.⁵

¹ William Morgan, dedication to the Bible of 1588; Maurice Kyffin, *Deffyniad Ffydd*, td. xiv; Rowland Vaughan, *Yr Ymarfer o Dduwioldeb*, gol. J. Ballinger (Caerdydd, 1930), td. xx.

² Vaughan, *Ymarfer o Dduwioldeb*, td. xiv.

³ Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 15 (Salesbury), 24 (Richard Davies), 52–3 (*Drych Cristianogawl*), 63 (Siôn Dafydd Rhys), 88 (Henri Perri), 90 (Maurice Kyffin), 103 (Ifan Llwyd), 105 (Edward Kyffin), 119 (Rowland Vaughan), 128–9 (Robert Llwyd).

⁴ Geraint Gruffydd, *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 23, p. 106; cf. W. Ll. Davies, 'Welsh Books in the Stationers' Company's Registers', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 2 (1916–23), 167–76, 204–9; idem, 'Short-title List of Welsh Books, 1546–1700', *ibid.* 176–88, 210–28; 4 (1932–6), 59–68.

⁵ Gruffydd, *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 23, pp. 105–6; Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality*, pp. 133–5.

The key to the whole Protestant literary effort was the securing of a printed version of a Welsh translation of the Bible and service book and ensuring that they would be used in all parishes where Welsh was spoken. The Reformers insisted on the doctrine that the word in which God had chosen to reveal His eternal will and design was sovereign.¹ In theory, of course, this held good for all Celtic-speaking peoples, though among none of the others was the same strenuous effort made to bring about a translation in the vernacular. What had given particular impetus to it in Wales was that fusion of driving forces earlier commented upon (pp. 381–3). Among Protestants it generated unusual intensity and created the impulse to attain a new kind of literary expression. Without being by any means completely successful in fulfilling all the aspirations associated with it, it did enough to bring about changes that were profound and long lasting.

The central issue that Welsh Protestants were obliged to face was whether or not their religion and culture could match up to the criteria of the New Learning. That challenge they saw at its highest and most demanding in the need for the Scriptures to be provided in their mother tongue and made intelligible and available to all.² It was an emphasis that gave a new dimension to religious belief, making it a matter of conviction within the individual heart and mind of God's purposes for each human being as revealed in His word. Welsh Reformers even believed that a Welsh version of the Bible had once existed in the glorious past, had been widely known, revered, and made the basis of their people's belief and worship. To bring about a 'second flowering' of those Scriptures in Welsh, they thought, was surely to fulfil that supreme purpose for which Providence had preserved the 'old British tongue' throughout long centuries of darkness and oppression.³ The Reformation thus viewed would necessarily appear as the matchless consummation of the time-honoured prophecies of renewal and regeneration. The Welsh had the opportunity of once more becoming worthy of their incomparable ancestors, the early British. This apparent restoration of the golden age of early British Christianity was the complete answer in the eyes of Protestant apologists to the hitherto most damaging criticisms of the Reformation: that it was new-fangled heresy and that it was an alien error, deriving from English sources and imposed on the

¹ Isaac Thomas, *Y Testament Newydd Cymraeg, 1551–1620* (Caerdydd, 1976), td. 31.

² *Ibid.*, td. 208.

³ Jones, *Old British Tongue*; Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, tt. 106, 109, 115.

Welsh against their will. It is difficult to think of anything else which could have given a more exciting fillip to national pride than this concept of the revival of a native faith that had originally been planted with all the authority of the apostles of Christ Himself.¹

Publishing the Bible in Welsh took three-quarters of a century to complete, from 1551 to 1620.² In the process a series of formidable hurdles had to be surmounted. First, obtaining formal permission in the Act of 1563 for the translation, and sanction for its use in public worship, meant that Elizabeth's government had been persuaded to agree to a major change in policy relating to the language used in religion in Wales.³ Again, intelligent use of contemporary editions of original texts of the Bible necessitated a high degree of scholarship and judgement in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. There had also to be a sensitive deployment of the Welsh language itself; freed from archaic and medieval terms and uses, not over-dependent on any single dialect, flexible and intelligible, yet dignified, resonant and preserving the classic qualities of strength and purity associated with the literary language.⁴ Dealing with printers in London called for skill and patience, and paying for the venture out of the private pockets of the translators represented a considerable financial sacrifice.⁵ The long and arduous enterprise required of the men principally involved clear vision, unremitting dedication, and a willingness to devote themselves unflinchingly to what they conceived to be the service of God and the highest good of their countrymen. The final translator, Bishop Richard Parry, having warmly praised his predecessors for their share in the work, summed up his own contribution thus: 'And if it should be given me to please my God and my King and to help the Welsh people, I shall attain what was uppermost in my prayers, what was my chief care in my work, and what will be a comfort to me as long as I shall live.'⁶ The little

¹ Williams, *Reformation Essays*, pp. 183-5, 212-13.

² John Ballinger, *The Bible in Wales* (London, 1906); A. O. Evans, *A Memorandum on the Legality of the Welsh Bible . . .* (Cardiff, 1925).

³ Williams, *Richard Davies*, tt. 93-5; R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Humphrey Llwyd a'r Beibl', *Llên Cymru*, 4 (1956-7), 114-15.

⁴ Thomas, *Testament Newydd*, *passim*; Bowen, *Traddodiad Rhyddiaith*, tt. 149-74.

⁵ All the translators had cause to complain of financial hardship, especially William Morgan, who contended, in the Dedication to his Bible of 1588, that but for Whitgift's timely help he would have had to content himself with publishing the Pentateuch only.

⁶ 'Cui si detur, Deo et Rege placere, Britannis prodesse, habeo quod fuit in votis primum, in opere studium, et erit quamdiu vixero solatium.' *Y Beibl*

group of translators deserved well of their countrymen. The rapturous chorus of gratitude which first greeted their labours has fittingly been echoed down the centuries.¹ The services they rendered in laying the modern foundations of religion, language, literature, and national awareness in Wales were epoch-making.

The other prose works tended to mesh in with successive biblical translations.² Each new version of the Bible—that of Davies and Salesbury (1567), William Morgan (1588), and Parry and Davies (1620)—was followed or accompanied, as might be expected, by a new edition of the prayer-book. In literary and scholarly terms the translation of the order of service was nearly as notable a feat as that of the Bible.³ The regular reading of it in Welsh parish churches, week in and week out, over the years engendered a real affection for it and contributed substantially to the anger felt by many when its use was prohibited by the Puritans in mid seventeenth century. New versions of the catechism, indispensable if the clergy were to perform their primary duty of instructing their parishioners, figured more prominently than any other printed books, and at least eight Welsh versions were published before 1640.⁴ The Book of Homilies, which might have been expected to appear early in view of the dire shortage of clergy who could preach in Welsh, was not published until 1606 by Edward James and, strangely enough, in view of the excellence of its prose style, was never reprinted until the nineteenth century.⁵ Of the other works chosen for publication, no fewer than thirty-five out of forty-three were, like those of Catholic writers, translations

Cyssegr-Lan (1620), Dedication; for Parry, J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Richard Parry, Bishop of St. Asaph . . .', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 26 (1974-6), 175-90.

¹ Glanmor Williams, 'Bishop William Morgan (1545-1604) and the First Welsh Bible', *Journal Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, 7 (1976), 347-72.

² R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Religious Prose in Welsh from the Beginning of the Reign of Elizabeth to the Restoration' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1952). In addition to all the benefit I have derived from his published work, I have to thank Dr Gruffydd for his great kindness in making his unpublished work so freely available to me.

³ G. Melville Richards and G. Williams (gol.), *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin 1567* (Caerdydd, 1967); John Ballinger, 'The First Welsh Prayer Book', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 2 (1916-23), pp. 238-43; R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'The Welsh Book of Common Prayer, 1567', *Journ. Hist. Soc. Church Wales*, 17 (1967), 43-55.

⁴ R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Religious Prose', *passim*; idem, 'Catechism y Deon Nowell yn Gymraeg', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 7 (1951-2), 114-15, 203-7; Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 232-4, for the importance of catechisms.

⁵ Gruffydd, 'Religious Prose', pp. 130-60; Glanmor Williams, 'Edward James a Llyfr yr Homiliau', *Morgannwg*, 25 (1981), 79-99.

into Welsh.¹ This might seem surprising at first sight, since it is notoriously difficult for translators to avoid following too closely the idiom and speech rhythms of original authors; but on reflection it becomes more understandable. The prime motive of most of the authors was to ensure the religious well-being of their readers as much as, if not more than, their own literary reputation. So they translated recognized classics which had already won a secure place in the affections of the public—Jewel's *Apology* or Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety*, and similar works—the work of men who were 'powerful and effectual workers in the vineyard of the spirit'.² In that way, the translators were surer of themselves and of their readers; it became 'an accustomed practice in all languages', as David Rowlands wrote, 'to translate godly works of good and devoted men . . . to add to knowledge, enlarge understanding and purify morals and Christian practice'.³

There is a striking general similarity between these books and those of the Catholic authors. Each group obviously wrote chiefly in order to encourage its own faithful rather than to convert outsiders. Each was unmistakably aware of the intolerable burden of existing ignorance and the absence of a sense of individual responsibility which surrounded them. Few of the writings paid much attention to the controversial aspects of religion, and Maurice Kyffin's translation of Jewel is as exceptional on the Protestant side as *Drych Cristianogawl* is on the other. Nearly all were aimed at raising the level of day-to-day belief and conduct. The Protestant authors, in particular, sought to dispel the assumption that religion consisted of no more than being present at a series of quasi-magical acts and rituals carried out by the priesthood to safeguard their flock from earthly misfortune and eternal damnation, and insisted that it was an inward response of faith and commitment, carrying with it the duty of regularly seeking God's will and presence not only in public worship but also in private and household prayer and meditation on the Bible. Most of what they wrote was evidently directed at the heads of

¹ Gruffydd, 'Religious Prose', p. 328; Henry Lewis, 'Perlau Benthg: Trem ar Ryddiaith yr Ail Ganrif ar Bymtheg', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmr.* 1930-1, tt. 36-61.

² 'Yn weithwyr grymus nerthol yn y winllan ysbrydol', Lewys, *Perl mewn Adfyd*, td. xvii; cf. Kyffin, *Deffynniad Ffydd*, td. vi; Vaughan, *Ymarfer o Dduwioldeb*, td. 5.

³ 'Peth arferedig yw cyfieithio a throi gweithredoedd duwiol gwyr da defosionol o'r naill iaith i iaith arall er chwanegu gwybodaeth, er egorud deall, ac er pureiddio moesau da ac arferau christianogaidd.' *Disce Mori*, Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, td. 132.

households, the property owners great and small, the backbone of society whose duty it was not only to accept religious obligations on their own account but also to instruct 'their children and their households' and other inferiors in the 'principles of the faith'.¹ Protestants and Catholics alike expressed their intention of writing in a plain, unadorned style; as Robert Llwyd put it, 'contenting myself with such ordinary words as the commonalty of the country are familiar with and understand'.² Not that such protestations should lead us to suppose that they wrote in a debased manner. On the contrary, the generation of the 1620s and the 1630s—John Davies, Rowland Vaughan, Robert Llwyd, or Oliver Thomas—wrote with a singular sureness and felicity of touch.

By 1640, in fact, Welsh Protestant prose had reached a high pitch of mastery. Three generations of authors had created a new, pliant, and virile prose which, in print and manuscript, conveyed to those of their countrymen who could read the core truths of the Reformation. The last generation of writers, steeped in earnest 'Church Puritanism', aspired to plant a fervent and genuine Anglican piety in home and hearth as well as in parish church. The keynote of the sponsors of the first popular edition of the Welsh Bible, the five-shilling one of 1630, was that it must be a familiar friend in the home; 'it must dwell in thy chamber, under thine own roof . . . as thy friend, eating of thy bread like a dearest companion and chief adviser'.³ That was a desire just as keenly shared by all the authors of the so-called Heylyn-Myddelton group, who owed much, though by no means everything, to the patronage of the wealthy London-Welsh merchants and patrons, Rowland Heylyn and Thomas Myddelton.⁴

Welsh poetry, like Welsh prose, had its contribution to make in the Protestant literary effort. The *cynghanedd* poetry was not much easier for Protestants to exploit than Catholics, being hedged in by

¹ 'Canys o hynny y daw y Perchen-ty a'r penteulu i fedru dyscu eu plant a'u tylwyth gartref y ngwyddorion y ffydd.' Oliver Thomas, *Car-wr y Cymru*, gol. J. Ballinger (Caerdydd, 1930), td. 8.

² 'Gan ymfodloni a r cyfryw eiriau sathredig, ac y mae cyffredin y wlâd yn gydnabyddus â hwynt ac yn yspys ynddynt.' Robert Llwyd, *Llwybr Hyffordd yn Cyfarwyddo yr Anghyfarwydd i'r Nefoedd*, Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, td. 130.

³ 'Ond mae'n rhaid iddo drigo yn dy stafell di, tan dy gronglwyd dy hun . . . fel cyfaill yn bwyta o'th fara, fel annwyl-ddyn a phen cyngor it.' Dedication to the reader, *Y Bibl Cyssegr-Lan* (1630).

⁴ Ballinger, *Bible in Wales*, pp. 26-8; J. Gwynn Williams, 'Rhai Agweddau ar y Gymdeithas Gymreig yn yr Ail Ganrif ar Bymtheg', *Efrydiau Athronyddol*, 31 (1968), 42-55.

immemorial conventions of what patrons expected of the poetry and by the poets' own view of their role. In so far as it responded to the Reformation it did so by the poets praising clerical patrons and identifying themselves with their ideals and aspirations. They were helped by the fact that many more Welshmen were now appointed bishops, in contrast to the aliens who had usually been advanced to the Welsh sees during the Middle Ages. These prelates now assumed the place once occupied by former Cistercian abbots as prominent patrons.¹ Leading poets like Wiliam Llŷn, Siôn Tudur, Owain Gwilym, and Wiliam Cynwal looked confidently to eminent members of the hierarchy for patronage.² A long succession of bishops of St Asaph bestowed their favours on several generations of poets.³ Some of the more notable bishops, particularly Richard Davies, William Morgan, and Richard Parry, maintained scholarly and literary households, to which the bards and men of letters flocked eagerly. Such households proved to be active nerve-centres of literary activity and publication. Abergwili, in Richard Davies's time the most famous of them all, was applauded for having, in addition to the more earthly attractions of lavish hospitality and good cheer, 'faultless sermons for God, that are much esteemed in this temple of Saint David'.⁴ William Morgan, even before he became a bishop, won some of the most glowing poetic tributes ever accorded to any clerical patron for having conferred upon his countrymen the supreme gift of that 'great bible in their own tongue, the sun that radiated light'.⁵ Other distinguished figures among the clergy and pre-eminent literary men in their own right, like Edmwnd Prys and John Davies of Mallwyd, were also cynosures of bardic attention and praise.⁶

¹ Williams, *Richard Davies*, tt. 83-5.

² J. C. Morice (gol.), *Barddoniaeth Wiliam Llŷn* (Bangor, 1908), tt. 166-8, 187-9, 199-201, 231-3; Roberts, *Siôn Tudur*, i. 469-96; Roy Saer, 'Owain Gwynedd', *Llên Cymru*, 6 (1960-1), 76-82, 194-207; G. P. Jones and R. L. Jones, 'Wiliam Cynwal', *ibid.*, 11 (1970-1), 176-204.

³ R. A. Charles, 'Noddwyr y Beirdd yn Sir y Fflint', *ibid.* 12 (1972-3), 3-44.

⁴ A diveth bregeth mewn bri
Aml i Dduw n heml Ddewi,

Williams, *Richard Davies*, td. 83.

⁵ Y Beibl maith yn ein hiaith ni
Yw'r Haul yn rhoi'i oleuni,

Williams, *Journ. Mer. Hist. Soc.* 7, pp. 347-8, 366-70.

⁶ A. O. Evans, *The Life and Work of Edmwnd Prys* (Carmarthen, 1923); T. Gwynn Jones, 'Edmwnd Prys', *Y Llenor*, 2 (1923), 245-64; 3 (1924), 19-31; Rhiannon F. Roberts, 'Y Dr. John Davies o Fallwyd', *Llên Cymru*, 2, pp. 19-35, 97-110.

Poets continued to compose some poetry on the familiar medieval themes of praise of God, the prevalence of human wickedness, and the terrors of death and damnation.¹ But patrons seem not to have favoured this kind of verse as much as they had done. Possibly it had lost some of its former esteem as the result of humanist criticism, by Catholics like Gruffudd Robert, who condemned 'flattering and mendacious *cywyddau*', or Protestants like Maurice Kyffin, who dismissed them as 'an old wives' tale', drawn for the most part from the 'book of the lying monks called the *Legenda Aurea*'.² Or it may be that this kind of theme was finding increasing expression in the free-metre poetry. Whatever the cause, proportionately far less of it survives from the sixteenth century than from the medieval era. Much more serious, however, was the failure of the poets to respond to demands for a new type of religious verse. For all the chorus of requests from humanist critics, who admired the bards and greatly envied their knowledge of the centuries-old art and their skill in using it, but wanted them to become the exponents of up-to-date modes and standards of the New Learning, none of the poets, except Gruffudd Hiraethog, seemed at all anxious to comply.³ Neither Catholic critics like Gruffudd Robert or Siôn Dafydd Rhys, nor Protestants like William Salesbury or Edmwnd Prys, were able to shift the poets from their customary posture. Much the most celebrated passage at arms was that between Prys, protagonist of Protestant humanism, and Wiliam Cynwal, a far from unworthy representative of old-style poetic learning. In a poetic marathon,⁴ Prys argued long and persuasively that Cynwal should abandon the mendacious flattery of conventional and insincere praise and become the poet of Christian learning and the printed book. All to no purpose, however; Cynwal simply stood pat on his defence that

¹ Lewys, *Perl mewn Adfyd*, atodiad; Roberts, *Siôn Tudur*, i, 583-621; Saer, *Llên Cymru*, 6, p. 194; Jones, *Llên Cymru*, 11, pp. 190-1; E. D. Jones, 'The Brogyntyn Welsh Manuscripts', *Nat. Lib. Wales Journ.* 6 (1949-50), 223; D. H. E. Roberts and D. Davies, 'Rhai o'r Beirdd a Ganai rhwng Dwy Eisteddfod Caerwys', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 24 (1970-4), 35-6.

² 'Henchuedlau coegion a choyddau guenheuthus celudog', Clynnog, *Athravaeth*, rhagymadrodd; 'ryw hen chwedl, neu goel gwrach . . . o lyfr y Myneich celwyddog gynt, yr hun a elwid *Legenda Aurea*', Kyffin, *Deffynniad Ffydd*, td. x.

³ D. J. Bowen, *Gruffudd Hiraethog a'i Oes* (Caerdydd, 1958); idem, 'Gruffudd Hiraethog ac Argyfwng Cerdd Dafod', *Llên Cymru*, 2 (1952-3), 147-60; G. A. Williams, 'Golwg ar Ymryson Edmwnd Prys a Wiliam Cynwal', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, 8 (1974), 70-109.

⁴ *Ibid.*; Williams, *Hanes Dysg*, tt. 40 ff.

to be a poet a man must undergo the long training of the bardic schools and subsequently exercise his art. Some later commentators on the controversy have, not without justice, deplored the poets' rigidity and lack of imagination, adjudging them to have missed a glorious opportunity and thereby to have contributed to the rapid decline of their own order in the seventeenth century. Yet we may, with equal validity, query the soundness of Prys's plea. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were still to be found plenty of patrons for the familiar poetry of praise; but, apart from such humanist critics as have already been mentioned, those mentors do not seem to have demanded or welcomed any new approach by the poets.¹ Even if such innovative sponsors had existed, to have satisfied them would have required a new kind of poetic training, extraordinarily expensive in time as well as money—presumably in grammar school or university, or both—in addition to the long bardic apprenticeship poets customarily underwent; and that at a time when there were already dire complaints from them about the crippling effects of inflation, shortages, and penny-pinching patrons. Any poetry subsequently composed by such metamorphosed poets would have called for an alternative method of diffusion by means of printed literature in place of oral declamation for the usual rewards. That might have been a viable situation for a gentleman-cum-cleric like Prys but would hardly have been practical for the average poet. Such arrangements as Prys proposed, for their successful working, demanded patrons and a reading and book-buying public on a scale and of a prosperity that did not exist in Wales and would not come into being until the Industrial Revolution.²

Much more significant than the part played by the *canu caeth* or *cynghanedd* poetry was that of the *canu rhydd*, or 'free-metre' poetry. Bards of lesser status, the household bards and *clêr*—'the unskilled people' who used these metres to sing carols, *cwndidau*, and festival rhymes, as Gruffudd Robert described them³—had for centuries been using these metres. 'Free' verse of this sort got a further potent stimulus in the sixteenth century by the introduction of English metres sung to popular airs of the day. Both kinds of free verses were extraordinarily popular and prevalent in Wales.

¹ D. J. Bowen, 'Agweddau ar Ganu'r Unfed Ganrif ar Bymtheg', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmr.* 1969, tt. 284–335.

² R. Geraint Gruffydd, *Argraffwyr Cynnar*, td. 4; Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality*, chapter vi.

³ 'Y bobl annhechnennig', *Gramadeg Gymraeg. Gan Gruffydd Robert*, gol. gan G. J. Williams (Caerdydd, 1939), td. 279.

Erasmus Saunders, referring to the composition of verses of this sort known as *halsingod* in the seventeenth century, characterized the Welsh as being 'naturally addicted to Poetry; so some of the more skilful and knowing among them frequently composed a kind of Divine Hymns or Songs';¹ and an exiled 'Cambro-Briton', Richard Parry, urged a kinsman to obtain a translation of religious works into Welsh so that they might be 'commonlye songe as your Carols ar'.² Some contemporaries feared that the free verses were so much esteemed that, in any competition with them for popular favour, the more dignified fixed metres were bound to be overwhelmed.³ Free poetry, by its very nature, was far better adapted for religious teaching and far easier to remember than verse written in *cynghanedd*. Nowhere was this more convincingly borne out than in the various efforts to translate the Psalms into Welsh verse. Wiliam Midleton, Edward Kyffin, and Siôn Tudur all tried at first to produce a fixed-metre version, but with virtually no success.⁴ Sympathizing with Midleton on his failure, the poet, Edward ap Raff, complained that *cywyddau* were distinctly unpopular among ordinary people as compared with carols and songs.⁵ Edmwnd Prys took the point, even though he was himself an accomplished master of the classical verse. He drew the essential distinction that 'all children, servants and every unlearned person will learn a verse of a carol, whereas only a scholar could learn a *cywydd* or some skilful song'. His judgement was vindicated by the immediate, immense, and enduring success of his own version of the Psalms in simple metre and plain language, no fewer than ninety-nine versions of which were published between 1621 and 1865.⁶ The same was true of the other outstandingly popular religious poet, Vicar Rhys Prichard, whose verses captured the imagination of many in his own day

¹ Erasmus Saunders, *A View of the State of Religion . . .* (Cardiff, 1949, repr.), p. 33.

² R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Two Letters from Richard Parry . . .', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 7 (1954-7), 46.

³ D. Gwenallt Jones, *Y Ficer Prichard a 'Canwyll y Cymry'* (Caernarfon, 1946), tt. 56-7.

⁴ W. Ll. Davies, 'Welsh Metrical Versions of the Psalms', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 2 (1916-23), pp. 276-301; Roberts, *Siôn Tudur*, i, pp. 625-60.

⁵ Jones, *Ficer Prichard*, td. 56.

⁶ 'Pob plant, gweinidogion, a phobl annyscedic a ddyscant bennill o garol, lle ni allai ond ysgolhaig ddyscu cywydd neu gerdd gyfarwydd arall.' T. H. Parry-Williams, *Canu Rhydd Cymnar* (Caerdydd, 1932), tt. xxx-xi; Claire Pollin, 'The Earliest Metrical Psalm-book of Wales', *Nat. Lib. Wales Journ.* 29 (1980), 257-9; G. A. Williams, 'Edmwnd Prys (1543/4-1623): Dyneiddiwr Protestannaidd', *Journ. Mer. Hist. Soc.* 8 (1977-80), 349-68.

and retained their extraordinary appeal for centuries after they first appeared in James I's reign. Appreciating the success of the Tudor *cwndidau* and carols, Prichard realized how acceptable all kinds of free verses were to his fellow-countrymen. It was the sight of people ignoring 'sincere preaching but remembering vain songs that led him to turn religious lessons into poems for them'. He had, in his own words, sought no 'artistic composition but smooth and perfect metre, easily and quickly learned by anyone who heard it three times'.¹

Unlike Prys, Prichard had not intended that his verses should be printed, nor were they until 1659, long after his own death.² Yet they, like the *cwndidau* and *halsingod*,³ though designed first of all for oral transmission, soon became so widely admired that they were copied in manuscript with the intention not only of preserving the poetry but also of encouraging people to read. That literacy was the key to the most effective propagation, there can be no doubt. Authors like Prichard and Oliver Thomas were untiring in their exhortations to the illiterate to learn to read, not least by comparing unfavourably the backward state of Wales in this respect with that of England.⁴ There was, moreover, a close correspondence between what they could read in poetry and prose; the poetry in most respects simplified and made memorizable what was contained in more depth and detail in the prose. It paraphrased the narratives, parables, psalms, and theological and moral teaching of the Bible; it repeated in verse the precepts of

¹ Abergofi pur bregethiad,
Dyfal gofio ofer ganiad,
A wnaeth im droi hyn o wersau,
I chwi'r Cymry, yn ganiadau.

Ni cheisiais ddim cywreinwaith
Ond mesur esmwyth perffraith,
Hawdd i'w ddysgu ar fyr dro
Gan un a'i clywo deirgwaith.

Jones, *Ficer Prichard*, td. 66.

² *Rhan o Waith/Mr. Rees Prichard/Gynt Ficar Llanddyfri . . .* (Llundain, 1659); for bibliographical details, John Ballinger, 'Vicar Prichard', *Y Cymmrodor*, 13 (1899), 1-75.

³ *Hen Gwndidau; Canu Rhydd Cynnar*; Geraint Bowen, 'Yr Halsingod', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmr.* 1945, tt. 83-108.

⁴ Thomas, *Car-wr y Cymry*, tt. 23, 38, 39, 71, 100; cf. Robert Llwyd, 'Pa fodd y gwasanaethi di Dduw gan na fedri ddarllain ei air ef?' ('How shall you serve God when you cannot read his word?'), Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, td. 129. For literacy in England, David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1980).

prayer-book, catechism, and homily; and it summarized in simple, aphoristic language the prolix arguments of books like *The Practice of Piety* or *The Pathway to Heaven*. As long as the large majority of the Welsh remained illiterate or barely literate, the poems were the most effective means of appeal.

Trying to assess the impact on public opinion of literature—in the broadest sense of any work, whatever its literary quality and however it was transmitted and diffused—is an operation always fraught with risks. To undertake it for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Wales, when religious life was being transformed by the effects of political change, the printing-press, the Renaissance, and the Reformation, is more than ordinarily hazardous. We still know far too little about the levels of linguistic and spiritual attainment and interest, or the extent to which they may have changed at this time, particularly in such vital matters as language usage, literacy, the acquisition of books and manuscripts, and oral transmission. It seems certain that the population of Wales and some western districts of Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Cheshire were Welsh-speaking. Only in the towns, and partly Anglicized areas like south Pembrokeshire, the Vale of Glamorgan, and parts of the eastern border, were there many who spoke English. Among that population there were, broadly speaking, three groups. First, among the gentry, professional men, and higher clergy were a minority who were able and eager to read (and in some cases write) books in more than one language, but more particularly in English and Latin as well as Welsh. They had become better educated during the period, taking advantage of improved opportunities at home and, in the case of Catholics, on the Continent. Yet contemporary Welsh authors were often critical of the religious apathy and worldly cupidity of the gentry and of the opposition among others of them to the publication of Welsh printed books. It is significant, too, that most of the gentry patrons of the poets were unresponsive to pleas for a new kind of religious verse. Because of the very large measure of influence exercised by the gentry over the rest of the population, any indifference or opposition on their part made the task of the writers all the more arduous. A second and larger group, amounting to about a quarter of the population, possibly, was drawn from among the minor gentry, yeoman freeholders, and the most substantial tenants, as well as the less educated among the clergy. With these might also be included the very limited number of urban groups such as merchants and shopkeepers. They were

usually described as 'uneducated', in the sense of having no Latin and little, if any, English, but were often able to read their own language, if no other. Had that not been so, it is difficult to see why else the authors should have persisted in producing Welsh books and manuscripts.¹ It is perhaps unwise to venture on any estimate of what proportion of the population the literates constituted, but by the early Stuart period they may have numbered anything from 10 to 20 per cent.² How many of them had a genuine desire to read, as opposed to being technically able to do so, is even more difficult to tell. It may be a clue of some moment that the majority of the books turned out in print or manuscript were religious in content; but whether that came about as a result of demand on the part of the readers or decisions taken by those in authority over them in Church or State (or both) is impossible to tell for certain, though the latter seems the more likely explanation. Since the literature was aimed especially at the clergy, it may have had a valuable indirect 'knock-on' effect on the flock as well as the shepherd; but the clergy continued to have many critics.³ What does seem certain is that the main effort of those who wrote the poetry and the prose was directed at this group. Their writing had an important political and social purpose as well as a religious one and was aimed at moulding 'sound' opinions and loyalty to the established order. The degree of success it secured remains more open to question. Finally, there was the rest of the population—the large majority—consisting of an illiterate mass of monolingual tenant-farmers, cottagers, craftsmen, labourers, and paupers. In so far as they could be reached at all, or were even thought to be worth trying to reach, they could be influenced only by being read to and by word of mouth. In their midst survived the most daunting dead weight of benighted ignorance and unchangeable custom. On them the literary efforts of every kind had the least effect, as the comments of all observers made abundantly clear.⁴ At best, they were almost certainly still in the state of only hearing religious services read, without understanding very much about

¹ From 1546 to 1640, almost all the Welsh authors make the point that the large majority of the Welsh could be appealed to effectively only in their own language.

² Glanmor Williams, *The General and Common Sort of People, 1540-1640* (University of Exeter Press, 1977), pp. 20-1.

³ Lewys, *Perl mewn Adfyd*, tt. xxi-xxii; Thomas, *Car-wr y Cymry*, tt. 13, 72; Thomas Richards, *The Puritan Movement in Wales, 1639 to 1654* (London, 1920), chapter i.

⁴ Below, pp. 403-4.

their implications. At worst, they may seldom or never have gone to church at all.¹

In terms of the number of people affected by the literature, its impact was limited and made little impression other than on those in the uppermost quarter of society who were literate; and this was true of both Protestants and Catholics.² The restricted scope of what it achieved was revealed plainly enough in future religious history. Wales remained one of the 'dark corners of the land' in the eyes of earnest early Stuart Puritans and came under severe censure for its backwardness and even 'malignancy' from the men of the Commonwealth.³ In post-Restoration times, both Anglicans and Dissenters who were associated with the Welsh Trust (1674-81) and the SPCK (1699-1740) recognized the pressing need to extend literacy and publish religious books in Welsh.⁴ The paladin of the campaign for popular literacy, Griffith Jones (1683-1761), described in despairing tones 'the brutish, gross and general ignorance in things pertaining to salvation' and 'how deplorably ignorant the poor people are who cannot read, even where constant preaching is not wanting'.⁵ Furthermore, there remained a vast area of Welsh life, not confined by any means to the illiterate, in which older beliefs in superstition, magic, witchcraft, and supernatural forces of every kind continued to flourish, with scarcely diminished currency, well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ The warnings of John Penry, Vicar Prichard, or Robert Holland against soothsayers, magicians, and 'wise men' had gone largely

¹ For the attendance of the poor at church, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), chapter 6; Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500-1640* (Hassocks, 1977), chapter 6; Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, chapter 5.

² For recusants, Bossy, *Catholic Community*, p. 282.

³ Christopher Hill, 'Puritans and the "Dark Corners of the Land"', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.* 5th ser. 13 (1963), 77-102; Richards, *Puritan Movement*; idem, *Religious Developments in Wales (1654-1662)* (London, 1923).

⁴ Mary Clement, *The SPCK and Wales, 1699-1740* (Cardiff, 1954); M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement* (Cambridge, 1938); Geraint H. Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales, 1660-1730* (Cardiff, 1978).

⁵ Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality*, p. 202.

⁶ J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Y Tylwyth Teg yng Nghymru'r Unfed Ganrif ar Bymtheg a'r Ail', *Llên Cymru*, 8 (1964-5), 96-9; Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Popular Beliefs in Wales from the Restoration to Methodism', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 27 (1976-7), 440-62; J. Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Flintshire in the Seventeenth Century', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, 26 (1973-4), 16-37; 27 (1975-6), 5-35.

unheeded.¹ Life for most people continued to be hard, precarious, and threatening; on all sides they appeared to be beset by evil spirits and malign forces over which they had scant control; and the persistence of an animist mentality led men to seek such help as they could find outside, as well as inside, the framework of the Christian religion and its ministers. Nor was it unknown for the clergy to combine both Christian and non-Christian functions.² Yet the impact of the literature is not to be measured simply in terms of the numbers of people affected by it. For even if their numbers were small, those concerned wielded a wholly disproportionate influence. They were the people who exercised authority and shaped opinion in Wales. A member of this group at its best, Sir John Lloyd of Aber Llwyfeni, was described in 1632 by Robert Vaughan as a 'man who served God chiefly and learned much from the books of divinity he possessed. He cared nothing for worldly wealth . . . He refused more money for his opinion and his law than many lawyers earned.'³ He and others like him were able to contribute richly to the future development of Welsh religious and cultural life in a number of different but related spheres.

As far as religion was concerned, overall, literature reinforced the efforts of both Catholic and Protestant clerics. The recusant community remained at all times a small, embattled minority, it is true; without a change to a Catholic ruler and dynasty, it had little hope of improving its position. Even so, it continued to be remarkably tenacious and resilient in areas like Flintshire and Monmouthshire, and actually added to its numbers down to 1642. Its literature helped to indoctrinate the faithful, stiffen their morale, maintain their identity, and create a tradition of Catholic literary activity in Wales which lasted into the eighteenth century. Catholic books and manuscripts were circulating widely, though how many of them were written in Welsh is a more debatable issue. Welsh Catholic authors writing in their own language were few in number, and the famous Jesuit library at Cwm had many more non-Welsh works than Welsh ones.⁴ When an educated man

¹ D. S. T. Clark and P. T. J. Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales: Robert Holland's Dialogue on Witchcraft', *Journal Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), 31-46.

² D. Edmondson-Owen, 'Pre-Reformation Survivals in Radnorshire', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmr.* 1910-11, pp. 92-114; J. A. Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire*, 4 vols. (London, 1904-33), iii. 53.

³ G. H. Hughes, 'Cefndir Meddwl yr Ail Ganrif ar Bymtheg', *Efyrdiau Athronyddol*, 18 (1955), 31-41, esp. p. 34.

⁴ Geraint Bowen, 'Llyfrgell Coleg Sant Ffransis Xavier, Y Cwm, Llanrhyddol', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 9 (1958-65), 111-32.

like David Augustine Baker, or a lesser figure like John Woodhouse, maintained that they had been converted by books, they may have been referring to works in English or Latin.¹ But there is unmistakable evidence of the impact of Welsh works as well. Lewis Evans, publishing in 1571 to rebut Morys Clynnog's *Athravaeth* of 1568, clearly indicates that the latter's book was well known in Wales; while John Penry asserted that it was 'ungodly Welsh books' and Welsh Catholic songs which were all that had kept many from being 'overgrown' by 'meare Atheisme'.² A leading Justice of the Peace in Penry's own county of Breconshire, John Games, was in 1596 accused in the Court of Star Chamber of reading 'Welsh superstitious books' and did not deny the charge.³ In James I's reign an illiterate man called Rosser was alleged to be the subject of amazement to others on account of the skill with which he devised Welsh recusant rhymes.⁴ The Privy Council was evidently alarmed about such matters and from time to time came down heavily on those who circulated their literary wares, while Daniel Powel, son to the famous historian, David Powel, claimed that his father had for many years fulfilled the valuable function of acquainting the Council with news of such traitorous Welsh books, libels, prophecies, and other 'bad discourses' against the queen.⁵ Perhaps the surest testimony of all to the value of Welsh recusant literature and the effect it had on the Catholic minority was the persistence with which authors, poets, copyists, distributors, readers, and hearers clung to it throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in spite of all the difficulties associated with producing and distributing it.

Within the Established Church the free and untrammelled access to the printing-presses enjoyed by Protestants and their infinitely greater liberty to publish their prose and poetry abroad among the population, conferred upon them enviable advantages. As early as 1574 and 1579, respectively, Robert Gwyn and Owen Lewis had been deeply apprehensive of what the impact of Protestant books was likely to be.⁶ This literary output, by conveying Protestant doctrine and worship in the mother tongue, served to make religion a more intelligible and better-loved

¹ Ellis, *Welsh Benedictines*, pp. 70-1; Williams, *GCH* iv. 239.

² Bowen, 'Rhyddiaith Reciwsantiaid', i. 140; Penry, *Three Treatises*, pp. 34-5.

³ PRO, Star Chamber Proceedings, 5/W38/27.

⁴ *Ibid.* 8/207/30.

⁵ Williams, *GCH* iv. 235; PRO, Star Chamber Proceedings, 5/P48/25.

⁶ Gruffydd, *Llên Cymru*, 2, p. 38.

reality; for the English service, George Owen averred, was no better understood than the Latin rite had been in the 'time of blindness'.¹ It is a grievous mistake to underestimate the success of the Reformed Church in the period before 1642.² It had certainly won a secure place in the affections of many of those who were literate. Loyalty to it, moreover, survived the disasters and defeats of the Civil Wars largely unshaken. Among a small number, however, the fervent 'Church Puritanism' of the early Stuart era prepared the ground for the relatively rapid spread of more radical Protestant notions in the 1640s and 1650s.³

On the Welsh language the effects were profound. Making Welsh the language of public worship in all those parishes where it was normally spoken, and the consequent need to furnish a Welsh Bible, service book, and ancillary literature, was in the long run the most crucial single factor in ensuring the survival of the language.⁴ If English had continued to be used for worship, then every parish church in Wales, no matter how remote or inaccessible, would have become a focus for familiarizing people with that language. It would have had the effect of creating a universal and permanent network of extraneous influences in Wales where otherwise they would never or rarely have penetrated. In this respect there is a marked contrast between the status accorded to Welsh as the language of religion and that of other Celtic languages. The failure to give them such a status had a profound effect on their chances of survival.⁵

It was, too, the labours of these humanists and reformers of every complexion that confirmed the continued existence of literary activity in Wales. They made sure that there survived among the clergy and, for a time at least, the laity also, an educated class which had a vital, personal, and professional interest in making effective and artistic use of Welsh for religious instruction. This was accomplished at a time when, on the one hand, a rapid and sadly irreversible decline set in among the professional bards, hitherto the mentors and custodians of native literature, and, on the other, there were seductively strong

¹ George Owen, *Description of Penbrokshire*, 4 vols., Cymmwr. Record Ser. (London, 1902-36), iii. 57.

² Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays*, pp. 22-30.

³ R. Tudur Jones, *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (Abertawe, 1965); T. M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, 1977).

⁴ W. Ogwen Williams, 'The Survival of the Welsh Language . . .', *Welsh History Review*, 2 (1960), 67-93; Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality*, chapters vi, vii.

⁵ Idem., *Journ. Merioneth Hist. Soc.* 7, pp. 367-8.

inducements to Welsh authors to write in English, to which many yielded.¹ In the following two or three centuries the greater part of what was written and published in Welsh—in prose especially—derived from a religious or moral purpose. Comparatively little of it was primarily motivated by literary ambition at all; its function was overwhelmingly didactic.² Nevertheless, a virtually new prose tradition was created, which extended the range of expression and gave confidence in the capacity of the language to meet the demands imposed upon it by the Reformation and the Renaissance.³ In addition, the success of Prys's metrical translation of the Psalms and Vicar Prichard's verses laid the foundations for the later rich and fecund hymnology and the religious lyric verses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Limited the range of this literature may have been and restricted its themes, but it was the only one of the Celtic literatures which at this time successfully spanned the transition from an oral and manuscript tradition of the Middle Ages to a printed literature of modern times.⁴

Finally, this era witnessed an impressive interweaving of religion, language, and literature with a compelling sense of national identity among the Welsh. This was as true in many respects of the Catholics as the Protestants. The former, at home and in exile, showed themselves to be deeply patriotic, as their cogent criticisms of some of the enterprises sponsored by their fellow-Catholics among the English and many references in their written works unmistakably brought to light.⁵ But their allegiance to a universal church and loyalty to a supranational papacy inevitably placed restraints on their pride in a nation, and especially in that monarchy regarded by Protestants as a 'national' one. Protestants experienced no such inhibitions. They felt themselves to be identified with a regime whose rulers were sympathetic to their ideals. They applauded the supposed 'British'

¹ Williams, *Reformation Essays*, pp. 201–4.

² D. Myrddin Lloyd, 'Four Centuries of Welsh Printed Literature', *Journ. Welsh Bibl. Soc.* 6 (1946–9), 177–200.

³ Parry, *Welsh Literature*, chapter viii; Williams, *Hanes Dysg*, pennod ii; Gruffydd, *Llên Cymru*, *passim*; R. Geraint Bowen, *Traddodiad Rhyddiaith*, *passim*.

⁴ J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Iwerddon* (Caerdydd, 1958); Gruffydd, *Bull. Bd. Celtic Stud.* 22, pp. 105–6; Williams, *Religion Language and Nationality*, pp. 131–5.

⁵ Mathew, *Celtic Peoples*, p. 88; Ellis, *Welsh Benedictines*, pp. 6, 76, 92; Geraint Bowen, 'Cambro-Britanni in Anglia Nati', *Nat. Lib. Wales Journ.* 13 (1963–4), 415–18; idem, 'Apêl at y Pab ynghylch Dilysrwydd *Historia Regum* Sieffre o Fynwy', *ibid.* 15 (1967–8), 127–46.

virtues of James I as well as the Tudors.¹ They even went to the extent of praising their ancient enemies, the English, whose attitude had once been that of ravening wolves, for having become, since the Reformation, careful shepherds.² They plausibly represented the Reformation as a return to the pristine purity of apostolically planted religion among the early Britons in the most splendid epoch of their history, as the fulfilment at its most sublimated level of the prophecy of the restoration of the ancient glories of Wales.³ Their pride in a unique blend of religiosity and Welshness, founded in the early modern period, continued for centuries subsequently. It encouraged among the Welsh a belief that they were an elect people, on a par with and ultimately descended from the same stock as the Hebrews themselves.⁴ Nothing was better calculated to preserve their own sense of a separate identity.

¹ A. H. Dodd, 'Wales and the Scottish Succession', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmr.* 1937, pp. 201–25.

² Charles Edwards, *Y Ffydd Ddiffuant*, gol. G. J. Williams (Caerdydd, 1936), tt. 209–10.

³ Williams, *Reformation Essays*, chapter ix.

⁴ P. T. J. Morgan, *The Eighteenth Century Renaissance* (Llandybie, 1981).