

HUGHES, JOHN (CEIRIOG) (Ceiriog; 1832 - 1887), poet

Name: John (Ceiriog) Hughes
Pseudonym: Ceiriog
Date of birth: 1832
Date of death: 1887
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet
Area of activity: Poetry
Author: David Gwenallt Jones

Born at Pen-y-bryn, Llanarmon-Dyffryn-Ceiriog, Denbighshire, 25 September 1832 [see Hughes, John, 1796-1860]. Early in 1849 he went to Manchester where, after about three months, he obtained a situation as clerk in the London Road goods station. At that time there were in Manchester Welshmen like **Creuddynfab**, **R. J. Derfel**, **Idris Fychan**, **Meudwy Môn**, and others; four of these - **Creuddynfab**, **R. J. Derfel**, **Idris Fychan**, and John Hughes - formed a small literary society, and the influence of the other three on Ceiriog is perceptible. He had, before going to Manchester, written lyrics for *Baner Cymru* and *Y Greal* and had edited the poetry column for the latter periodical. **Robert Ellis** (Cynddelw, 1812-1875) was the first to encourage him as a poet. In 1852 he won a consolation prize for a poem, 'Paul o flaen Agrippa,' a Biblical poem written in the Miltonian style like so many of the Welsh poems of the first half of the 19th century. It was **Creuddynfab**, 'my most intimate dear valuable old friend and Tutor in poetry if I had one' (he writes in **NLW MS 10193D**) who taught him to change his style, to write lyrics in the manner of Robert Burns and Thomas Moore, and to sing of patriotism, country life, and love, in a simple, natural and popular way.

R. J. Derfel was responsible for teaching him to set store by the language, traditions and history of Wales. It was he who objected to English surnames; he added 'Derfel' to his own baptismal name and so became **Robert Jones Derfel**; he besought John Hughes to follow his example, but the latter was content to insert the name 'Ceiriog' between the 'John' and the 'Hughes.'

Idris Fychan was a singer to the harp; he had been collecting melodies and penillion, like **Edward Jones**, **Ifor Ceri**, and others before him. It was from him that Ceiriog got that passion for collecting old tunes which was to last all his life. He also sought out the history of the tunes and of the harpists who played them, and collected nursery rhymes. It was his intention to publish four volumes of Welsh airs but only one appeared, *Cant o Ganeuon: Yn Cynwys, Y Gyfres Gyntaf o Eiriau ar Alawon Cymreig*, but in *Y Bardd a'r Cerddor* he has a list of 1,195 of them and he maintains that there were between sixty and 100 anonymous airs. It is quite impossible to understand Ceiriog's poetry without taking into consideration his love of collecting old melodies, for his objective as a poet was to write words for these melodies, and so to convert them into songs. In *Y Bardd a'r Cerddor* he wrote 'Awgrymiadau Ynghylch Ysgrifenu Caneuon a Geiriau i Gerddoriaeth' which dealt with the art of adapting words to melodies. Although Ceiriog did not understand the technique of music, he had, according to **Idris Fychan**, a remarkable gift for getting the 'feel' of an air and of incorporating its 'spirit' in words. In all his songs his words are more than mere words; they are words which are wedded to the particular air. Ceiriog's songs are best seen in *Songs of Wales* (**Brinley Richards**). It is clear from his letters that some of his songs and recitations were written to order, to be sung or recited at concerts and entertainments. Ceiriog was the poet of the pianoforte, the poet of the concert platform.

In 1865 he returned to Wales, as station-master on the Cambrian Railways, at Llanidloes; in 1870 he went to Towyn, and in 1871 was appointed superintendent of the newly opened line from Caer-sws to the Van lead mines. **Nicholas Bennett** of Glanyrafon lived near Trefeglwys, and it was to him, the 'Kindly Neighbour and Bosom Friend of John Ceiriog Hughes,' that **Isaac Foulkes** dedicated the last volume of Ceiriog's songs, *Yr Oriaf Olaf*. John Ceiriog Hughes died 23 April 1887 and was buried at Llanwnog.

His work, originally published in separate booklets, was collected into two volumes (Wrexham, n.d.); a third was published at Liverpool, 1888.

Author

David Gwenallt Jones, (1899 - 1968)

Sources

Llyfrbryf (Isaac Foulkes), *John Ceiriog Hughes ei fywyd, ei athrylith, a'i waith*(Liverpool 1887)

H. Elvet Lewis, *Athrylith John Ceiriog Hughes*

Saunders Lewis, *Ceiriog* (Aberystwyth 1929)

Further Reading

John Ceulanydd Williams, *Athrylith Ceiriog Hughes: ynghyda byr gofiant* (Gwrecsam 1892)

Images

John Owen, John Ceiriog Hughes' grave

Works

J. Ceiriog Hughes, *Oriau'r hwyr: sef, gweithiau barddonol John Ceiriog Hughes*(Rhuthyn 1860)

J. Ceiriog Hughes, *Y Bardd a'r Cerddor: gyda hen ystraeon am danynt*(Wrecsam 1863)

J. Ceiriog Hughes, *Oriau'r haf* (Wrecsam 1870)

J. Ceiriog Hughes, *Oriau eraill* (Wrecsam c.1868)

J. Ceiriog Hughes, *Gemau'r adroddwr: o bob lliw, o bob llun, ac o bob lle*(Wrecsam 1870)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Ceiriog manuscripts

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