

WILLIAMS, EDWARD (1750 - 1813), Independent divine and tutor

Name: Edward Williams
Date of birth: 1750
Date of death: 1813
Parent: Anne Williams
Parent: Thomas Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: Independent divine and tutor
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born 14 November 1750 at Glanclwyd (between Denbigh and Bodfari) where his family had lived for 150 years before that; the son of Thomas and Anne Williams. His parents were members of the Church of England, and as he himself was intended for holy orders he was first sent to S. Asaph grammar school, and afterwards to Derwen, to be coached by the parish priest. He lost the desire to enter the church, and it was then thought that he might try the law, and so he went to Caerwys grammar school, where **Thomas Jones**, later of Denbigh (1756 - 1820) was one of his contemporaries. But he changed his mind once more and returned home. When he was in this state of indecision he heard **Daniel Rowland** of Llangeitho preach, and joined the Methodists - years afterwards (1773) **Edmund Jones** noted in his diary that the Independent minister of Trelawnyd ('Newmarket') had refused to allow Edward Williams to use his pulpit ' because he had been preaching among the Methodists.' However, in 1770 Williams (with the consent of his parents, who did not approve of Methodism) had begun preaching to the Independents, and in 1771 he went to Abergavenny Academy. He was an exceedingly solemn young man, eschewing levity and reading voraciously - so much so that for a time he came under the influence of **William Llewelyn** of Leominster's unorthodox views; but he returned to the old paths and in 1775 was ordained minister at Ross. In 1777 he received a call to Oswestry. In addition to working as a minister he kept a school, and was on the point of converting this into a private Academy when he was invited to amalgamate his school with Abergavenny Academy on the departure of **Benjamin Davies** for Homerton; however, he insisted that the Academy should be transferred to Oswestry (May 1782). He started Sunday schools at Oswestry and other near-by places; and when he heard about **Thomas Charles's** peripatetic schools, raised money from wealthy sympathisers in England and started similar schools in a number of counties; furthermore, he prepared Welsh catechisms for their use. He resigned from the Academy in October 1791, and at the end of the same year accepted a call to Carr's Lane, Birmingham, where he began his work at the beginning of 1792. In 1792, also, he became [a co-editor] of the *Evangelical Magazine*, and was given the degree of D.D. by Edinburgh University. He was one of the founders of the London Missionary Society (1795). In 1795 he became principal of the Independent Academy at Rotherham, Yorkshire, where he died 9 March 1813. An English biography was published by Joseph Gilbert, 1825.

Throughout his career he drove himself and his students mercilessly. While at Oswestry, he published abridged versions of **Mathias Maurice's** *Social Religion* and **Dr. John Owen's** commentary on the Hebrews; he later helped to publish the works of Doddridge and **Jonathan Edwards**; moreover, he published a considerable number of sermons and addresses, some of which were collected into four volumes (1862) by **Evan Davies** (1805 - 1864). But his *magnum opus* was *An Essay on the Equity of Divine Government* ... 1813; in this he sought to reconcile the sovereignty of God with the freedom and responsibility of man, his argument being that the Atonement was universal. In its day, this was a book of considerable importance, not only in England but also in Wales. Although Edward Williams's working life was spent almost entirely in England, and although his books were written in English, he played an important part in the history of his denomination in Wales. The Welsh Nonconformist leaders of the time, reacting against the Arminianism and Arianism of the 'men of Carmarthen,' had veered towards the higher Calvinism, as (later on) the Methodists of **John Elias's** time were to do in reaction against Wesleyanism. It was Edward Williams who was largely responsible for turning the tide. One of his pupils was **John Roberts** (1767 - 1834) of Llanbryn-mair, father of the 'new system,' who influenced men like **Michael Jones** to oppose the 'old system' represented by **George Lewis**. Moreover, as is clear from the biographies of **Evan Evans** (Ieuan Glan Geirionydd) and of **John Jones** (1796 - 1857) of Tal-y-sarn, the study of the *Equity* was not confined to his own denomination. During the 19th century three men were responsible for a new theological approach within three denominations in Wales : they were Edward Williams of Rotherham the Independent, **John Philip Davies** of Tredegar the Baptist, and **Lewis Edwards** of Bala (but later, and in a different way).

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

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D. E. Jenkins, *Life of Thomas Charles* (Denbigh 1908) (index)

Y Gwyddoniadur Cymreig (1889-96), x, 259-76 (full and detailed)

G. D. Owen, *Ysgolion a Cholegau yr Annibynwyr* (1939), 101-7

W. T. Owen, *Edward Williams, D.D: his life, thought and influence* (Cardiff 1963)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: Edward Williams

Additional Links

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