

JAMES, THOMAS DAVIES ('Iago Erfyl'; 1862 - 1927), clergyman, and popular preacher and lecturer

Name: Thomas Davies James
Pseudonym: Iago Erfyl
Date of birth: 1862
Date of death: 1927
Spouse: Emma James (née Jones)
Parent: Thomas James
Gender: Male
Occupation: clergyman, and popular preacher and lecturer
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Author: Enid Pierce Roberts

Son of Thomas James and his wife; born at Manafon, Montgomeryshire, 13 August 1862. Soon afterwards the family moved to Wyddi-goed, Llanfechain, but his parents died when he was young and he was brought up by his grandparents at Garth Isaf, Rhosybrithdir, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant.

He began preaching with the Methodists at Rhosybrithdir, went to Didsbury College, Manchester, and after passing his examinations he was appointed an assistant on the Llanfyllin circuit, which at that time also included Llanfair Caereinion. Shortly afterwards, perhaps under the influence of the family of his intended-wife (Emma Jones, Rhos-y-glasgoed, Meifod; married September 1890), he turned to the Church in Wales, and in 1888 entered St. David's College, Lampeter. He was ordained deacon at St Asaph, 1891, and priest, 1892. He was curate of Llanfair Caereinion from December 1891 to October 1896; Northop, Flintshire, 1896-97; and chaplain of the Welsh church of St. Martin, Chester, from 1897 to 1901 when he was appointed by the Lord Chancellor to the living of Llanerfyl, Montgomeryshire (which was in the gift of the Crown), and he spent the rest of his life there. He succeeded 'Penfro' (William Morgan) as Dean of Caereinion, 1918; he was elected member of Llanfyllin board of guardians, Llanfyllin district council, Montgomery county council and of the education committee.

The Methodists saw him as following in the footsteps of John Evans, Eglwys-bach, and when he was curate of Llanfair Caereinion his sermons attracted large crowds to the church. His eloquence and his wit brought him fame as a preacher and lecturer in both Welsh and English, and he was in demand not only throughout Wales but also in Welsh centres in England. He preached in London during World War I, in Liverpool cathedral in 1927, and he had been invited to deliver a Welsh sermon in St. Paul's cathedral, London, in 1928. His most popular lectures were those on Robert Owen, Twm o'r Nant, Mynyddog, Ceiriog, Y Bardd Cwsg, Owain Glyndŵr and Ann Griffiths. He demonstrated his lectures (before the days of the lantern) with a series of his own pen and ink illustrations on large movable rolls. He was in great demand to compère eisteddfodau; he possessed a wealth of humorous stories, and was always ready with his repartee. He was a member of the Gorsedd of the Province of Powys, and at Carmarthen national eisteddfod, 1911, he became a member of the gorsedd under the name 'Iago Erfyl'. He contributed much to the local papers; for years he wrote the Welsh column, under the pseudonym Y Gigfran, in *The Montgomery Express*.

At one time he was a staunch Tory and vehemently opposed the disestablishment of the church, though when it came about he accepted it, recognising in it a greater freedom for the church and its officers. During World War I he changed his political views and became a socialist.

He was taken ill while preaching in Liverpool cathedral, and although he endeavoured to conduct services two Sundays after that, he had to yield. He died at his daughter's home at Addiscombe, Surrey, 30 July 1927, and was buried in Llanerfyl churchyard, 3 August. He was as highly esteemed by the Nonconformists as by churchmen, and the following Sunday evening 7 August, when a memorial service was held in Llanerfyl church, every chapel and church in the vale of Banw was closed. In his funeral sermon the Reverend Canon J.R. Roberts, Llanfihangel (son of Ellis Roberts, 'Elis Wyn o Wyrfaï') declared that he deserved to be reckoned among the chief stalwarts of the pulpit in Wales, together with the likes of John Elias and 'Williams o'r Wern' (William Williams, 1781 - 1840). He left a widow (died April 1939), a son and daughter.

Author

Dr Enid Pierce Roberts

Sources

The Montgomeryshire County Times, 6 and 13 August 1927

The Montgomeryshire Express, 9 August 1927

Y Brython, 11 August 1927

Yr Haul, 1927, 364, 387

A History of the Diocese of St. Asaph (1874), I, 472

information from his son, Dr. Cernyw James, Llanfyllin

family acquaintance

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