

RICHARDS, DAVID WILLIAM (1893-1949), preacher and philosopher

Name: David William Richards
Date of birth: 1893
Date of death: 1949
Gender: Male
Occupation: preacher and philosopher
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Religion
Author: Ivor T. Rees

David W. Richards was born 16 May 1893 in Llanegwad, Carmarthenshire, the son of John Richards, a farmer, and his wife Mary. He was educated at Capel Isaac school, Llandeilo County School and University College of Wales, Aberystwyth where he graduated in mathematics in 1914, gaining his M.A. in 1917 for a dissertation on 'The reality of extra-intellectual knowledge with special reference to Bergson and Pragatism'. He gained his PhD (London) in 1942. He taught mathematics for three years in Pwllheli Intermediate School but in 1917 he accepted an invitation to the Congregational ministry. He served the Welsh churches Saron (Bedwas) and Peniel (Trethomas), 1917-20, the English churches in Griffithstown, Pontypool, 1920-24, returning to the Welsh ministry at Seion, Abercanaid (1924-27) before accepting a call to Bethel, Penclawdd in 1927.

He was a successful competitor on philosophical subjects in Welsh at the National Eisteddfod: viz. the philosophical trend of the day and its influence on ethics and religion (Neath, 1920), a critical and explanatory essay on the philosophy of Bergson (Corwen, 1921), the philosophy of immortality in the light of recent spiritualist theories (Barry, 1922).

His ministry at Penclawdd had an auspicious start with the chapel full every Sunday evening and groups hiring coaches to attend. Richards became well known as a preacher able to present a modern interpretation of the gospel and to adapt it to the needs of the day and he was also a popular lecturer. He had great influence on the young men of the church, many of them colliers, and he succeeded in getting many of them to educate themselves for the improvement of the lives of their fellows as well as themselves.

David Richards was the Labour party candidate in the University of Wales election in 1929. But notwithstanding all his successes he and his family were forced to leave the church and the manse at short notice on 21 December 1930. He lectured for the Workers' Educational Association until he was appointed lecturer in philosophy in the Extramural Department of Birmingham University in June 1931. The family moved to Leamington Spa but he continued to preach in Wales and in England.

David Richards married Margaret Jane, the daughter of Daniel and Sarah Davies, Capel Isaac, and they had six sons, all of whom had a university education. Tragedy befell the family in January 1949 when one son, Gwilym Caradog, killed himself, and it is clear that another son had died before this though the details were not made public. It was all too much for David Richards and he took his own life at his home 24 April 1949.

In this tragic way the life of this genius came to an end. Dr R. Tudur Jones (*Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (1966), p. 306, *Congregationalism in Wales* (2004), p. 243) says that David Richards's particular gift was to expound the gospel and to make it relevant to the needs of the day. Obituary notices describe him as one of the most solid and strictest thinkers of this day, without affectation or pride but with a courteous and brotherly spirit, and as a pioneer and interpreter of the modern mind. Through his preaching and his lecturing he did as much as anyone to reveal the relevance of the gospel and to adapt its message to the social, political and intellectual needs of the day.

Author

Ivor T. Rees

Sources

Personal research

Blwyddiadur yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg, 1950

Y Tyst 12 May 1949

The Congregational Year Book, 1950

Further Reading

NLW Archives: University of Wales Parliamentary Constituency. Election Address of Rev. David Richards, M.A., The Labour Candidate. General Election, May, 1929.

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