JONES, WILLIAM (died c. 1700), Baptist minister in south-western Wales.

Name: William Jones
Date of death: c. 1700
Gender: Male
Occupation: Baptist minister
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Thomas Richards

Many things about him are uncertain: there are no particulars of his birth and education; there is not enough proof that he was once minister of Cilmaenllwyd under the ' Triers '; and there is not sufficient support for the tradition that he became a Baptist by contact with Jenkin Jones (born 1623) in Carmarthen gaol. Sure ground is reached with the account of his romantic journey to Olchon in the south-west of Hereford, the reputed home of the first colony of strict Baptists on the borders of Wales, to be there baptized by immersion, and with the coming of two officers of that church to found a new cause in the west, for convenience usually called ' Rhydwilym,' a cause devoted to immersionist baptism and exclusionist communion (12 July 1668). William Jones was named as chief elder. Thirty had been baptized before the Olchonites had arrived; before the end of 1669 there were fifty-five members; by the end of 1675 eighty; by 1689, 113. These numbers testify to intense and persistent propaganda; for these Baptists had to survive the fierce impact of the penal laws, the natural opposition of the Independents nurtured by Stephen Hughes, and the still more fierce opposition of the early Quakers, especially in the parish of Llandysilio and the adjoining districts. The gospel preached and practised by William Jones was not easy and attractive, but austere and uncompromising: baptizing in winter, baptizing old women, travelling far to lay on hands (in obedience to Hebrews vi, 2), and all subject to Vavasor Powell's *Confession of Faith*, from which had been carefully excised all references to free communion with people not baptized by immersion. Jones and his people were deeply expert in all the apparatus of conscientious resistance: secret meetings, stealthy movements across country, marriages before elders without clerical authority, arranging burying-places for the members, and refusing to disclose their clandestine retreats by taking out licences under the Indulgence of 1672. The church of Rhydwilym [the chapel bearing that name is on the Carmarthenshire bank of the eastern Cleddau] had a wide geographical ambit, from mid-Cardigan to Amroth by the sea, from Haverfordwest to Llanllawddog; by 1715, according to the lists of Dr. John Evans, it had 900 members in Pembrokeshire alone - an obvious exaggeration, but a great tribute to the power and persistence of the propagandist. Naturally enough, the severity of the persecution told heavily upon the success of Jones's work; between 1678 and 1687, only five were baptized. But as soon as the greater liberty of Toleration arrived, William Jones is at it baptizing again, adding twenty to the church in 1689-90. In his latter days he had no fewer than eleven preachers as assistants. Gradually the subsidiary branches became autonomous churches; out of them, in a later generation, arose some of the most famous Baptist churches of Wales.

Author

Thomas Richards, (1878 - 1962)

Sources

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