



Daniel Griffiths.
1828-1903

The Father of "Y Gymanfa Ganu."

Mr. Daniel Griffiths, who may not appropriately be selected as the representative of congregational singing in the Aberdare Valley, was born in April 1828. He was the son of Evan Griffiths, who kept a grocery store, drapery, ironmongery, and general stores at Ty Mawr, High Street (the house was the occupied by Dr Evan Jones, J.P.) As a lad he attended Carmel Methodist Chapel; and being from his childhood deeply interested in singing, he learnt the rudiments of music at the singing school conducted by then the leader of Carmel, Mr. Abraham James (father of Mr Benjamin James, of London), who will act as conductor of the Singing Festival of the Hirwain District of the Calvinistic Methodists to be held in June 1893.

Mr. Daniel Griffiths has a history which is closely weaved with the first and earliest efforts of Wales to assert a choral assumption. His friends at Aberdare are moving to present him in the winter of life with testimonial. If good, effective, and unostentatious service to the country and people of the land deserve recognition, we know no one more sincerely deserving of such gratitude than Mr. Daniel Griffiths, Aberdare. The promoters, and they include Judge Williams, and Mr. Marchant Williams, claims that his services to the higher forms of music have been varied and extensive in training choirs, parties, and individuals for competing at eisteddfodau, and taking part in oratorio performances. He, and others who are with us no more, were instrumental in making popular choral competitions, which were features unknown at eisteddfodau, up to that time.

As a musical critic his judgment was highly appreciated in all musical circles. In training the "Cor Mawr" for the competitions in the Crystal Palace, he was one of the advisers and coadjutors of the renowned Caradog. Mr. Griffiths was also one of the leading spirits in the "Gymanfa Gerddorol Ddirwestol, Gwent a Morganwg," (Temperance Musical Assembly, Gwent, and Morganwg), which did so much to develop and cultivate musical talent in the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth.

He was also one of the founders of the "Gymanfa Ganu," an institution now adopted by all denominations throughout the Principality, and considered indispensable as a means of improving the music of the sanctuary; and for 40 years, as a leader and indefatigable worker, he has devoted his best energies to keep up the high standard of "congregational singing." We knew him in our "sweet 'Berdar" days as the "Jonathan" of Caradog, the great and incomparable conductor who led Welsh vocalism to such brilliant, issues at the Crystal Palace competitions. Mr. Griffiths was the critic, the severe censor of technicalities and forms, while Caradog was the great soaring soul-genius in conception and enthusiasm. Those were the foundation days of the Welsh choral traditions, and, therefore, we trust this movement will not be allowed to want support from those who love Wales

and its musical name. Our old friend, Mr. Tom Stephens, will gladly receive subscriptions from Rhonddaiteis.

A district Gymanfa Ganu was held, being the twenty first, on Monday, April 24th, conducted by Mr. Tom Price, Merthyr, with Miss Morgan of Taff's Well, and Mr. Thos Thomas the schoolmaster as accompanists. Price, like all other conductors, gave endless praise to Mr. Daniel Griffiths, saying that Wales is indebted to him for his congregational singing, and also praising the singers for listening to their teacher, and adopting his, innovative ideas. We believe that here is the best place to place a picture of Mr. Griffiths, and a little of his history: Mr. Daniel Griffiths was born in April 1828, one of seven children of Evan and Ann Griffiths, who kept the biggest shop in Aberdare at the time, where they sold all kinds of foodstuffs, clothes, ironmongery, saddlery etc., in High Street, almost next to the Old Church, Aberdare.

After that, the old shop was converted into a dwelling where Dr. Evan Jones lived for years. As a boy, Daniel went with his parents to Carmel chapel, and as he loved music and singing, he became a faithful pupil of the famous old singing conductor, Mr. Benjamin James, and it wasn't long before he became a valuable assistant to his teacher, and travelled around the area teaching choirs etc. When a number of Carmel's members decided to start a new cause in the town, and to build Bethania, Daniel moved with other members of his family, and from then until his death, he was diligent and famous for congregational and choral singing.

In September 1858, Ieuan Gwyllt came from Liverpool to Aberdare, and joined Bethania, for we see him paying his first contribution on the church book in October of that year. There were several famous musicians belonging to the church then, like Messrs. Silas Evans, Joseph Hughes (Carpenter), Alaw Du, David Rosser, and others. It was also Daniel who started the Gymanfa Ganu, though there was mention of such assemblies having been formed before. The first took place in the Temperance Hall, Aberdare on January 10th, 1859, with Ieuan Gwyllt conducting, and the choirs prepared by Daniel. But the Gymanfa did not become an established annual event until 1872, and great is the change that has taken place since then in the congregational singing of the Principality.

September 22nd and 23rd 1859, a National Eisteddfod was held in Merthyr and three members of Bethania competed in two trio competitions and won both. The three were David Rosser, Daniel Griffiths, and William Davies. They sang "The Nightingale" and "Fairest Flower." The adjudicator was Ieuan Gwyllt, who was a member at Bethania at the time and editor of "Y Gwladgarwr" with Llew Llwyfo; but Llew was soon exhausted (do not understand this it sounds like 'they soon grew tired of Llew' but does not make sense) and Ieuan Gwyllt lived a short life.

It is true that Daniel did not take any obvious public part in this, but again, he was always diligent and forthright in preparing the choirs and the vocalists in Aberdare for fifty years. His judgement in unifying words and tunes was second to none. Gymanfa conductors, older and later, are of one opinion of his ability and talent as a musician and musical teacher.

The main task of Mr. Griffiths was to improve the singing, especially sacred singing. It's true that on several occasions he competed in eisteddfods, and having won as well, he did not want to be seen by anybody, but his aim was to work out of sight; and there was hardly any choral or religious Gymanfa competition taking place, where his service was not sought after by one denomination or another. The strange thing in his story was that he had never been a full member of our church, even though as much as anyone, he had preached the faith in schools and Gymanfa Ganu gatherings in a devotional and earnest spirit.

A Deacon's Interesting Reminiscences.

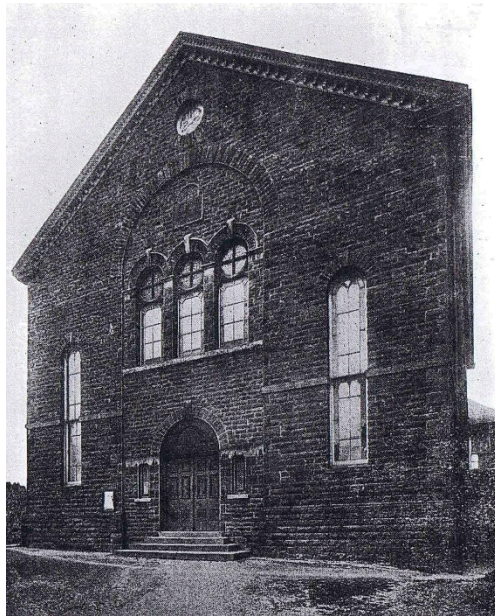
Under the auspices of the Bethania M.I.S.

1909

Mr. David Griffiths, senior deacon of the church, delivered an address to a large gathering. The subject was, "The History of Bethania." He stated that the church was founded by a number of people who came down from Carmel, Trecynon, to start a new cause in the town. The new chapel was opened on April 14th, 1854, the Thursday preceding Good Friday. The services were continued on Good Friday and Sunday, and the anniversary services have been held on these dates ever since. On the Thursday night a young lady, named Mary Rosser, opened the first meeting by reciting a chapter. On the Friday four young lads recited a chapter from I. Kings.

They were William Roberts, George Roberts, William Griffiths, and David Griffiths; and of these only one was alive today. The preachers who ministered at the opening services were the Rev. Evan Harries, Merthyr, and the Rev. John Jones, Llanelli. Bethania was built in the year 1853, at a cost of £1,659 12s. 6d., and in 1865 a new vestry was built at a cost of £322. In 1884 the interior of the chapel was renovated at a cost of £1,288, and the vestry was enlarged in 1889 at a cost of £357.

In 1904 a new organ was erected, and the whole of the building painted at a cost of £1,448. The work was done to suit the taste of the late respected pastor of Bethania, Rev. W. James. The church at the commencement consisted of about 140 members, and the chief stalwarts of the cause then were the Griffiths' family, William, Lewis, and Daniel in particular and several others who came from Carmel. The church discipline was then very, strict. The speaker remembered one member being publicly excommunicated.



Bethania Chapel.

Nazareth, a branch of Bethania, was opened in 1860. Abergwawr, and another branch, in 1866, and Trinity, another of Bethania's off-springs, in 1867. The first pastor of Bethania was Dr. Saunders (1857-1862), the second being the late Rev. W. James, and he (the speaker) hoped that the Lord would guide them to select another pastor worthy of his predecessors.

Bethania reared several young men for the ministry, viz., the late Rev. J. Wyndham Lewis (Homo Ddu), the late Rev. W. James, Rev. W. O. Powell. Rev. W. L. Powell, Rev. Ed. Griffiths, and also the

Archdruid Dyfed. Bethania had been blessed in possessing a good band of deacons, men whose names not only added to the dignity of the church, but to the dignity of the whole connexion.

Death of Daniel Griffiths.

On Friday night Mr. Daniel Griffiths. The Poplars, Aberdare, passed away in his 76th year. He was a native of the town, and his family for many years past have been connected with its growth and prosperity. Mr. Daniel Griffiths was an ironmonger, and for many years was one of the leading tradesmen in Aberdare.

From his early years he took a keen interest in music, and being connected with the Calvinistic Methodist denomination at Carmel Church, Trecynon, the oldest Methodist church in the valley, he was taught the elements of music by Mr. Abraham James, then the conductor at Carmel, and a man who devoted much time to the training of choirs in North Glamorgan and Brecon, holding singing schools in the villages and hamlets. Young Griffiths was soon recognised as his assistant, and it may be said his subsequent lifetime was devoted to improving the music of the sanctuary. He was an ardent eisteddfodwr, and his name frequently appears in the records of local and semi-national eisteddfodau of the 1850s and 1860s as a prize winner.

In 1853, on the formation of the Bethania Church, Aberdare, Mr. Griffiths was one of those who left Carmel to join the new cause, and he was appointed choirmaster, bringing the singing at Bethania up to a high standard. He gathered around him a band of musicians, whose names became known throughout the length and breadth of the land, among them being Silas Evans, Joseph Hughes, Alaw Ddu, David Rosser, and others.

Five years later the church at Bethania received a notable addition to its musical talent in Ieuan Gwyllt, who came to Aberdare to undertake the editorship of the "Gwladgarwr." A little earlier "Cymanfa Gerddorol Gwent a Morganwg (The Monmouthshire and South Wales Temperance Singing Association) having ceased to exist, the question of holding annual congregational singing-festivals was mooted, and Mr. Griffiths, who had been prominently connected, with the temperance festivals, took up the matter in earnest.

Ieuan Gwyllt at that time was engaged in preparing his tune book for the press, and he was, urged by Mr. Griffiths to publish a selection of his tunes and have them rehearsed for a cymanfa ganu. This Ieuan Gwyllt ultimately agreed to, and the first gymanfa ganu, at least in its present form, was held at the Temperance Hall, Aberdare, on January 10th, 1859. Ieuan Gwyllt himself conducted, but the whole, preparation, and training, of the choirs was undertaken by Mr. Griffiths. In the meantime, an excellent united choir for eisteddfod contests, of which Mr. Griffiths was a member, was formed by Caradog at Trecynon in the early part of 1853. Under the renowned Caradog this choir became the finest in the Principality, and at eisteddfod after eisteddfod proved successful. Their continued success led to the proposal to form a South Wales choir to compete for the 1,000-guinea challenge cup offered for competition at the Crystal Palace contest in 1872.

Of this choir, Mr. Griffiths became a member, and proved a valuable assistant to Caradog, whoever acknowledged the indebtedness of "Y Cor Mawr" to him. When the contest was over Mr Griffiths was one of the strongest advocates of a new departure by the Aberdare section of the choir, urging them to give up eisteddfod contests and devote themselves to the performance of complete works. This was the origin of the Christmas oratorio concerts of the Aberdare Choral Society, the conductor being Mr. Rees Evans, of Aberdare, and subsequently his son, Mr. W. J. Evans.

He was the recipient in 1882 of a life-size oil painting of himself and a gold watch and chain, while scarcely a year elapsed since he was presented with a testimonial at Bethania Chapel. Aberdare, the presentation being made by Judge Gwilym Williams and consisting of a substantial sum of money.

In other directions Mr. Griffiths rendered valuable services to musical culture in Wales, especially in the assistance he gave to the Rev. Wm. James, Bethania, in the preparation of the new Calvinistic Methodist hymn and tune book. One of his peculiar gifts was that of uniting appropriate hymns and tunes. Last year he retired from business, and advantage was taken of the opportunity by his friends in the town and music lovers throughout the Principality to present him with a testimonial. This reached a handsome sum, and included subscriptions from England and Wales, and even from the United States of America.

The presentation was made at a public meeting at Bethania Chapel, presided over by his Honour Judge Gwilym Williams, the address being read by Dyfed, and the presentation made by Mr. T. Marchant Williams, the Merthyr stipendiary magistrate. It was then hoped that he would be spared many years to enjoy well-earned repose from business, but an internal disease made itself manifest, and on Thursday last it became necessary for him to undergo an operation. It was thought for some time that he was in no danger, but about 5 o'clock on Friday afternoon his temperature rapidly increased, and before midnight he had passed away.

The Funeral.

The funeral took place on Wednesday, when a vast concourse from far and near assembled at the Poplars to pay homage to a worthy son of song.

The mourners were:

First coach: Dr. P. R. Griffiths, Messrs. G. Griffiths, W. Griffiths, and T. Griffiths.

Second coach Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Williams, Misses Jennie, and Bessie Griffiths.

Third coach Mrs. Treharne, Mrs. Walter Jones, Mrs. G. Griffiths, Mrs. D. Morgan.

Fourth coach: Revs. W. James, R. J. Jones, Dr. Rees, and Mr. T. Marchant Williams.

Fifth coach: Messrs Thomas, Martell, Walter Jones, and D. Morgan.

The Revs. W. James, R. T. Williams, Swansea J. M. Jones, Cardiff; Dr. Rees and Dyfed officiated at the house and at the graveside, while a united choir drawn from all the churches in the cymanfa ganu district sang most effectively under the conductorship of Mr. D. Griffiths.

The following rev. gentlemen were also present: Revs. J. M. Jones. Aberdare; D. Evans, Cwmbach; H. Fisher Short, D. Silyn Evans, J. Robertson, J. O'Reilly, W. J. Phillips, J. Lewis, and J. H. Jones, Aberaman; J. M. Jones, Llwydcoed; R. Williams, Nazareth; R. S. Thomas, Abercynon; H. T. Stephens, Carmel; J. Morgan, Bryn Seion; H. A. Davies, Cwmaman; Ll. Llewellyn, Neath; T. Jones, Carmel; J. Mills, J. Grawys Jones, W. Harris and Watcyn Wyn.

The following musicians and conductors were present: Messrs. T. Price, Merthyr; Harry Evans and E. T. Davies, Dowlais; D. Evans (Mus Bac), W. J. Evans and D. Phillips, Aberdare; B. James, J. Arkite Phillips, Ap Tudor, T. Thomas, Cardiff; R. Howells, Eben Powell, E. Moses, Samuel Davies, and J. T. Jones.

Also, the following survivors of the "Cor Mawr." Messrs W. Davies, R. Evans, Dan Jones, Eos Dar, Tom Stephens, J. Thomas and Mrs. Thomas, Ferndale; Messrs. W. Davies, Hirwain; Rogers, Pontypridd; J. Lake, Aberaman; James, Wm. Morgan, and Mrs Williams, Penrhiwceiber.

Wreaths had been sent by Mr. and Mrs G. R. Jones (Ap Caradog), Mr. and Mrs. D. M. Richards, Mrs. Baker, Mr. D. A. Thomas, M.P., Brother and family," Nieces J. and B." Rees and Mary. The Bethania deacons acted as pall-bearers, and Messrs. Dan Jones, J. Evans, and Daniel Jones marshalled the procession.



The grave of Daniel & Lewis Griffiths.
Aberdare Cemetery.