

RELIGION IN THE VALE 150 YEARS AGO

YOUR readers may be interested in these remarks about David Jones and his impact on the religious life of Glamorgan a hundred and fifty years ago.

David Jones was rector of the parish of Llangan from 1767 to 1810. It is conjecture whether he actually resided in the parish since his usual residence was Coychurch in Tremains House on the road to Bridgend. Nevertheless, Jones kept a curate who lived in the rectory at Llangan, and one such curate was William Howells, 1778—1832, who later achieved London fame as an evangelical preacher.

Eloquent Preacher

David Jones, according to his diaries of 1808 and 1810, was a widely travelled person in an age where travel was dangerous, unpleasant, and, to the majority, uncommon.

But this was true of all the great Methodist preachers, especially Wesley himself, who is said to have travelled the unbelievable distance of 4,500 miles a year, and preached over 5,000 sermons en route.

There is no doubt that David Jones was one of the foremost preachers of his age; his eloquent evangelism attracting vast crowds wherever he went. He must have been the leading spirit in Welsh Methodism after the deaths of Daniel Rowlands (1790), and Pantycelyn (1791), but he was unable to combine organising power with eloquence as Wesley had so brilliantly done in England.

Immense Impact

David Jones' impact on the

religious life of the locality was immense. Despite the fact that he remained a good Anglican all his life, he is probably responsible for the overwhelming dominance of Nonconformity in the district in the 19th Century. Although he ostensibly insisted that his followers should remain Anglican communicants, he nevertheless took the irregular step of building his own chapels (Salem) at Pencoed, Aberthin and Tonyrefail. Thus he was indirectly sowing the seeds of Nonconformity which were to yield such an abundant harvest after his death.

Wry Comment

The most convincing proof of David Jones' influence can be seen in an extract from Census of Religious Worship in 1851, which revealed that on March 30, 1851, only 12 persons attended morning service at Llangan Church, while 25 were present at Evensong.

The curate commented wryly that for the last eight or ten years the parish had "almost wholly given up to Dissent." Nearby Saron Chapel in Treoes, was able to attract 140 persons for morning service and over 300 in the evening.

Llangan had gone Nonconformist and David Jones was unwittingly the architect of this transformation.

[Contributed by Mr David J. Francis, 3 Heol Cynllan, Llanharan].