

OWEN GLENDOWER*

OWEN GLYN DWR has been neglected to a remarkable extent by English historians. The reason is perhaps not far to seek. He belonged to the great army of unsuccessful men; and history has never been kind to failures. He survived in the memory of Englishmen as a character in a Shakesperian play. In so far as he entered at all into serious history, they were content to put him down as an irascible but unpractical Celt, a picturesque bandit, the main object of whose existence was to kill Saxons.

His fate at the hands of his countrymen was little better. Paradoxically enough the battle of Bosworth, which enabled a Welsh king to ride into London at the head of a largely Welsh army, did Wales little but harm. The gentry came to court and became Anglicised: the Reformation which destroyed the monasteries—the cultural centres of the country—completed the process. The patriots were usually papists, and either fled abroad or perished on the gallows. The Act of 1535 avowedly aimed at the extirpation of the Welsh language: and the unpleasant figure of the anglicised Welshman began to appear. In 1567 Dr. Griffith Roberts, the Chaplain of St. Charles Borromeo, and a prominent exile, satirized the type in the preface to his Grammar: ‘their Welsh is Englishified, and their English, God knows, is too Welshy.’ Morus Kyffin, a fervent defender of the Reformation, wrote in 1595 of a ‘clerical person’ who ‘said that it was not right to allow any Welsh books to be printed, that he wanted all the people to learn English, and lose their Welsh, saying further that the Welsh Bible would

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do no good, but a great deal of harm . . . Could the devil himself say otherwise? Let all say Amen, and no more mention ever be made of him.'

In such an atmosphere as this, the fame of Owen Glyn Dwr, a rebel and a nationalist, had but little opportunity to flourish. He remained the legendary hero of the common people, but—as far as the gentry were concerned—he was only 'that most profligate rebel Owen Glyn Dowrdwy,' 'a rebell and sedicious seducer,' whose miserable end was a sufficient indication of the attitude of Providence. Professor Lloyd gives the credit for turning the tide to Thomas Pennant, who devoted a lengthy digression of over sixty pages to the task of restoring Owen to that place in history to which popular tradition had always assigned him. In 1833 there appeared a pamphlet of forty-eight pages, published by a Carnarvon printer—'Hanes Owain Glandwr, Blaenor y Cymry mewn Rhyfel . . . gan William Owen.' Despite the frothy style and obvious incompetence of the author, who relied largely on Pennant, Professor Lloyd considers the book to be important, as William Owen seems to have been in possession of a manuscript history of Glyn Dwr, now lost, which gives an account of the movement from the point of view of an Anglesey Welshman. William Owen appears to have been 'a character.' Born in Beaumaris, he spent his youth in the navy and fought in the Napoleonic Wars. He settled in Carnarvon as a printer, and became well known in the town as a devoted antiquarian and a zealous Catholic. 'Owen,' says Professor Lloyd, 'was an original and attractive figure, warmly patriotic, combative in spirit, devoted to his antiquarian researches, and credulous and uncritical to the highest degree. He remained a poor man all his life, and died at an advanced age about 1869.' His type and fate are still by no means unfamiliar.

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Professor Lloyd devotes an entire chapter to Glyn Dwr's ancestry and inheritance, a matter of capital importance if the part he played on the political stage is to be appreciated. He discusses the causes and circumstances of the outbreak and traces the fortunes of the revolt from the raid on Ruthin in the midst of the townsmen's preparations for the St. Matthew's Day Fair in the September of 1400 to the remarkable victory of Mynydd Hyddgen among the Plynlimmon mountains and the victory of Bryn Glas in 1402. This last victory paved the way for the French Alliance. In the years 1405-6 Owen was in fact what he claimed to be in theory—Prince of Wales. After 1406 his fortunes were on the wane. With the fall of Aberystwyth and Harlech in 1409 he became, for all intents and purposes, an outlawed, but still dangerous, wanderer in the mountains. The great raid on Shropshire in 1410 with its complete failure really marks the end. The capture of three of his most able lieutenants, Rhys Ddu, Philip Scudamore, and Rhys ap Tudur, was a blow from which there was no recovery. Rhys Ddu was hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn, Philip Scudamore at Shrewsbury, and Rhys ap Tudur at Chester. Their prince died, a rebel to the end, soon after 1416, probably at Monnington Straddel in the Golden Valley. Perhaps the Abbot of Valle Crucis was right: 'You have risen too early, a hundred years before your time.'

Professor Lloyd has a very able chapter on Glyn Dwr and the Church. Owen made a compact with Benedict XIII which was to bring Wales on to the side of Avignon. The Welsh Church was thus to be independent of Canterbury and under the primacy of St. David's. Two universities were to be founded in which the native clergy might be trained. Benedict was to bless the Welsh revolt as a holy war on the grounds of the crimes of Henry IV, particularly

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against churches and churchmen. Henry, it will be remembered, had plundered Strata Florida and stabled his horses at the high altar in 1401. Of Owen's orthodoxy there was never any doubt, and as early as 1397 he had received from Boniface XI an indult allowing his confessor to grant him and his wife a plenary pardon 'in the hour of death.' In 1403, after the outbreak of the revolt, it was extended to 'at any time.'

It is to be wished that space could have been found for a fuller discussion of the Welshmen who flocked to Owen's standard from Oxford, and of the ferocious racial riots at the university, which, no doubt, made them such excellent recruits. The theory is sometimes put forward that Glendower's rising was in reality the Welsh version of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. It would have been interesting if Professor Lloyd had made his opinion clear on this point. Also, though it is a small point, one would have liked to have had some account of such traditions as those of Llyn Llech Owen, the Nannau Oak and the cave of Moel Hebog. Finally, and it is the only serious fault which can be found with the book—would it not have been possible to provide the reader with a good and reliable map?

Professor Lloyd has firmly established Glyn Dwr not only as 'an attractive and unique figure in a period of debased and selfish politics'—to quote Professor Trevelyan's verdict—but as 'The founder of modern Welsh nationalism.'

T. CHARLES-EDWARDS.