

At the Foot of the Mountain



*O Shepherd of all the flock of God,
Watch over thy lambs and feed them;
For Thou alone, through the rugged paths,
in the way of life canst lead them.*

Mary Jones and Her Bible

It would be hard to find a lovelier, more picturesque spot than the valley on the south-west side of Cader Idris mountain, where the little village of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant nestles.

Above it towers the majestic mountain with its dark crags, its rocky precipices, and its steep ascents while stretching away in the distance to the west lies the bold shore and glistening waters of Cardigan Bay where the white breakers come rolling in and dash into foam, only to gather afresh, and return undaunted to the charge.

The mountain, the outline of the bay and the wonderful picturesqueness of the valley are still much as they were hundreds of years ago. Still the eye of the traveller gazes in wonder at their wild beauty as other eyes of other travellers did in time gone by. But, while Nature's great landmarks remain, or undergo a change so gradual as to be almost imperceptible, man, the tenant of God's earth, is born, lives

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his brief life and passes away, leaving only too often hardly even a memory behind him.

And now, as in thought we stand upon the lower slopes of Cader Idris and look across the little village of Llanfihangel, we find ourselves wondering what kind of people have occupied those simple grey cottages for the last centuries; what were their histories, their habits, their toils and struggles, their sorrows and pleasures.

To those then who share our interest in the place and neighbourhood and in events connected with them, we would tell the simple tale which gives Llanfihangel a place among the justly celebrated and honoured spots in Wales. From its soil sprang a shoot which, growing strongly, soon spread forth great branches throughout the earth, becoming indeed a tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

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In the year 1792, more than two hundred years ago, the night shadows had fallen around the little village of Llanfihangel. The season was late autumn and a cold wind was moaning and sighing among the trees, stripping them of their changed garments, only recently so fresh and green and whirling them round in eddies before laying them in shivering heaps along the narrow valley.

Pale and watery, the moon, encompassed by peaked masses of cloud that looked like another ghostly Cader Idris in the sky, had risen and now cast a faint light across a line of jutting crags, bringing into relief their sharp, ragged edges against the dark background of rolling cloud.

In pleasant contrast to the night with its threatening gloom, a warm light shone through the windows of one of the cottages that formed the village.

The light was caused by the blaze of a fire of dried driftwood on the

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stone hearth while, in a simple wooden stand, a rushlight burned, throwing its somewhat uncertain brightness upon a loom where a weaver sat at work. A bench, two or three stools, a basic cupboard, and a kitchen table – these, with the loom, were all the furniture.

Standing in the centre of the room was a middle-aged woman, dressed in a cloak and a tall conical Welsh hat worn by many of the peasants of that day.

“I am sorry you cannot go, Jacob,” she said. “You’ll be missed at the meeting. But the same Lord Almighty who gives us the meetings for the good of our souls, sent you that wheezing of the chest for the trying of your body and spirit and we just need to be patient until He sees fit to take it away again.”

“Yes, wife, and I’m thankful that I needn’t be idle, but can still carry out my trade,” replied Jacob Jones. “There are many a great deal worse off. But

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what are you waiting for, Molly? You'll be late for the service. It must be gone six o'clock."

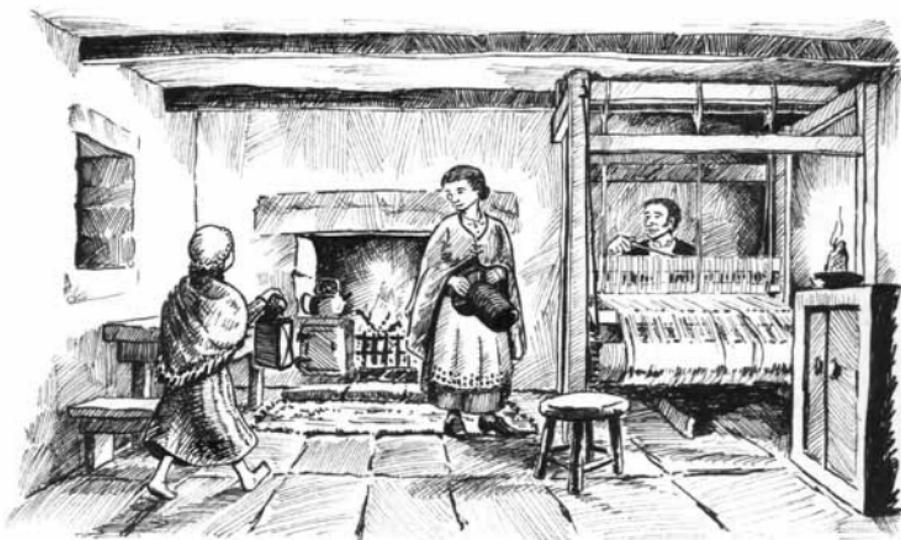
"I'm waiting for that child and she's gone for the lantern," responded Mary Jones, whom her husband generally called Molly, to distinguish her from their daughter who was also Mary.

Jacob smiled. "The lantern! Yes," said he, "you'll need it this dark night. 'Twas a good thought of yours, wife, to let Mary take it as regularly as you do for the child wouldn't be allowed to attend those meetings otherwise. And she does seem so eager about everything like that."

"Yes, she knows already pretty nearly all that you and I can teach her of the Bible, as we learnt it, doesn't she, Jacob? She's only eight now but I remember when she was only a wee child she would sit on your knee for hours on a Sunday and hear tell of Abraham, Joseph, David and Daniel. There never was a girl like our Mary for Bible stories,

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or any stories for that matter; bless her! But here she is! You've been a long time getting that lantern, child, and we must hurry or we shall be late."



Little Mary raised a pair of bright dark eyes to her mother's face.

"Yes, mother," she replied, "I took so long because I ran to borrow neighbour William's lantern. The latch on ours won't hold and there's such a wind tonight that I knew the light would be blown out."

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“There’s a moon,” said Mrs. Jones, “and I could have done without a lantern.”

“Yes, but then you know, mother, I would have had to stay at home,” responded Mary, “and I do so love to go.”

“You needn’t tell me that, child,” laughed Molly. “Come along then, Mary. Good-bye Jacob.”

“Good-bye, father dear! I wish you could come too!” cried Mary, running back to give Jacob a last kiss.

“Go your way, child, and mind you remember all you can so you can tell your old father when you come home.”

Then the cottage door opened and Mary and her mother set out into the cold windy night.

The moon had disappeared now behind a thick dark cloud and little Mary’s borrowed lantern was very much needed. Carefully she held it so that the light fell upon the way

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they had to take, a way which would have been difficult, if not dangerous, without its friendly aid.

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," said Mrs Jones as she took her little daughter's hand in hers.

"Yes, mother, I was just thinking of that," replied the child. "I wish I knew ever so many more verses like this one."

"How glad I would be if your father and I could teach you more but it's years since we learned. We've got no Bible and our memories are not as good as they used to be," sighed the mother.

A walk of some length, and over a rough road, brought them at last to the little meeting-house where the church members belonging to the Methodist church were in the habit of attending.

They were rather late and the service had begun but kind Farmer Evans made room for them on his

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bench, and found for Mrs Jones the place in the psalm-book from which the little group had been singing. Mary was the only child there but her face was so grave and her manner so solemn and reverent that no one looking at her could have felt that she was out of place. The church members who met there from time to time had come to look upon this little girl as one of their number and welcomed her accordingly.

When the meeting was over and Mary, having relighted her lantern, was ready to accompany her mother home, Farmer Evans put his great broad hand upon the child's shoulder, saying, "Well, my little maid! You're rather young for these meetings but the Lord has need of lambs as well as sheep and He is well pleased when the lambs learn to hear His voice early, even in their tender years."

Then with a gentle fatherly caress the good, old man released the child

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and turned away, carrying with him the memory of that earnest intelligent face, happy in its intentness, joyful in its solemnity, having in its expression a promise of future excellence and power for good.



“Why haven’t we a Bible of our own, mother?” asked Mary as she trotted homeward, lantern in hand.

“Because Bibles are scarce, child, and we’re too poor to pay the price of one. A weaver’s is an honest trade, Mary but we don’t get rich by it. We

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think ourselves happy if we can keep the wolf from the door and have clothes to cover us. Still, precious as the Word of God would be in our hands, more precious are its teachings and its truths in our hearts. I tell you, my little girl, they who have learned the love of God have learned the greatest truth that even the Bible can teach them. Those who are trusting the Saviour for their pardon and peace and for eternal life at last can wait patiently for a fuller knowledge of His Word and will."

"I suppose you can wait, mother, because you've waited so long that you're used to it," replied the child; "but it's harder for me. Every time I hear something read out of the Bible I long to hear more and when I can read it will be harder still."

Mrs Jones was about to answer, when she stumbled over a stone, and fell, though fortunately without hurting herself. Mary's thoughts were so full of what she had been saying that she had

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become careless in the management of the lantern and her mother, not seeing the stone, had struck her foot against it.

“Ah, child! It’s the present duties after all that we must look after most,” said Molly, as she got slowly up; “and even a fall may teach us a lesson, Mary. The very Word of God itself, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, can’t save us from many a tumble if we don’t use it aright and let the light shine on our daily life, helping us in its smallest duties and cares. Remember this, my little Mary.”

And little Mary did remember this and her later life proved she had taken the lesson to heart – a simple lesson, taught by a simple, unlearned handmaid of the Lord but a lesson which the child treasured up in her very heart of hearts.