

DERFEL, ROBERT JONES (1824 - 1905), poet and socialist

Name: Robert Jones Derfel
Date of birth: 1824
Date of death: 1905
Parent: Catherine Jones
Parent: Edward Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet and socialist
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Poetry; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Religion
Author: David Gwenallt Jones

Son of Edward and Catherine Jones, born 24 July 1824 at Y Foty, his grandfather's farm in the hills between Llandderfel and Bethel, Meirionethshire. His parents moved to Tan-y-ffordd, a cottage near Llandderfel. In due course he left his home to look for work and, after a great deal of wandering, was employed by the firm of J. F. and H. Roberts [see **Roberts** of Mynydd-y-gof], Manchester, as a traveller, his territory covering Staffordshire, part of the Midlands, and North Wales as far south as Aberystwyth. He was a lay preacher among the Baptists and was a contributor to their periodicals, *Y Tyst Apostolaidd* and *Y Greal*.

In Manchester a literary society consisting of four persons - **Creuddynfab** (William Williams, 1814 - 1869, **Ceiriog**, **Idris Fychan** (John Jones, 1825 - 1887), and Robert Jones - was formed; Robert Jones insisted that they should all have Welsh surnames and added 'Derfel' to his own. He won prizes at the eisteddfodau for his poems in the classical metres. He also sent to the *Amserau* parts of a poem dealing with the 1847 reports of the commissioners of enquiry into the state of education in Wales; publication was withheld and he, thereupon, published the entire poem under the title **Brad y Llyfrau Gleision** (The Treachery of the Blue Books), 1854. In 1864 he published *Traethodau ac Areithiau* in which he pleaded for a university for Wales, a Welsh daily paper, a national library, village libraries, a national museum, a school of arts and crafts, and an observatory. This book makes it clear that he was one of the leaders of the national movement in the 19th century.

He abandoned religion and, under the influence of **Robert Owen's** books, became a socialist and rationalist. R. J. Derfel was one of those who, in 1890, started the Manchester and District Fabian Society. Between 1889 and 1904 he wrote in English many pamphlets and songs on socialism from which it was clear that he was more of an Owenite than a Fabian. Between 1892 and 1903 he published a series of letters and articles on socialism in *Y Cymro* and *Llais Llafur* - the first articles on socialism to appear in Welsh; in these he sought to reconcile his socialism with Christianity and nationalism. Later he came under the influence of the secularist movement, more especially as this was interpreted in the works of Holyoake and Bradlaugh, and contributed a number of articles to the *Freethinker* and other secularist and agnostic periodicals.

When he gave up preaching, about 1865, he bought with his savings a Welsh bookshop in Manchester which had attached to it a printing press and it was from this press that he published some of his English pamphlets on socialism, and also '*Derfel's School Series*,' annotated English poems on **Llywelyn the Last** and others, with short extracts from Scott, Coleridge, etc.; but this venture soon came to an end. He died 17 December 1905, and was cremated.

Author

David Gwenallt Jones, (1899 - 1968)

Sources

Detholiad o Ryddiaith Gymraeg R. J. Derfel (Aberystwyth 1945), with an introduction by D. Gwenallt Jones, 1945, i, ii

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Robert Jones Derfel](#)

Additional Links

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