

JENKINS, JOHN (GWILI) (1872 - 1936), poet, theologian, and man of letters

Name: John (Gwili) Jenkins
Date of birth: 1872
Date of death: 1936
Spouse: Mary E. Jenkins (née Lewis)
Parent: Elizabeth Jenkins
Parent: John Jenkins
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet, theologian, and man of letters
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born at Henty, Pontardulais, Carmarthenshire, 8 October 1872, son of John and Elizabeth Jenkins. He began preaching (with the Baptists) in 1891, and after a short period at Gwynfryn (Ammanford), the school kept by **Walcyn Wyn** (Watkin Hezekiah Williams), went in 1892 to Bangor and thence (1896) to University College, Cardiff; at both alike, preaching and poetry seemed to him more important than examinations. In 1897 began his friendship with **(Philip) Edward Thomas**. From 1897 to 1905 he assisted **Walcyn Wyn** at Gwynfryn, but in 1905 went up to Jesus College, Oxford; he graduated in the Theological School in 1908, and in later years won the degrees of B.Litt. (1917) and D.Litt. (1932). Throughout these years he never ceased to write poetry and prose, to preach, and to lecture. He felt no inclination to the pastorate (he refused three invitations), and although alert and thoughtful hearers highly valued his preaching, the excessive rapidity of his delivery, and his advanced views, precluded favour among the thoughtless or conservative. Nor, in poetry, was he successful in the strict metres; it is significant that all his successes in provincial eisteddfodau were gained in the free metres, and that his sole triumph in a national eisteddfod was the winning of the crown (at Merthyr Tydfil in 1901), which is given for work in free metres. After leaving Oxford he succeeded **Walcyn Wyn** at Gwynfryn; and in 1910 he married Mary E. Lewis (they had two daughters). In 1914 he was appointed editor of *Seren Cymru* - he edited it till 1927, and again from 1933 till his death. The war of 1914-19 put an end to his school, and in 1917 he moved to Cardiff, at first as assistant to **Thomas Powel**, professor of Welsh at University College, then as acting-professor *sede vacante*, and finally in charge of the Salesbury Library (1919); it was at Cardiff (1920) that he published his volume of English poems. His wanderings ceased when in 1923 he was appointed professor of New Testament Exegesis at the Baptist College (and also at University College) at Bangor. He did much work there, publishing in 1928 *Arweiniad i'r Testament Newydd*, and in 1934 a volume of poetry (*Caniadau*), and editing *Seren Gomer* from 1930 to 1933. But quite certainly his *magnum opus* was his book on the history of theology in Wales, published in 1931 under the somewhat misleading title *Hanfod Duw a Pherson Crist*, a piece of research in a field which hardly anyone before him (excepting maybe **Owen Thomas**) had worked systematically. A list of his other writings in prose and verse, with a selection of his sermons, will be found in his biography by E. Cefni Jones, 1937. In 1931 he was elected archdruid. He died 16 May 1936 and was buried in the graveyard of the old Independent Meeting-house at Llanedy, Carmarthenshire. Gwili was a jovial man despite his disappointments, and a good companion; his little impracticalities only enhanced the affection of his friends.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

E. Cefni Jones, *Gwili: cofiant a phregethau* (Llandysul 1937)

John Moore, *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas* (London 1939), 168, 190, 274
personal acquaintance

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Jenkins](#)

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