

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

MORS TRIUMPHOUS.

(By Jeannette Marks.)

Each new election for the town council found Griffith Griffiths still unelected. The primary reason for his failure was a party matter; Griffiths was a Conservative, whereas every other Welshman in the town of Bryn Tirion was a Radical. Let him change his politics, said Bryn Tirion. No, said Griffith Griffiths, never! And the town knew he meant it. But, added Griffiths, I will be a member. For thirty years this battle was waged; children were born, and their children; mothers grew old and died; and Griffiths grew rich in slate and sheep. Now he was sixty and still unsuccessful. If he wished, he could buy up all Merionethshire; true, but he could not buy up one independent, honest Welshman, whether that Welshman counted his sheep by tens or thousands. Nor, to do Griffiths justice, did he think of buying votes, for he was as honest as his fellow-townsmen. Pulling his whiskers, he looked vindictively at the mantelpiece before him, with its cordon of shining, smiling china cats. Had he not done more for the village than any other man? He had given Bryn Tirion two sons of whom to be proud, he had provided the young minister with a wife in the person of a beloved daughter, he had piously paid for tearing down a shabby old treasure of a church built in the time of Edward I, he had presented the village with a fountain and a new bread oven, he had introduced improved methods in cleaning and shearing sheep, and he employed daily over one hundred men in his slate quarry. Notwithstanding all these benefactions, he was still obliged to consider schemes for winning a paltry election.

"That's a happy thought," he exclaimed, starting forward. "I'll do it. Aye, it'll win this time. I'll go for it myself an' bring it home, I will. There'll be no word spoke when they see that. It'll cost me a hundred pounds an' the trip, but I'll do it."

Griffiths' eyes twinkled as he winked at the mantelpiece cats.

"There'll be no doubt this time, my girls. No doubt, no doubt this time, an' every old granny in the town a-thankin' me. Oho, ho, ho!"

Mrs. Griffiths peered in.

"Father!"

"Aye!"

"Father?"

"Well, mother?"

"Is it a joke?"

"No-o, a joke, yes, a—no-o, it is not."

"Father, what are ye thinkin'?"

"I—I, well, I've been a-thinkin'!" replied Griffiths, with conviction.

Mother's face expressed censure.

"I'm thinkin' now, mother; I'm thinkin' of goin' to Liverpool."

"Liverpool! an' what would ye be goin' there for?"

"I'm thinkin', mother, of goin' tomorrow."

"Thinkin' of goin' tomorrow?"

"Aye!"

"Are ye goin' about slate?"

"No, not just about slate," father hedged.

"Is it sheep?"

"No, not exactly sheep."

Mrs. Griffiths by this time regarded her husband with alarm.

"Ye no been to Liverpool in twenty years; am I goin'?"

"Why, no, mother; I'll travel there one day and back the next. I'm—I'm a-goin' just—I'm a-goin' for the trip."

"For the trip!" sniffed Mrs. Griffiths.

"What'll I bring ye, mother?"

"I'm no' wantin' anything," replied Mrs. Griffiths, coolly.

While her generous husband was running about Liverpool to buy another benefaction for Bryn Tirion, Mrs. Griffiths was receiving calls at Sygyn Fawr.

"Bore da," said Olwyn Evans, stepping over the brass door-sill of Sygyn Fawr.

"Bore da," replied Beti Griffiths.

"I hear Griffiths is gone to Liverpool?"

"Aye, he is."

"He went yesterday?"

"Aye."

"He comes back this evening?"

"Aye."

The clock ticked and the china cats smiled blandly at the silence.

"He's not come yet?"

"No, he has not."

Olwyn re-adjusted her shawl.

"Ilan says he's not taken the trip for twenty years?"

"No, twenty years ago this September."

"Rhys Goch says he's gone for new machinery come from Ameriky. And at Cwm Dyli farm they say Griffiths's gone to sell sheep. Has he so?"

"It's neither sheep nor slate," replied Beti Griffiths, acridly.

"Jane Wynne and Jane Jones is ill," said Olwyn Evans. "Their folks 've been to the chemist's in Tremadoc for them, but you'd think they'd have the doctor, now wouldn't you?"

"You would," assented Beti. "Jane Wynne's eighty; how old is Jane Jones?"

"She's comin' seventy-five."

"She is?"

"The chemist says it's fallin' with both," commented Olwyn. "They'll not die very far apart. They'll be keepin' the minister busy, what with visitin' them and then buryin' them. It'll be hard on Robert."

"It will."

"You say Griffiths is not back?"

"No, not back."

"He'll be comin'?"

"Aye."

The evening light lay purple and lavender on the heather-covered hills; it cut through Aberglaslyn Pass in a golden shat, gliding the jagged top of Craig y Llan and making the cliff-side of Moel Hebog sparkle. Griffith Griffiths sniffed the honeyed air of his Welsh valleys hungrily. The nearer he came to home the more purple seemed the heather and the more golden the gorge.

"How'd ye think of it, Griffiths?" said Jones, looking back approvingly.

"Well, the village hasn't any."

"It'll be a great surprise, man."

"It will be," agreed Griffiths.

"The folks over to C'n'rcon can't give themselves airs any more."

"Well, no, they can not."

"Did Beti know?"

"No; a woman worries when she's to keep a secret."

"The folks have all been askin' for you for two days; and Jones' face shone with the same delighted good will as that on his master's."

The caravan moved slowly into Bryn Tirion. At the rumble of wheels Olwyn thrust her head out of Cwm Gloch door, took one look at the moving load, and rushed into the back garden for Ilan. To Ty Isaf they hurried with the crowd; girls with water-pails dropped them; children staggering along under mammoth loaves of bread fresh from the oven tumbled them in the white dust of the road; old women put down their bundles of fagots; dogs ceased their quarreling and children their playing, all rushing in the same direction. Griffiths and Jones were stripping away the crating.

"It's an organ for meetin'," said Marget Owen.

"It's a new pulpit," exclaimed Magee Powell.

"It's a HEARSE!" cried Olwyn Evans,

as the bagging was ripped from one side.

For an instant admiration made the concourse silent; then old Marsha Rowell said softly:

"At the Lord had 'a' asked me what I wanted most, he could no done better."

"Surely, it is the Lord's gift," affirmed Elen Roberts.

"To think I'd live to see a real live hearse!" shrilly exclaimed old Annee Dalben.

"It's a fine smart present, it is," said Howell Roberts, "an' there wouldn't no one else 'a' thought of it except Griffith Griffiths."

"It'll be pretty and tasty with mornin', now won't it?" commented Gwen Williams.

"It's a pity Jane Jones and Jane Wynne's too sick to be here an' see it, when they're likely to have first chance at it," declared Olwyn Evans.

"It'll be fine for the first as is buried in it," nodded Elen Roberts, wistfully.

"It'll be an honor," assented old Annee Dalben.

"The doctor from Tremadoc has been called in," remarked Beti.

"Has he so?" replied Griffiths, toasting his feet before the fire and eyeing the smiling cats benevolently. "He's a clever young man."

"Aye, but it won't save Jane Jones or Jane Wynne."

"No?"

"The Joneses is havin' him come every other day, so the Wynneses is doin' the same. They're both fallin' rapidly. When the family asks about Jane Jones, all he'll say is, 'She's no worse.' An' when the Wynneses ask about Jane Wynne, he says, 'She's no better.' Olwyn Evans says it's her opinion he don't know which is worse; doctors, she thinks, has to keep quiet, they're always so uncertain what the Lord is plannin'. It'll be hard on Robert if they both die the same day an' he has to bury them simultaneous. Virginia says he's poorly now from havin' to make so many visits each day on the Joneses, to say nothin' of the neighbors flockin' in to ask questions after each visit. It's hard on Robert."

"Aye, it is," assented Griffiths, peacefully.

In the thirtieth year of the contest Griffith Griffiths had won his election; by the gift of the hearse he put Bryn Tirion under a final obligation. Politics paled before the generations of dead who would be indebted to this benefactor. That a man should be a Conservative or a Radical mattered not to the dead, and the living must discharge for the dead their debt of gratitude. But the outcome of this contest was quickly lost sight of in the uncertainty of a new strife. Would Jane Jones or Jane Wynne be buried first in the new hearse? While Griffiths and Beti were still discussing this question the door-knocker clapped rapidly.

"I do believe it's Olwyn Evans come with news," exclaimed Beti.

"Nos dda," said Olwyn, disposing of her greeting. "She's seen it!"

"Seen it?"

"Aye, Gwen Williams. She was walkin' there, by the old bridge over the Blaslyn, this evening, an' first she thought it was a light in the old mill, for it looked large, just like a lamp-flame. Then she saw it was movin' and it was comin' towards her."

"It was the Candle of the Dead she saw?" asked Griffiths.

"Aye, it was; the nearer it came the smaller grew the flame, till it was no bigger than a thimble. Gwen was frightened so she couldn't move from the wall; she let it pass close by her, and it was a woman carryin' the light."