

## HOWELL HARRIS, THE WHITEFIELD OF WALES.

## ORIGINAL LETTER.

Though Wales forms no unimportant section of our Empire, and furnishes a title to our future King, we actually know less of it than of many foreign lands. Long did its iron-bound coast and frowning rocky fastnesses stand as a barrier against the inroads of modern civilization. The "children of the Cymry" were isolated as the hardy mountaineers of the Caucasus, or of Kurdistan. Cradled amid storms, breathing the bracing breezes that blew keen from the towering peaks of Snowdon, and the tremendous steep of Penmanmawr, they lived on as their fathers had done; inheriting all the traditions of the elders, maintaining in spite of all political changes, a rude independence, and retaining, in spite of the flight of time and the fluctuations of fashion, all their primitive simplicity. Only lately has this "land of the mountain and the flood," begun to resound with the shrill snorting of the Iron Horse; and now its varied beauties are being disclosed, its vast resources are being developed, and its primitive people are being brought abreast of the age. Religiously, the change is marked. Little over a century ago, Superstition brooded over Wales, dense as the wetting mist which wrapt her rugged hill slopes. "The people sat in darkness." Huts, resembling the bothie of the Highlander, or the cabin of the Irishman, dotted their smiling valleys or peered out from their dizzy heights, through whose murky gloom pierced not a ray of the Sun of Righteousness. These humble cottages clustered generally round Churches scarcely less humble, devoted to some native saint, and claiming an antiquity of many centuries. These churches witnessed the enacting of a dumb show, mis-named worship. These huts witnessed the frequent gathering of neighbouring cottagers to open up the treasures of legendary lore, and the mysteries of "second sight." Green swards formed the scenes of sacred plays,—parodies on Scripture History gone through in a semi-theatrical style. Holy Wills (as in Ireland) abounded, to which a healing virtue was attached, and pilgrimages were made. The praises of the Virgin Mary were chaunted. The "passing bell," which rung out the soul from time into Eternity, was the signal for the Welsh Peasant to pray that the soul then shelterless might be kept from the "hounds of darkness," to whom it was supposed the space between earth and heaven was allotted as a "hunting ground." Where the Welsh Peasantry had any well defined religion at all, its main formularies consisted in the Creed, the Commandments, and the Old Prayer; the following version of which is borrowed from Goronva Camlan:—

"Mother, O mother, tell me art thou weeping ?

The Infant Saviour asked, on Mary's breast :

Child of th' Eternal, nay, I am but sleeping,

Though vexed by many a thought of dark unrest.

Say, at what vision is thy courage failing ?

I see a crown of thorns and bitter pain ;

And thee, dread child, upon the cross of wailing :

All heaven aghast, and rude mankind's disdain."

Wales very partially shared in the blessings of the Great Reformation. The days of the Commonwealth dawned more propitiously. Then a hundred and fifty faithful men were planted within her borders. Their devoted labours relieved the deepening darkness. Around the names of Powell and Gouge hallowed associations gather. Thomas Gouge especially, who has been spoken of as the Charles Simeon of his day, is referred to in the current Welsh Literature as "the benefactor of the nation of the Cymry."

But this brief season of light was like a premature bright day in an English spring, "after which the gloom of winter returns, and the buds and blossoms