

A "CRACKED-VOICED" PREACHER

William Howells of Long Acre

By E. W. PEARCE

"A cracked-voiced Welshman in Long Acre, of the name of Howell, a wonderful and original thinker, whose discourses always arrested me."

Such was Cardinal Manning's description of the Rev. William Howells, of Long Acre, a Welsh worthy who deserves a more prominent place in the ranks of the distinguished sons of Wales than has been given him.

William Howells was born at Llwynhelig, near Cowbridge, in September, 1778, and was the eldest of a family of twelve children. His first tutor was the Rev. John Walters, who published a Welsh dictionary and who also had the reputation of being a bigoted Churchman and an ardent anti-Methodist.

On April 3, 1800, Howells entered Wadham College, Oxford, and was made forthwith sub-librarian of the Bodleian Library. His career at Oxford, however, was considerably hampered by persistent ill-health. In a letter to one of his



WILLIAM HOWELLS

friends he states: "I am very ill and have been so at intervals from the time I entered college."

HIS CONVERSION

The human instrument in the conversion of Howells was the Rev. James Hinton, a Baptist minister, who had charge of a congregation in the city. As Manning resorted to the ministry of Howells in after years he likewise in earlier years had listened to Hinton, and the result was conversion. "At Oxford the Gospel first reached my heart from the lips of an Englishman," he wrote.

What induced the ardent young Churchman to attend a Baptist church? Probably it was the thrilling story of the Glamorgan Baptists, together with the reputation of the Oxford minister.

After spending three years at the University Howells returned home. Having reached Cowbridge he prepared himself for Holy Orders. Many complaints had already reached Dr. Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, concerning the Calvinistic and Methodist tendencies of the Llwynhelig candidate. But the

Continued in next column.

Continued from preceding column

bishop was a prelate of very charitable views, as is shown by his "Life," published in 1818.

THE LLANGAN CURATE

Howells gave Dr. Richard Watson entire satisfaction in all his replies and soon became curate of the church at Llangan. He preached to large congregations and even travelled in the company of the noted Rev. David Jones of Llangan on preaching tours to Gyfylchi and Llangeitho.

In 1811 the Rev. David Jones died, but the Llangan living was withheld from the popular curate and was given to another. Consequently Howells broke away from Wales and hastened to London.

On his arrival in the Metropolis he became the curate of St. Ann's, Blackfriars. The young Welshman was once again to be severely tested in the midst of strangers. An enemy had sent an accusation against him to the bishop concerning his evangelical doctrine.

Mr. Goode, the rector, however, reminded Dr. Randolph that "the gentleman in question was a native of Wales, that he had received all necessary testimonials to his character, that he could find no ground for complaint in him unless that he possessed too much Welsh fire for cold English hearts." The answer silenced the bishop.

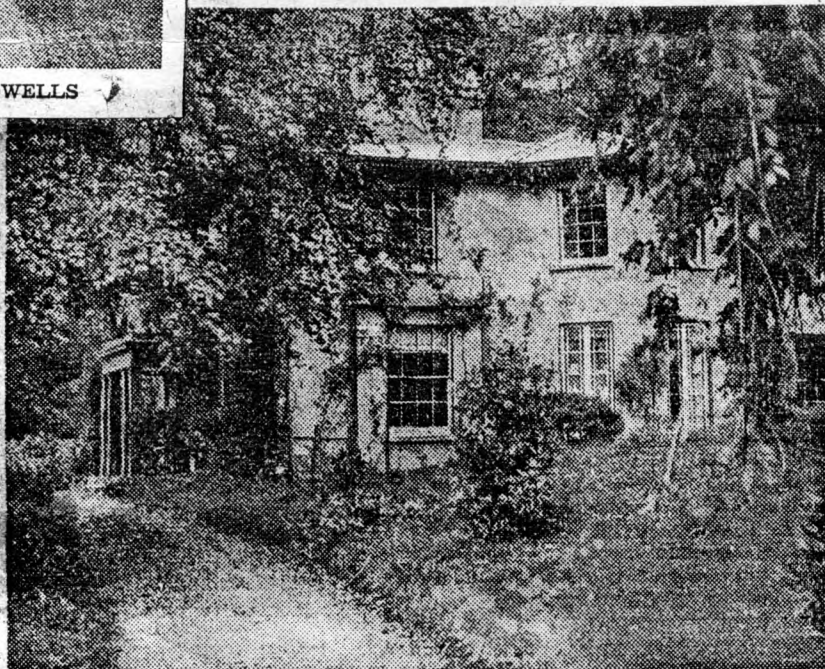
AT LONG ACRE

The rector of St. Ann's died in 1816, but Howells was not invited to the living. It was the old story of Llangan repeated. His friends were disappointed, but their loyalty was undiminished, and eventually he became the lessee of the Episcopal Chapel in Long Acre, in the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

The Long Acre Chapel had always been renowned by reason of the notable ministry of Cecil and Foster. Its subsequent history proved that Howells succeeded to maintain its traditions.

Through a ministry that was both powerful and enlightened Long Acre became the centre where men and women of high social standing sought and found the Light. The success of the preacher was phenomenal.

He died on November 18, 1832, and was buried in a vault at Trinity Church, Islington, aged fifty-five years.



LLWYNHELIG FARMHOUSE, Cowbridge, the birthplace of William Howells.