

Biography of Morgan John Rhees

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RHEES, MORGAN JOHN (1760-1804), divine, was born in Glamorganshire on 8 Dec. 1760. Although his parents were in humble circumstances, he was well educated, and became a teacher. Joining the baptist church, he determined to be a minister, and, after studying at a baptist college at Bristol, was appointed to the charge of the baptist chapel at Peny-garn, Monmouthshire. While there he gained an equal notoriety as a preacher and politician, and so keenly did he sympathise with revolutionary opinions that on the outbreak of the French revolution in 1789 he resigned his charge and went to Paris. In a few months he was again in Wales, disappointed with the French revolutionary leaders, but more zealous than ever in upholding his own political opinions. About the beginning of 1790 he founded the quarterly 'Welsh Treasury,' through which he attacked the English ministry, and became one of the most notorious political leaders in Wales. By-and-by he was threatened with prosecution, and, after consultation with his friends, he resolved to go to America and there find a suitable situation for the founding of a colony of Welsh malcontents. He landed in February 1794, and was received by Dr. Rodgers, provost of the university of Pennsylvania.

He travelled over the southern and western states, preaching as he went, and, after engaging in ministerial work for two years in Philadelphia, he purchased a large tract of land in Pennsylvania, to which he gave the name Cambria, and upon it founded a town called Beulah. Here he settled in 1798, opened a church, and attracted Welsh immigrants. But American conditions failed to kindle his political enthusiasm, and his fame there is solely owing to his powers as a preacher. Shortly before his death he removed to Somerset, Somerset county, where he died, 17 Sept. 1804. He was survived by a widow, the daughter of Colonel Benjamin Loxley of Philadelphia, and five children.

He wrote some hymns in Welsh, but few of them have been translated. Shortly before his death he published in America a selection of his 'Orations and Discourses.'

[Sprague's Annals of the American Pulpit, vi.344; Allibone's Dictionary of English Literature.] J.R.M.

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