

of all who are associated, both far and near, with this sacred shrine of Calvinistic Methodism in America!

The first gymanva of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church in America was held at Penycerau, May 10, 1828. With the mere mention of this we turn to the chapters which follow to study the gymanvas and presbyteries of the Church.

V. THE GYMANVAS AND PRESBYTERIES

THE organizing of the Calvinistic Methodist church at Penycerau, Remsen Township, Oneida County, New York, in 1826, was both significant and prophetic. It meant that Calvinistic Methodism was definitely established on the American continent. Moreover, it had received recognition and indorsement of the denomination in Wales, and was accepted as a church belonging to that body. This fact, when it became known, no doubt influenced and encouraged emigration on the part of Calvinistic Methodists in the homeland, and they came and settled in Oneida and adjoining counties. Such was the tide of immigration, following close upon the organization of the Penycerau Church, that other churches soon began to spring up in other neighborhoods in the settlement.

At the beginning all were members of the mother church, but as settlers increased some lived at a distance from the immediate vicinity of the church. In these new neighborhoods, cottage meetings, such as Sunday School and prayer meetings and even fellowship meetings, were held. But all went to Penycerau for the preaching services and the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the course of a few years these neighborhood services developed into churches; so that in 1828 there were four churches of the denomination in Oneida County, and it was in that year, on May 10, that the first gymanva ever held in America convened at Penycerau Church. No record shows who presided as moderator or who preached at the public services. Rev. Benjamin Davies was the only ordained minister of the denomination in America at that time, so far as is known. This brings up the query, What is meant by a gymanva? It is rather difficult to define. The first gymanva, as it was called, at Penycerau was in all probability not an organized body but simply a day of preaching. The first gymanva held in Wisconsin in 1844 is reported to have had a large audience present, considering

the newness of the settlement. But only one preacher and two ruling elders were there.

The early gymanvas in America were nothing more than a day of preaching—or, in some cases, two days—when one service, in which elders took a prominent part, was devoted to informal discussion of some religious theme or doctrinal subject and another session might be devoted to consideration of the welfare and outlook of the local church.

When the churches in a given settlement or combination of settlements in a state multiplied, business or ecclesiastical sessions were introduced and organization was extended until finally a state body called a "gymanva," or "gymdeithasva," became a permanent organization. The words *cymanva* and *cymdeithasva* are used interchangeably in the published reports of the state organizations, and this is somewhat confusing. The word *cymanva* means a meeting, an assembly. The word *cymdeithasva* means an association. The word "gymanva" may well apply to the early gatherings, for they were merely an assembling of people at a preaching festival. But the more appropriate name for the organized or state body would be the word "cymdeithasva," which means an association of presbyteries and churches within a given state or area. So while a gymanva was held at a very early day in some communities, it required some time before the gymanva became a state body, or *cymdeithasva*. But, for some reason, the name which has prevailed in America is gymanva, even when applied to the state body. This may be accounted for by the fact that people in general thought of the state body in terms of its semiannual stated gatherings, assembled in representative capacity through its qualified delegates. That the name gymanva should prevail is natural also from the fact that the preaching element in the assembly was the important thing, especially in the mind of the laity. To the business or ecclesiastical sessions they paid little attention. The great preaching sessions—of which there were six or eight in a gymanva, with two sermons delivered in each service—held the chief interest and people assembled from a large radius to listen to the great preachers, some of whom were true masters of assemblies. We have followed the usual designation in this volume, and have applied the name gymanva

to the state organization as well as to the quarterly or semiannual meetings of that body.

Moreover, the gymanva preceded the presbytery in point of time and organization. It was not until the gymanva grew and extended over a large area that presbyteries came into existence. The presbyteries also, in many cases, grew spontaneously without the authority of the gymanva. They sprang up in local sections, based on the feeling that the gymanva covered too large an area for the convenience of local settlements, or groups of neighboring settlements; so the presbytery came to exercise ecclesiastical authority as a subdivision of the gymanva. These divisions grew quite naturally, and were later recognized as presbyteries within the gymanva.

The gymanva, not the presbytery, was the controlling institution in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church. The gymanva came first in point of time and remained first in point of importance. Even the Welsh General Assembly could only advise and counsel; the authority of the gymanva was final. In the Presbyterian Church commissioners to the General Assembly are sent from the presbyteries; in the Welsh Calvinistic Church they were elected by the gymanvas. Ordination in the Presbyterian Church is a function of the presbytery; in the Calvinistic Methodist Church it was a prerogative of the gymanva. In the Presbyterian Church the General Assembly is a legislative body and the final court; in the Calvinistic Methodist Church the gymanva (synod) was final. In the Presbyterian Church the session metes out discipline in the local church; in the Calvinistic Methodist Church the entire local church (communicant members) at the weekly fellowship meeting—which was moderated by an elder—received and dismissed members, administered discipline, and gave attention to any other business touching the spiritual welfare of the church.

It may readily be seen that the judicatories in the Calvinistic Methodist Church correspond, broadly speaking, to the session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly in the Presbyterian Church. But in prominence of functions they differ. In the Presbyterian Church the presbytery and General Assembly appear to be prominent. In the Calvinistic Methodist Church the seiat, or

fellowship meeting, which is the governing body of the local church, and the gymanva have the prominence.

The early fathers of Calvinistic Methodism in America were scrupulous in their adherence to the polity of the denomination in Wales in all matters so far as conditions in the new environment would permit. The gymanva in Wales was held quarterly. It was called the "quarterly gymanva." The presbytery in Wales was held monthly and was called the "monthly meeting." The early gymanvas in America were also held quarterly and were called quarterly meetings, or quarterly gymanvas. The nearest approach to the monthly meeting in point of frequency was the "six-weeksly meeting" (*cyfarfod chwe'wythnosol*). Such meetings prevailed for many years in the East, but were later changed to bimonthly, then to quarterly, and finally to semiannual meetings of the presbyteries.

With this general statement pertaining to the organizations of the Calvinistic Methodist Church we now turn to a brief account of the six gymanvas, together with the presbyteries and the churches within them.

VI. THE NEW YORK GYMANVA

SO MUCH has been written in the foregoing pages about the New York Gymanva, as the beginning of the Calvinistic Methodist Church in America, that nothing more need be added except perhaps to state that during the first few years the churches in Pennsylvania were closely associated with and under the paternal protection of New York, but were never regarded as a separate presbytery. They were simply a group of churches that formed a part of the three-cornered gymanva of New York, namely, the Oneida County group, the Pennsylvania group, and the church in New York City.

The first gymanva was held in Penyaerau Church, Oneida County, in 1828, and for over one hundred years its sessions continued to be held in unbroken succession. Even after the Calvinistic Methodist Church united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1920, its gymanvas and presbyteries were kept intact, except where there was direct conflict with the polity and usage of the Presbyterian Church, as in the case of the New York City Presbytery (C.M.) where a single church session constituted a presbytery. Great gymanvas were held and the multitudes frequented them. For several early decades the Remsen region in Oneida County was the Mecca, but in later decades Utica became the center of Welsh activity.

At first the gymanvas were held quarterly. Repeated attempts to reduce the number of the sessions failed. To reduce their number was difficult because, when it came to a vote of the churches, the people declined to have them reduced. In the early 1860's the number still remained four gymanvas and six "six-weeksly," or presbytery, meetings in the year. But in 1865 the break was made and the gymanvas were reduced from four to three. The "six-weeksly" meetings,¹ however, were continued at the former rate,

¹ The name "six-weeksly" meeting held over even when the meetings were held bimonthly, and the quarterly presbytery meeting was called the bimonthly meeting for many years after it became quarterly. In function they were all the equivalent of presbytery meetings.