

(Mary Jones walked 28 miles across a mountain pass on her own in order to buy a Bible; her special journey led to the foundation of the Bible Society which now sends scriptures world-wide in the: language of the people; re-told here by Ros Harding from Roger Jones' musical "*Greater Than Gold*" ISBN 0.7197-038--4)

Mary Jones lived with her family in the small village of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant, in mid-Wales in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. Her father was a weaver and, like so many people of the time, the family was poor, could not read, and possessed no Bible of their own. Nevertheless they had a real faith in God and regularly attended chapel on Sundays where they heard the Bible read out loud. At home in the evenings they often sat knitting, and spinning wool, by the fireside and re-telling some of the stories they had heard. Despite the absence of a Bible in so many homes, families in Mary Jones' little village loved the scriptures and attended Chapel regularly.

Mary sometimes went to visit a farmer and his wife who lived some distance away. They were called Mr. and Mrs. Evans, and sometimes Mrs. Evans read to Mary from the large family Bible they possessed. She was also allowed to turn the pages herself and longed to be able to read it. Mrs. Evans promised Mary that if she learned to read, she could come and look at the Bible whenever she wanted. When a school opened in a village a few miles away, Mary was one of the first pupils and soon learned how to read. Mrs. Evans kept her promise and whenever Mary visited, she would allow her to read the family Bible.

One day a visitor came to the village school. He was the Rev. Thomas Charles, a Minister living in Bala, a long way from Mary's village. He was greatly concerned with the establishment of schools and Sunday Schools in many of the remote mountain villages throughout Wales. He belonged to an organisation called the *Religious Tract Society*. He was very impressed when he was introduced to Mary Jones, especially when he was told that she had gone to school because she so longed to be able to read the Bible for herself.

Mary was determined to have her own Bible, and so she set about the task of earning enough money to buy one. This was very difficult in those days because money was scarce. She helped her parents, sewed for people, ran errands for the village and sold the eggs from some chickens that Mrs. Evans gave her. It took many years to save all the money she earned, and when she was fifteen she at last had enough to buy a Bible. She hadn't spent any of the money, but patiently put it away for this moment! Mary knew that the Rev. Thomas Charles, whom she had met, had Bibles for sale in Bala. This was twenty-eight miles away from her village. But she was determined to go. She left her family, and carrying her shoes and her precious bag of money, she set off on her own to walk the long and difficult journey across the Welsh mountain passes. She sang many of the Welsh hymns that she had been taught in Chapel to keep her spirits high, and her feet moving along.

Imagine the surprise of the Rev. Charles when Mary knocked on his door and said she had walked all the way from Llanfihangel-y-Pennant to buy a Bible. Mary burst into tears when the Rev. Charles told her that he had no Bibles left. Mary stayed with the Rev. Charles and his family until a new delivery of Bibles arrived. When they came he gave Mary not one Bible, but three, because he was so impressed with her faith and patience. The story of this brave young Welsh girl who so desperately wanted a Bible in her own language that she was prepared to work for it, save for it, and then walk miles to fetch it, spread to the ears of many people. It inspired the *Religious Tract Society*, to which the Rev. Thomas Charles belonged, to start the world-wide work of **Bible Societies**. Today one hundred such Societies are seeking to provide Bibles in people's own language at prices they can afford. This is the story of one girl's special journey of faith.