

WELSH
CALVINISTIC METHODISM

A Historical Sketch.

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CHAPTER XI.

Concerning Welsh Revivals.

WE have seen and heard much of revivals within the last few years. A great awakening took place in America in the year 1858, and it visited this country, and spread more or less throughout the British Islands in the years 1859 and 1860. Since that time it has been usual to hold what are called "Revival Services." Possibly there is not a neighbourhood in the kingdom where these are unknown. Series of prayer-meetings are held, in which earnest prayers are offered to God to revive His work, and stirring appeals are addressed to men, urging them at once to come to Christ and accept the proffered salvation. We have had professional "Revivalists" going about to hold these services, and some of those good people advertised as converted colliers, converted shoemakers, or converted something else. Some of them were men of sufficient spiritual discernment to ascertain the exact number who, at a particular service, had been brought under conviction. We have heard the converts classified after the following fashion:—"Wednesday evening—twenty-four cried for mercy, and eighteen found peace." Far be it from us to say anything uncharitable or unfriendly of attempts to get up a revival, for we reckon that every religious service ought to be an effort in that direction. We have seen some of those revival meetings followed by unmistakeably beneficial results, and have seen some of them turning out very flat affairs indeed. A popular minister once related to us how he had produced a revival, and sought to impress us with the idea that it was a very simple process, and such as we ourselves could very easily carry out; but we wish our readers to understand that revivals which we have to speak of as having taken place in Wales were very different from all this. The phrase which we have quoted above about a certain number crying for mercy, etc., is an importation from England, and we believe we are right in saying that it has not hitherto been translated into the Welsh language. Those revivals usually occurred, not as the result of any predetermined and special effort to produce them, but in the ordinary means of grace, and were frequently unexpected by the great mass of the congregation. As it was on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples "were all with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting," it has often happened in Wales. When the congregation had assembled together to hold the usual service, and while that service was proceeding in the usually quiet manner, the preacher would suddenly find himself under some unusual influence—felt at liberty to relinquish the string of his discourse, and to utter words which were not on his paper, and thoughts which had not occurred to him in his study. Some of the oldest brethren and sisters would soon recognise

the sound. John would remark to his brother Simon, "It is the Lord!" and possibly follow the glad announcement with the shout, "Gogoniant!" to which Simon would respond with "Diolch iddo byth!" Presently the whole congregation was ablaze. Christians shouted for joy that their good Lord had again visited them, while numbers who had been so far indifferent to their souls' salvation would send forth the distressing cry, "What shall we do to be saved?" It was no transient feeling. It would be present at the next service, and the next afterwards, and for months to come. It would spread to the adjoining districts, perhaps over the whole country, and possibly over the greater part of Wales. There is a wild and mountainous tract of country lying between the counties of Brecon and Cardigan, where, for many miles in every direction, there are no human habitations, save here and there, in a deep dingle, just one house, the residence of the sheep-farmer, with three or four small cultivated fields in its immediate vicinity, and at some distance up the slopes of the mountains an occasional shepherd's hut. Crossing the range there is a bridle-road leading from Llanwrtyd Wells, in the valley of the Irvon, to Tregaron, in the valley of the Teivi—a distance of about eighteen miles "as the crow flies," but of considerably more as the rider must travel. It is a magnificent ride, through scenery of the wildest grandeur. From the highest points in his progress the traveller will descry nothing but a sea of mountains, some rounded, and some rugged and precipitous, extending in every direction—bluff after bluff, and precipice beyond precipice, and, as it seems to him, interminable. Here are the "Wolves' Leaps," where the Irvon, before it has become a river, has worn its rocky channel to an enormous depth, and rushes and gurgles in the dark caverns and recesses beneath, while the rocks on the surface on both sides nearly touch each other. Here, too, are the "Cock's Paces," where the Towy, many miles before reaching the plain, does the same thing on a greater and grander scale. Here, likewise, near the spot where the Dothia and the Towy rush, with a deafening roar, into one another's embrace, and more than half way up a rugged and rocky cone, is "Twm Shon Cati's Cave," from whence, a couple of centuries ago, that celebrated outlaw was wont to issue forth, to spread terror and rapine through the surrounding districts. It is not a mountain at all that one traverses here, but a country of mountains. It is a path that a stranger would better not attempt alone, for the chances are that he would soon find his way into some place from which it would be exceedingly difficult to find his way out, and he might shout until he could do so no longer without making himself heard by any human being. In the heart of this wild district there is a comfortable chapel, into which worshippers gather from distances varying from two to eight miles. We attended a service in this chapel on a Sabbath morning some years ago. The building was filled with attentive worshippers, and the adjoining yard was occupied by some fifty or sixty ponies, that had borne as many people to the place. The first Methodists preached in the farm-houses among those mountains, and God bore witness to the Word of His grace, and a

church was formed in the year 1747, which sometimes held its meetings at a homestead called Cwmdu, and sometimes at another called Bronyrhelem.

In the year 1779 a remarkable awakening began in this out-of-the-way place. A homely exhorter, of very ordinary preaching talents, but of great piety, Jack Edward Watkin by name, was preaching at the place on a Sabbath afternoon, when suddenly the fire kindled, and numbers who had been so far hearers only became deeply concerned for their everlasting safety. Daniel Rowlands heard the glad tidings, and he resolved to ascend the mountain to see this thing which the Lord had wrought. He preached, and *the power* was still present, and even mightier than on the preceding Sabbath. On his return home he said to his friends, "It is a heath fire and will spread abroad." And it *did* spread from these dreary mountains to the valleys and plains around, until it had reached many and far- distant localities in South and North Wales, and thousands were brought earnestly to seek everlasting life.

One of those great revivals began at Llangeitho, not in the public service, but in several families in the neighbourhood simultaneously. When the brethren worshipped God with their own households, they felt a gracious and mighty influence descend upon their souls. They carried the fire with them to the chapel, where it became a blaze which spread far and wide through the surrounding country, and resulted in the salvation of many souls.

The Rev. Thomas Charles refers in a letter to a revival which took place in 1791, in the following terms: "Here at Bala we have been blessed with a great, mighty, and glorious outpouring of the Spirit upon the congregation, and especially upon the children and young people. Scores of the wildest and most thoughtless young men and women have been converted. The convictions are manifest and deep, and in the case of some persons so mighty that they are brought to the very brink of despair. Their comforts likewise are similar. If the Lord will please to continue to work as He has done for some weeks past, the kingdom of the devil will be in ruins. 'Go onward! Go onward, thou King of Glory!' is the earnest prayer of my soul day and night. I verily believe that the Lord intends to give a terrible shake to the kingdom of darkness, for He takes away its pillars. Some of those who were foremost in the service of Satan, and in rebellion against God, are now foremost in seeking liberty through the blood of the Lamb. It is easy work to preach the Gospel here at the present time. Divine truths lay hold on the minds of the people, in their own greatness and importance. Divine rays and irresistible power accompany all the truths that are delivered. It is delightful to see how the most stubborn hearts are bent, and the hardest melted. I would not have died without seeing what I have lately seen—no, not for the whole world. The free schools are greatly blessed. The children, who were like pearls hid in the dust and mire, now shine with great brilliancy and beauty. Little children from six to twelve years of age are melted and overcome. Their little minds are full of spiritual things night and day. All this is

undeniable fact; I do not use exaggeration, but, on the contrary, have only selected a small part of that which is. The Lord has done great things for us, and to Him be the praise!”

Besides those seasons of refreshing which spread thus from place to place, there were frequently mighty influences descending on particular services, and making one sermon the means of conversion to great numbers of souls. There are many instances of such sermons in the early history of Welsh Methodism; sermons long remembered in the localities in which they were delivered and the fame of which has been handed down from generation to generation, to the present day.

There was a preacher living at Lledrod, in Cardiganshire, and afterwards at Twrgwyn, in the same county, whose ministry was frequently owned in this remarkable manner. His name was David Morris. His son, Ebenezer Morris, of whom we shall yet have occasion to speak, far surpassed him in preaching talent, but the father was a man of note, and especially made so by the mighty power of God which frequently attended his ministry. He made frequent visits to North Wales, preaching two or three times a day as he went along, and some of those evangelistic tours were remarkably successful; so much so that there was scarcely a sermon delivered by him that was not the means of conversion to some souls, and in several instances to a great number. On one of those journeys he preached at a place near Rippont Bridge in Anglesea, from the words, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” A wonderful influence descended upon himself and upon the congregation. His heart within him melted with compassion towards the lost souls before him, and he burst into a loud and dolorous shout, while every line of his countenance expressed the deepest and most intense feeling—“O bobl y golled fawr!—y golled fawr!” The English for which is—“O ye people of the great loss—the great loss;” but that does not convey half the idea. The people bent before him like reeds before a mighty tempest; multitudes joined the neighbouring churches under impressions received from that sermon, and it is talked of to this day in the locality as “the sermon of the great loss.”

There are some who are wise enough to account for all this on natural principles. They are by no means the discoverers of the theories which they enunciate on this subject. There were remarks made on the Revival, in the days of Daniel Rowlands, equally wise, enlightened, and intellectual with those which are made in the present day. It is easy to say that “it was all excitement.” There was excitement, we admit, and much of it; but we scarcely believe that there is any one prepared to say that there was none on the day of Pentecost. But to say that it was all excitement is quite another matter, if by that it is intended to imply that it was a momentary feeling, which passed away without leaving any lasting beneficial effect on those who experienced it. There is abundant and conclusive evidence in thousands of instances, that that idea is quite a mistaken one. There

may be different opinions as to the propriety of those manifestations. The Rev. Rowland Hill, during one of his visits into Wales, witnessed some of these scenes, and said, "I like the fire; but don't like the smoke." It was prettily said, and quite in character with many of the other sayings of that eminent man; but perhaps it would have been too difficult, under the circumstances of the time, to get the one without the other. It is possible that the people allowed themselves to be too much excited,—that they ought not to have shouted, and that it was very blameworthy in them to jump. We are not at all disposed to argue that point; but it is certain that thousands of those who were thus excited, and who expressed their feelings in cries of distress, and in shouts of gratitude, underwent at the time the great change, and proved themselves for the remainder of their lives to be new creatures.

The idea has gone abroad that the preachers of those days encouraged such manifestations, and made every effort in their power to produce them. Some excellent men seem to have been under the impression that the preacher had only to say "Shout," and that the people shouted; and to say "Jump," and that they jumped accordingly. Dr. Evans, in his *Sketch of the Denominations of the Christian World*, designates one of his "Denominations" "Jumpers." He gives a description which, no doubt, was satisfactory to himself, of what he calls "this kind of worship." He administers a very just castigation on the miserable thing which his own imagination, or that of his informant, had created; and while admitting that "there were some sincere and pious persons to be found among this class of people—men who think they are doing God service, while they are the victims of fanaticism," he generously declares that "these are the objects of compassion;" and it is comforting to find him expressing his conviction that "they doubtless will find it in God."

But it is all an absurd caricature. It is a mistake to assert that these manifestations were only known in Wales; and another mistake to intimate that they were regarded by the founders of Welsh Methodism as necessary accompaniments of true religion. It is true they were defended, or rather apologized for, by W. Williams of Pantycelyn; but how? Not by attempting to show that they were necessarily connected with earnest religion, but by endeavouring to prove that they were not inconsistent with it. David leaped before the ark, and so we *may* do; but there was no attempt made to show that we ought to do so. We are not greatly in love with these things ourselves; and yet these cold times make us feel that, if we could only get the "fire," we would not very strongly object to a little of the "smoke."