

Anatomy of a Revival (4)

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A Discerning Look at Revival as an Evangelical Tradition especially as in Wales in 1904-05

It is interesting at this juncture to examine the further testimony yielded by the Rev. Joseph Jenkins. Writing to his son-in-law on 5th May, 1904, he noted the “Christian Endeavour meetings” as being a salient factor in spreading the “revival.” Such meetings he portrays as being characterised by outbreaks of prayer and praise with “some praying while others half-way through the prayers break out to sing, young girls mainly, girls in service going forward to pray without being asked ... the eyes of all are filled with tears when the girls pray.” A young man, he says, was “as full of the Holy Spirit as in the days of the apostles ...”

In an earlier letter, he writes,

I am unable to do anything ... I am in the middle of the sound of the wind. God himself is here ... I don't know what to say—only weep, and yet I cannot weep. Twenty-year-old girls are prophesying ... I don't know where to start with anything ...³⁶

While we only have space here to view excerpts from Jenkins' testimonies, we have, we believe, presented accurately the scope and tenor of them. Enough has been cited to demonstrate that in all the exultation and drama of the moment, Jenkins *again* does not mention the Lord Jesus Christ anywhere. We have to indicate our concern that this is a strange breed of Christianity that, whilst inflaming such intense fervour and devotion, in the midst of it all, finds nothing to say about Christ, the emphasis being entirely on the “fireworks” of the emotions. Isaiah, in his vision of the Most High in the temple, was certainly not wrapt up with any ecstatic experiences sweeping through his person, save only the intrinsic uncleanness of his own nature. John, in the Apocalypse, in the midst of the most intense visions and experiences, right from

³⁶For the full text of these letters of Rev. Joseph Jenkins, see Kevin Adams, *A Diary of Revival 1904-1905*, pp. 44-46.

the beginning expresses how he was overwhelmed with the sight of the Lord Christ, and not with any “fire coursing through his being” or “blue flame.”

But look at Jenkins’ letters, what a farrago of confusion and chaos they exult in! He actually *glories* in having to say: “I am unable to do anything ... I don’t know what to say ... I don’t know where to start with anything.” From the description he gives of the revival meetings it is no wonder he was at such a loss, surrounded by such a phantasmagoria of spiritual anarchy. But is this a picture of the workings of the same Spirit manifest among the apostles? Did not Paul write two whole epistles to the Corinthians to correct similar irregularities to those Jenkins describes, and to insist that presbyterial discipline must prevail in Christian worship? Did he not insist that “all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40)? Did he not tell them that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (I Cor. 14:32-33)?

But already, in these early motions of the outbreak of the first revival in 1904, albeit under the aegis of Keswickism, we see the rush of emotion that was to explode forth into a stream of its own in the autumn of that year. For if there were indeed two revivals in Wales, the second one was deeply rooted in the first one, indeed one could say it was the logical consequence of it, though the proponents of the first revival held themselves in check from espousing the extremes endemic to the later spiritual incandescence.

In the early months of 1904 therefore, this religious whirlwind was being generated in Southwest Wales, and quietly spreading from its origins in the west toward the industrial heartlands of Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire. And it is at this juncture that we meet with the young man who was to precipitate the second revival, parallel to the one already in motion.

A former mineworker, member of the Moriah Calvinistic Methodist Chapel at Loughor, Evan Roberts felt the “call” to the ministry of his denomination sometime in 1903. In preparation for this, he was sent, in the spring of 1904, with other young men, for pre-seminary training at a country grammar school in a little west Wales town called Newcastle Emlyn, about 12 miles southwest of Newquay, and Rev. Joseph Jenkins of “blue flame” fame. Evan Roberts was therefore, without realizing it, propelled by circumstance into the very area where the first of the revivals was already spreading; it having

begun at Newquay, as we have seen, with Florrie Evans on the second sabbath of February. Several salient facts and connections emerge.

First, the then 27-year-old Roberts had been characterised as intensely religious for some years, going right back to his youth. He appears to have been “a slender young [man] with piercing eyes, a lovely smile, a clean, upright look, and some signs of idealism ...”³⁷ He owned some serious religious books. A. A. Hodge’s *Outlines of Theology* (probably in its Welsh translation) was one of several tomes to be found on his shelf, as were the several volumes of Bishop Ellicott’s *Commentary*.³⁸ Roberts himself could speak however, of “three books that greatly contributed to his spiritual development” besides the Welsh Bible: *The Christian Instructor* by Thomas Charles of Bala, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and *The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Hymnbook*. The first two of these might have been orthodox enough, but about the hymnbook we must express serious doubts. It was “methodistic” through and through, and was commonly produced with and used in conjunction with the Welsh Wesleyan Methodists. Bishop Ellicott’s *Commentary* was a popular evangelical work in those days, but Ellicott himself, of course, was the big name associated with the Revision Committee of the 1870-80s which steam-rolled over the Textus Receptus.³⁹ His commentary, let it be said, being a collection of work by various nineteenth century Anglican scholars, was not without its idiosyncrasies. Hodge’s *Outlines* are quite useful, but somehow one has one’s doubts as to how far Roberts would have, indeed, *could have*, studied this tome, for reasons that shall become clear as we examine matters further.

Whatever orthodoxy Roberts had to hand, from an early age he was transfixed by mysticism. Let him speak for himself concerning those formative years of his youth at Loughor in the 1890s and up into the early 1900s:

³⁷B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, p. 18. In a “revival” centennial article in the *Western Mail* of Cardiff for Monday, 4 October, 2004, Roberts is described as being “devastatingly handsome.”

³⁸Cf. Adams and Jones, *A Pictorial History of Revival* (Crusade for World Revival and 1904 Ltd, 2004), p. 50.

³⁹Ellicott, sometime Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, was in fact the Chairman of the Revision Committee and published a pamphlet in defence of the Revisers and their Greek Text of the New Testament. That “Greek text” was of course the Westcott/Hort hybrid. Dean Burgon’s eloquent and detailed demolition of Ellicott’s learned pamphlet can be found printed at the end of Burgon’s book *The Revision Revised* (Reprint Conservative Classics, 1978).

For a long, long time I was much troubled in my soul and in my heart by thinking over the failure of Christianity. Oh! it seemed such a failure—such a failure—and I prayed, but nothing seemed to give me any relief. But one night, after I had been in great distress praying about this, I went to sleep, and at one o'clock in the morning suddenly I was waked up out of my sleep, and I found myself, with unspeakable joy and awe, in the very presence of the Almighty God. And for the space of four hours I was privileged to speak face to face with Him as a man speaks face to face with a friend ... And it was not only that morning, but every morning for three or four months. Always I enjoyed four hours of that wonderful communion with God. I cannot describe it. I felt it, and it seemed to change all my nature, and I saw things in a different light, and I knew that God was going to work ...⁴⁰

Critique

Again, a total absence of reference to the Lord Christ characterises this whole testimony. One compares it to the vision of John in the book of Revelation, and one sees the stark disparity between the two visions. Strange, too, that though experiencing “unspeakable joy and awe,” Roberts was still quick-witted enough to note down the time: “one o'clock in the morning” and “for the space of four hours.” We note that in the Apocalypse the blessed John only noted the time when “there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour” (Rev. 8:1). Furthermore, the “face to face” communion with “God” that Roberts claims, as if the Mediator was unnecessary in his case as with John, tends to put forth a picture of Evan Roberts as one greater than not only the apostle, but greater too than Moses, for even Moses was only allowed to see “the back part” of God as He passed by.⁴¹

We have heard one contemporary, learned, orthodox, Reformed theologian, confronted with this testimony of Roberts, exclaim that the man must have been a charlatan. We are inclined to think that Roberts was sincere, but seriously duped by false theology.

Like all forms of mysticism, however, the “kick” from these “spiritual

⁴⁰Cf. B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, p. 18.

⁴¹Cf. Exodus 33:19-23, especially v. 20: “for there shall no man see me, and live.”

experiences” does not last, and one finds the mystic stumbling about forlornly in between times, evidently suffering some kind of “withdrawal symptoms.” A lust for more and more such “experiences” is engendered, and the mystic will enter deep depressions during the uneventful intervening periods. So it was with the young Roberts. For some reason the nightly visitations ceased after four months, and appear to have become intermittent, and finally stopped completely. Roberts entered the characteristic depression state at this juncture, and by 1903 was “convinced he would fail his examinations” and that he was not really called to the ministry. He would strangely testify at this time as to “how hard” he felt, and that though “he loved the Father and the Holy Spirit” he “did not love the Son.” This latter time of hardness he experienced while at Newcastle Emlyn Grammar School during the spring of 1904. Indeed, at first the impression of Roberts gained by people at Newcastle Emlyn was of one who “puzzled his friends, worried the landladies, and angered the tutor as the study of academic things became a torment to him and he escaped gladly into” evangelistic missions.⁴²

It is noteworthy that whilst at Newcastle Emlyn, Roberts, like his fellow students, naturally associated himself with the Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in that town, attended its meetings, and became friendly with the minister and his family. Now it so happens that this minister was a real old-timer with a great beard, and as great a reputation for having been a preacher forty years previously in the 1858-60 revivals. Revivalism was a strong feature of the Rev. Evan Phillips, despite the fact that he characteristically preached only 20-minute sermons. He had a large family, of three sons and five daughters.⁴³ Interestingly his eldest son was Dr. Tom Phillips, who was to become a famous London eye surgeon, making his home in the borough of Harrow. Dr. Tom fathered two children, a boy named Ieuan (pronounce Yiye-yan), and a girl named Bethan. The boy was to grow up and become an Evangelical Calvinistic Methodist minister in South Wales during the mid-twentieth century. The girl, Bethan, grew up to become a graduate medical doctor from University College in London, where she

⁴²On these spiritual fluctuations in Roberts’ pilgrimage, see Adams, *A Diary of Revival 1904-05* pp. 51, 59, and B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, pp. 18-19.

⁴³On Rev. Evan Phillips and his family, see Adams, *A Diary of Revival 1904*, p. 52, and also Adams and Jones, *A Pictorial History of Revival 1904*, for various photographs.

encountered, and later married, another famous London medical man, the young David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, M.D., M.R.C.P. These facts are important, as well as interesting, as they throw light on how and why Lloyd-Jones seemed completely under the spell of the revivalist tradition. His attachment to his wife's family was very close and intense, such that Lloyd-Jones' funeral service in 1981 was held in the very chapel in Newcastle Emlyn where his widow's grandfather had ministered for over fifty years from the 1860s on. It was there, in the town cemetery at Newcastle Emlyn, Lloyd-Jones' mortal remains were laid to rest.⁴⁴

Interestingly when Ieuan and Bethan Phillips were respectively eight and six years old and by then living in London, their father actually sent them both down by train to their grandparents at the manse in Newcastle Emlyn just so that the two could witness first hand the revival scenes of 1904-05.⁴⁵ With their grandfather, old Evan Phillips in the thick of things, and reminiscing of his experiences forty odd years previously in the 1858-60 revival, doubtless these two children were deeply impressed and carried the impressions with them for the rest of their lives. Old Evan Phillips testified in fact, that during 1904-05 Revival he had wept so much till he became "soft," and that he hadn't wept that much in the revival of 1858-60. In 1904-05 Phillips was "convicted about his smoking and gave it up" but later returned to it "for medical reasons." The aged minister could also talk of his own mystical experiences including a vision bearing a prophecy concerning revival coming to a certain Welsh valley, which was indeed fulfilled.⁴⁶ In appreciating all this, one can further understand the powerful and all-embracing ethos of revivalism which was heavily impressed eventually on Phillips' famous son-in-law, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and how he in his turn impressed it mightily on to the Evangelical Movement of Wales and the major phalanx of modern Welsh evangelicals.

Now it happened that the home of Evan Phillips, being the Calvinistic Methodist manse in Newcastle Emlyn, was "just a few yards away" from the grammar

⁴⁴The two volumes of Iain Murray's biography of Dr. Lloyd-Jones amply portray the closeness of this family connection, giving photographs of the Lloyd-Jones taken outside Evan Phillips' old manse even as late as the 1950s.

⁴⁵Cf. Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the First 40 years 1899-1939* (Banner, 1982), p. 45, n. 1.

⁴⁶Cf. Adams, *A Diary of Revival 1904-05*, pp. 52-54.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 52.

school, and it was a regular “home from home” for the pre-seminarians.⁴⁷ Encountering the old patriarchal minister, the young Evan Roberts was deeply impressed with what he saw as the godliness of the old man. In turn, Phillips himself would testify later of Roberts that “he was like a piece of radium in our midst.”⁴⁸

At the manse, Evan Roberts struck up a close friendship with three of Rev. Phillips’ daughters: Rachel, Anne, and Maggie.⁴⁹ Over the months of his stay in their town, these girls became important witnesses of the young man’s spiritual development, and they testified that while they were highly impressed with Roberts’ intense piety, yet they also became “sometimes worried, sometimes amazed, at what they were witnessing.”⁵⁰ So intense were Evan Roberts’ spiritual aspirations and exercises that Rachel and Anne Phillips both expressed their concerns over it. “I was very anxious about him ... and they told me to keep an eye on him ...” said Anne on 28th October, 1904.⁵¹ Two days later her sister Rachel could say that she “feared he was going too far and doing himself harm ... But God knows what burdened us was care for his mental condition ...”⁵² Apparently Roberts was “continually sighing” and asking for a prayer meeting to be initiated when he visited the manse. In one youth meeting the Phillips girls evidently beheld him in a “half-sitting posture, shedding tears and repeating over and over, ‘Glorify thy Son.’” The testimonies of these girls are interesting and important because they occur about one month after Roberts had supposedly been anointed with “power from on High” in the “baptism of the Holy Ghost” which he allegedly experienced in a meeting on 29th September. The ensuing days from then to 28th October were filled, it seems, with more spiritual experiences including a plethora of visions. And indeed, on that very day of 28th October, on which, as we have seen, Anne Phillips expressed her deep concerns about him, both she and her sister Rachel would testify that Roberts told them of his spiritual experience of the night before. “I did not sleep all night,” he said, for “the divine outpouring was so heavy that I had to shout out and ask God to withhold his hand.” At a meeting that very day in Capel Drindod, so Rachel and

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴⁹Adams and Jones, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵¹Adams, *A Diary of Revival 1904-05*, p. 76.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 83.

Anne Phillips would later relate, “Great was our anxiety about Evan Roberts. He was bent on looking heavenwards continually and we, poor creatures, endeavouring to get him to look earthwards ... at the time he wasn’t aware if he was in or out of the meeting, because of his absent-mindedness.”⁵³

But from here on, Roberts, supposedly endowed with power from on high, was on the brink of going out all over Wales to spread the revival. And it is at this juncture that he effectively began the second movement of the phenomena, breaking from the Keswick-dominated original revival. What has to be said, however, is that at no time did he appear consciously to think that he was actually starting off a second movement, but merely that he was continuing the revival already in full spate.

What is breathtaking here is how, in the midst of supposedly receiving copious anointings of the Holy Spirit, that gracious Holy Spirit who is described by Paul as being the Spirit of a “sound mind” (II Tim. 1:7), Roberts nevertheless displays those mental idiosyncrasies that created anxiety in the Phillips girls. As we have seen, they reported themselves deeply impressed by his piety, yet this was saliently tempered by “concern for his mental condition.” Womanly intuition, indeed ... future events were to confirm the accuracy of their perceptive instincts.

To be continued (DV) .

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.