

Mr. Evan Roberts and the Mission.

by Gwilym Hughes

The Evan Roberts revival highlights the importance of personal redemption and the New Birth, emphasizing the need for clergy to emphasize conversion and intellectual sustenance in their teaching and ministry.

Scripture: John 4:23, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:10, James 1:22, 1 Peter 1:23

Topics: "Personal Redemption", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

Gwilym Hughes reflects on the unique and powerful ministry of Evan Roberts, known as 'The Silent Evangelist,' during his time in Liverpool. Roberts' silent yet impactful presence garnered respect and interest from various communities, with his intense gaze, illustrative actions, and devout silences leaving a lasting impression. The Welsh revival led by Roberts emphasized the importance of personal redemption, spiritual passion, and the expression of deep emotions through hymns and prayers, showcasing a voluntary and impulsive worship style. Hughes highlights the need for all churches to focus on the central necessity of turning to God and emphasizes the significance of conversion and the New Birth in religious teachings, urging ministers to integrate intellectual understanding with spiritual truths.

Transcript

By Sir Edward Russell,

Editor of the Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury.

"The Silent Evangelist" has held his last Liverpool meeting. During the stay of Evan Roberts, while attention has been largely attracted, few have known what to say. Many have not known what to think. But from first to last the phenomena have been unique, and, in presence of them he has received, not only from all communions, but from the general public, demonstrations of respect and interest. There has been no indifference. There has been astonishingly little scepticism. Any scepticism there has been has scarcely been expressed. The general sentiment has been that there could be no doubt of the need to which Evan Roberts's ministrations have been addressed; that the success of those ministrations showed that he could make the need felt; and that, as good must result -- God speed to it. No one who has encountered this young man has doubted his good faith. No one could doubt his power over people of his nation. Nor has anyone disputed the reality of those traits which his admirers celebrate: his intense and searching gaze, his ready and illustrative action, his curiously bewitching smile, his devout and strenuous silences, his appearance of being amenable to instantaneous impulses, which he takes to be Divine. In

this respect it has been rather shrewdly suggested by a thoughtful member of the Society of Friends that what has happened with Evan Roberts is only what happens at every Quakers' meeting. Nor need more be made of it, though there were one or two incidents which favoured a more fanatical or more supernatural theory. The idea of good thoughts being put into the mind by God is one of the first to be entertained, one of the last to be surrendered. He who can with most conviction and effect convey such communications to others is the best George Fox or Evan Roberts. In each of these cases the thing specially notable -- the distinctively new trait in evangelism is the silence, which much overbalances the speech. The trait which has been least mentioned as to Evan Roberts, but which has been most new, has been the entire absence of personal push.

If anyone had gone into the great Welsh Calvinistic Church in the Princes Road, on Saturday evening, without any previous information, he might well have failed to discover -- at all events, till after four hours, and then he might have been forgiven for missing it -- that the 2,500 densely-packed, visibly excited people assembled had come to hear, and were longing to bear, a young man who in the main sat saying nothing, doing nothing, with his head on his hands. He might have been the Rev. John Williams's unimportant subordinate, waiting to take a message or to start a hymn. Those who have seen other revivals must know how totally different this is; and the evidence seems sufficient that from the beginning of his career in Wales Evan Roberts has behaved in the same way. Leaving unoffered the transcendental explanation which his disciples in solemn confidence advance, we may suggest as a rationalistic explanation the character and ways of the Welsh. There may have been in camp meetings in America scenes comparable to that of Saturday night. There have been no such scenes among the English. Go back to Wesley and Whitefield; come down to Moody and Sankey; if you will, to Torrey and Alexander; in all the revivals of these there was the visible personal domination, and in the last two contrived music. Whereas in the Welsh revival all is voluntary, impulsive. This one starts praying, that one starts singing, over the whole area of the congregation. The responses to what is heard are numerous. Response pervades. But no one obtains monopoly as mouthpiece. As often as not the weird, rhythmic, oft-repeated cadence of the Welsh petition, frequently in lovely female voices mellowing from moment to moment under the influence of spiritual passion, is the expression of some personal agony or ecstasy; desolation because of some dear one's insensibility to the Divine love or the Divine authority; joy at the remembrance and the experiences of salvation; tragic horror at the thought of hundreds then and there on the road to spiritual ruin; giant-joy in the faith that they will yet be saved.

Ever anon comes by swift casual force of humble personal initiative, bursting amidst and overwhelming the exclamations and pleadings, the great, inimitable volume of Welsh hymnody-- a vast, solemn, deliberate torrent of majestic melody. This, the warp of the magnificent sound-fabric. Shooting across it a grand woof of many harmonies, strong, vigorous, pealing, startling, with all the effect -- nay, more than the effect -- of the noblest counterpoint; greater in effect because the singers, the whole assembly --all knowing the words -- are to the manner born of this matchless musical achievement. A venerable Welsh friend whispers as you murmur your almost unspeakable admiration, "Because it comes from the heart." But even then you know that it comes from the heart of a national being and essence, which has no peer in the musical expression of spiritual emotion -- perhaps no peer in popular possession by spiritual realities. And this knowledge is deepened as you receive from kind, eager friends suggestions of the poetic purport of these wonderful, chiefly minor-key lyrics of two-thousand-voiced power. One of them is an impassioned appeal for likeness to Christ. Another pours forth in aeolian strains the air that breathes from Calvary. Another surveys from Calvary's height all the glories of the world, and serenely declares their true place in the scheme of things, and the higher range of truths which Calvary's deed and doctrine

have made part of the continuous experience of humanity.

When the adhesions of converts begin to be taken the singing take another tone -- that of pure joy. A hymn-verse is repeated and repeated in triumph, and the genius of the people seems to give newness even to the seventieth repetition. Of the solos, inspired by the wildest emotions and often sung with frenzied gesticulations in appeal to the Almighty -- but always well sung -- we need not speak. Let us note how Evan Roberts rises and without posing mounts to the height of the occasion. He eagerly turns the leaves of the pulpit Bible. He struggles with the evil principle which he seems to see rampant among the unyielding of his hearers.

He dissolves into his own smile at the thought of precious Bible passages and sidelights. Big book on shoulder he transacts, but not theatrically, the lost sheep reclaimed and so carried by the Good Shepherd. Then comes stress of gloom, and he buries his head in his hands and arms. Anon comes the head uplifted, the face suffused with the smile, prompted by something he or another has said. And a curious Welsh peculiarity is that what is a smile in Evan Roberts is often a quick genial laugh in some of his hearers. And when you seek the humorous cause, it was no humour, but a glad recognition of a familiar, household-word, spiritual joy. Meanwhile, you are one of a vast assembly which for three or four hours has been, as far as you can judge, intensely and individually racked by anxiety for the salvation of the unsaved minority present. We are using the language which best expresses the ideas of the rapt participators in the scene. It is a great illustration of the strength of the personal redemption idea in the popular religion of this country that where it is realised it can produce such a scene, and though the Welsh temperament is necessary for enacting it, English sympathy has no difficulty in understanding it. This is true not only in England and Scotland, but in America and in the colonies -- wherever English is spoken. May we venture to suggest that here comes in the permanent moral of the Evan Roberts Revival period?

Are our clergy in their regular ministrations justified in laying aside or leaving to occasional revivalists, as they undoubtedly have done for years, the active prosecution of the doctrine and practice of conversion? Whenever British religion has been earnest and zealous this element has been its key. Because it is in the background in the beautiful quietism of Keble, the sacerdotalism of Pusey, the reasoned continuity of Newman's Catholicism, the Oxford Movement has, after all, been a penchant rather than a popular power. There is, of course, much converting grace in High Church teaching, and Conversion was long the main business of the Evangelicals, who had to import it into Anglican usage and phraseology in order to do under Church of England forms their work in the world. But of late years the direct insistence on the New Birth has gone much into desuetude. Yet, if there is one irrefragable human fact, denied by none of any faith, it is that it must be right and saving (in every sense) to turn with full purpose of heart to good and to God. The extent to which this must be connected, either in rationale or method, with this or that dogma, must be decided by this and that Church. The important thing for the world is that all Churches alike should insist on the one central necessity on which Evan Roberts has been insisting, and for which, under his mystical stimulus, thousands personally and many thousands vicariously have during the past few weeks in Liverpool been wrestling with angels. Perhaps the most pathetic incident of Saturday evening was when it was pleaded for a young man in the galleries that in infinite distress he was willing and wishful to "decide," but that on Monday he would have to go to work among his companions, and he felt that then he might fall. Weak and foolish? Yes; but it is to strengthen such honest Fainthearts and triumphantly to extirpate by grace such cowardly folly of unaided human nature that the Gospel ought to be preached, and effectually, every Sunday. Such is the accruing lesson of the Evan Roberts Liverpool mission.

One other thing must in honesty be said. Things that exist cannot be annihilated either by ignoring them or by denouncing them. Let it be quite understood that the real results of sound inquiry as to Revelation are not got rid of either because Dr. Torrey protests against them, or because Evan Roberts says nothing about them. It was distinctly no business of Dr. Torrey as an Evangelist to make futile protests against the results of scholarship and reason. It was no business of Evan Roberts to deal with any such matter: He showed good sense, good taste, and a sound spirit in adhering to what was his business. The important body of ministers by whom the Welsh Churches are served are more and more cultured. The juniors are taking B. D. degrees at the new Welsh University. For these degrees they are examined by some of the finest of Biblical scholars. The testimony of those who know is that the members of Welsh congregations love the old unction, for which they have a special and untranslatable word, quite as well as ever, but they exact also weight and thought. It is natural and right that the pivot fact of the New Birth not only should be continually urged, but may at times collect around it an accumulated force of special interest and attention. But the ministers will lead the people into blindness if, either in their teaching or tacitly, they allow it to be thought that the truths of conversion are incompatible with the truths of the intellect. Happily there is not even incongruity between them. We should deprecate in the Revival atmosphere even an unconscious laying aside of intelligent conclusions. The New Birth not only does not render unnecessary -- it demands -- intellectual sustenance of the New Life.

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