

Part 1. Many Sowers, One Seed

by H. Elvet Lewis

H. Elvet Lewis explores the profound impact of the Welsh Revival on the spiritual life of Wales, emphasizing community, prayer, and the mystical presence of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 85:6, Isaiah 44:3, Zechariah 10:1, John 14:26, James 5:7

Topics: "Revival History", "Sovereign Will"

Description

H. Elvet Lewis preaches about the profound mystery and overwhelming flood of the 1904 Welsh Revival, highlighting the transformation it brought to the nation, reshaping its history and renewing churches. The sermon explores the question of whether such seasons of refreshing are beyond the Church's control or predestined by God's sovereign will, emphasizing the importance of waiting, working, and walking with God to create a reservoir of spiritual influences for the Spirit to use at the right hour.

Transcript

Chapter 1

He Has Shed Forth This

As the autumn of 1904 in Wales recedes farther and becomes more and more a memory, it grows more profoundly mysterious. At the time, to get hold of a date, to visit a place, to contemplate a personality, seemed explanation enough of all that was going on. We know better, far better, today. Dates, places, and persons were only outward and visible symbols of a wave - more, a tide - nay, an overwhelming flood, that has no everyday name, no secular explanation. The apostle of Pentecost had to be content with the one syllable - This; out of it all now shines This -nameless, mystic, all-subduing. Many waited long for its coming. Their hunger for it made them at times announce its near advent, but when it came it was a catholic surprise. Even the watchmen upon the walls of Salem knew not what to say, but they were glad. In the first days of its coming at Ebenezer, Aberdare, two old pilgrims who had never forgotten the Revival of 1859-60, but had kept their Simeon-like watch, suddenly sprung to their feet at a prayer meeting, and with arms uplifted, shouted: "Here it comes! Old 59!" There was no name for it, only the equation of an old and hallowed memory. It was This.

To write its record, to review its course, to pass equitable judgment upon its manifold result, must at best be only an attempt, partial in scope, incomplete in its audit. It has not only swollen the current of the nations life, it has changed the rivers course. The entire history of Wales has been re-shaped by it. True, it

is not without its disappointments, inconveniences, its regrets - all that a reasonable man would expect. "Miry places" and "marshes" unhealed there will be, apparently there must be, after every crystal flow of holy waters from the sanctuary. But let not the unfruitful exceptions make us forget the lush meadows, the trees of beauty and of healing on either bank. As long as the nation remains, there are trees of this river's blessing in 1904-5, "whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed."

Are these seasons of refreshing, in whole or in part, beyond control of the Church? Can we compel their coming? Or are they to be placed among the predestinate things, unconditioned blessings of Gods sovereign will? One is tempted to answer the second part of the question affirmatively, when considering it in this light: no amount, no form of organized effort could produce in 1906 what seemed as natural as a breath of air in the early months of 1905. I have seen, occasionally, an elaborate attempt to make it come; nothing was produced but disaster. Much of last years fire still remains. It burns inwardly more than outwardly. Once or twice this year I have seen it blaze forth with something of its virgin flame, but the very rareness makes its far-offness stand out more definitely. Why? There are thousands of hearts that would welcome it-possibly hearts cleansed by it, and more fit therefore to greet and appreciate its second appearance than its first. But one would feel it almost a blasphemy to suggest an organized intercession for its reappearance. We must settle down again patiently to wait - work and wait - for another such season; but we know little whether we can "haste the coming" of the day. Of one thing, however, we are sure, that our waiting, our souls thirst, our instant and constant prayer, our whole life of walking with God, create and supply a reservoir of spiritual influences which the Spirit can use at the right hour. If there is something absolute in the coming of the Spirit, there is also something conditioned. Predestination does not make human action of less value, but of more. We are of worth enough to have been taken into account in Gods eternal counsels.

Our present attempt will deal with apparent sources and with recognized results. There may be human sources that will never be marked in any map of earth; there may be results too secret as yet, too deep, to be tabulated here. "Lo, these are parts of His ways: . . . but the thunder of His power who can understand?" - or the stillness of His dew either! The Spirit is one, in all ages and places, but He can use a thousand varied instruments. And already we see the saying of Savonarola in a wider application, verified as to many instruments used in the Welsh Revival: When the Higher Agency is withdrawn from prince or priest, he is no longer an instrument, but a broken tool. Perhaps some or much blame attaches to the tool; perhaps more pity than blame.

In another way the Spirit has confirmed His own hand in the movement. Every promise relating to the Comforter contained in John 14-16 has been abundantly fulfilled during these months. "He will reprove," said the Promise. Tens of thousands know anew, since 1904, how true it is. He shall not speak of Himself;...He shall glorify Me," said the promise. What new kindness, what sweetness of affection, has gathered around the Name and Person of Jesus during these two years! What new meaning the title "Son of Man" has come to bear- the Man who comes nearest to every man, from childhood to old age. A father had, through drink, fallen into an early and dishonored grave, leaving his widow and children in want of bread. It was one of his children, raggedly clad, that left every heart in one prayer-meeting aching and yet exultant, as in his childish prayer he used phrases that must suffer in translation:-

"Dear Jesus, I thank thee for coming here as a poor man, so very poor - perhaps as poor as I am. Thou couldst have chosen the finest palace in the world to be born in, but Thou wouldst have been too high for me then. But I know how to come to a manger. I wish I had been living when Thou wert here. Everybody will want to cast their crown at Thy feet in heaven, but I should like to have laid my crown at Thy feet when

they were stained with the dust of the road, bleeding and wounded."

Besides this child's personal sentiment of Jesus, we place this portion of a woman's prayer:-

"Dear Saviour, I thank Thee that Thou wert crucified with Thine arms outstretched, to show that there is welcome for every one to come to Thee. Oh, I thank Thee that the old devil was not allowed to tie Thy hands behind Thy back, or at Thy side, or folded on Thy breast, but outstretched wide, to tell the world world to come to Thy bosom. Until these last days my prayer was very small - for myself for my friends, for Wales; but I have looked between the outstretched arms, and now Lord, save the whole world! Save everybody!"

To me, it was not the charm of quaintness that made these sayings so memorable, but the feeling they produced of being fresh from life. Those who used them seemed to say: "We have seen Jesus!"

So, on the very threshold, we forewarn all that we are in the presence of an unexplained but impressive mystery; nor will the mystery be diminished as we trace some of its manifold manifestations." We do not know"- said Evan Roberts himself, in one of the earlier meetings of his first journey-"how this revival has originated; we have no idea how many thousands have been praying in private for it; nobody knows how many. Nothing but the Day of Judgment will reveal it. He went on, There is a new life coming into Wales now. Everything will be changed. Why? Because Wales is opening her doors to receive the Holy Ghost. And without forgetting or minimizing the mistakes, the disappointments, the passing extravagances, the new difficulties in part created or increased by the movement, we cannot but still write - "He bath shed forth This."

Chapter 2

Characteristics of Religious Life in Wales

The Welsh people, in their religious life, have developed certain forms and methods in a way peculiar to themselves. In retaining their own language they have safeguarded their Celtic inheritance, for better or for worse. They have a bias towards the intellectual and social contents of religion, even when they are not moved to live its life. Religiousness, if not religion, is a national interest. This comes out in many of the institutions to which we are about to refer, and these had much to do with the democratic aspects of the recent revival.

THE WELSH SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Sunday school in Wales has two elements of power that do not prevail elsewhere- (1) its large adult membership; (2) its catechetical methods. In rural districts practically the whole community belongs to the Sunday school. In towns and populous valleys this is not so much the case, though here also a very large proportion of the churchgoers are also scholars. Apart from the religious bias of the race, we believe that the common method of conducting class teaching has much to do with the retention of scholars. The teacher presides and conducts, but seldom or never gives an address on the lesson. Each member of the class, by question or answer, or both, is expected to make a contribution to the exposition and application of the lesson. Free discussion is permitted and cultivated; the too forward are restrained, the too backward is encouraged. There is little need to point out that this not only trains them from the first in the phraseology of doctrine and devotion; it also stamps the text of the Bible more securely upon their memory. It supplies a stock of knowledge and expression which may become buried and lost for years,

but is there to be used when the souls awakening comes.

Then too, it is still the custom in many parts for one school to visit another, the whole service being devoted to impromptu questions and replies on a chosen chapter. It is a kind of exhibition day. Scholars try to excel among each other, and the whole school is jealous of its honor. Arising out of this, the schools of a district are grouped together and a united festival is held at intervals, for which the music has been especially prepared, and chapters especially studied. Some of these services are as interesting, as impressive, as evangelistic, as the finest preaching. It is religion established by democracy and voluntarily sustained by it. They stand, men of many conditions, almost equal: "Ward against ward, the small as well as the great, the teacher as well as the scholar."

PRAYER MEETINGS AND SOCIETIES

One never hears in Welsh Wales of "the week-evening address." It is observed in some of the English churches; otherwise it is unknown. Prayer meetings are an essential part of the church's syllabus, not infrequently even taking the place of the morning or evening service on Sundays. If the expected preacher does not make his appearance, there is no nervous disturbance. Without any ado, a prayer meeting is held, as if all had been pre-arranged. Not only so, but in country districts especially, the pilgrim prayer-meeting is an old and honored institution. This means that the meeting passes in circuit from house to house - the cottage of the laborer as well as the free-holders farmstead - week by week. The present writer owes more than he can tell to the Tuesday evening prayer meeting of the neighborhood where he was brought up, circulating in this fashion from house to house. Young and old were invited and helped to take part. Many of the efforts were very humble, but it was the common people's academy of devotion, where a Thomas a Kempis would have felt at home. Nor should we omit to mention that the missionary prayer-meeting on the first Monday of each month is still largely observed in Wales.

The "Society," born of the Methodist Revival of the eighteenth century, is almost as universal as the prayer meeting. To conduct it is an art in itself. Sometimes a theme is started - perhaps from the preceding Sunday's sermon - and each in turn has a chance of contributing, either an exposition or an experience, or at least a text or a hymn. If the Christian Endeavour movement has not flourished among Welsh churches, it is because the society meeting had in part prevented it - to use the biblical phrase. It is the Methodist class meeting modified, freely adapted to the genius of the race.

THE "CYMANVA"

This word, in the Welsh Bible, is the equivalent of "solemn assembly" (Joel 2: 15), and of general assembly (Heb. 12:23). It applies mostly to the annual denominational gathering of the churches of a county, or a group of counties. As a rule, the meetings occupy two days, one session being given to business, all the remainder being preaching services to which special preachers are invited. They are held mostly between the end of May and the beginning of July and, out of choice, in the open air. They move, year by year, from place to place, and it is almost a rule that the more sequestered the spot, the larger the audience. People come by train, on foot, cycling or driving, sometimes from great distances, starting early, returning late. It is a very mixed congregation, naturally, but it is safe to say that it will contain a large number of the faithful, the choice ones, of the churches, the men and women of prayer and life long service - a congregation that helps to make preaching. The writer's experience of these annual meetings for the last fifteen years leads him to remark that in nine cases out of ten the weather was favorable, and that never a summer passed without at least one meeting where the rapture and fervor bordered on revival.

experiences. The ninth wave would not be what it is but for all the preceding waves, the last reaching a mark almost as high as itself. Within the walls of an ancient castle, with only the blue sky for roof, on a hillside gently swept by the summer breeze in a wooded retreat on the outskirts of a town, strains have from time to time been heard, during all these years, which were easily recognizable again in the raptures of the revival. They were the Spirits rehearsals of the day of song.

There was also, and there is, the Singing Festival. For this again choirs and churches unite and come together periodically to render a program: hymn, and psalm, and anthem. But frequently, during the last few years, the song became larger than the program; that characteristic expression of Welsh fervor - the frequent repetition of a favorite strain - proved the presence of something more than musical art. The revival did not create the refrains that swept a vast congregation in their torrent; it found them already in the peoples memory and heart; it charged them with fresh power; it sanctified them anew. At one of these festivals, held some years ago at Neath, the late Dr. Joseph Parry (writer of the tune Aberystwyth, among many others,) moved by the hwyl of the meeting, foretold that the next revival would be markedly a singing revival. I may not live to see it, he continued, but some of you who are here today will see it, and you will recall my words. He was laid to rest in 1903, but his words were remembered, and proved true.

THE WELSH "HWYL"

The word has a particular as well as a more general meaning. In its more general sense of a good time, it may be applied to a political meeting, an eisteddvod, a concert, or even a sale. When things are going well, it is a season of hwyl. But it has a more private interpretation. It is used to denote effective melody of speech. All true oratory is instinctively, unconsciously set to music; the tune can be discerned by a listener with a good ear, set down and copied in notes and rhythm. But this is especially noticeable in Welsh preaching, more so, perhaps, than in any other tongues. There is a manufactured form of it; there are extravagant varieties of it; but when it comes naturally, with the rising warmth of emotion, and is made the instrument of the inward spirit with the aid of a well-modulated voice, its charm makes it an incalculable power for good. It sways a congregation almost at will. It is heard not only in the pulpit, not only on the day of the great Cymanva, but may suddenly transform the humblest prayer-meeting.

Many visitors from England and other countries were startled at the readiness, not of a few, but of almost the entire congregation, to take part in prayer and song; but long rehearsals, all unknowing, lay behind. What Moses saw was not a tree of Paradise descending out of heaven in a robe of fire and filling the desert with the Other-world's fires; he saw a common bush of the desert touched of God into flame that fed the leaf it kindled. Those prayers, those refrains at meetings who were never to be forgotten by the stranger from near or far, were no sudden shower from the sky either: they were ordinary men and women that prayed and sang, trained in the school of long years, and now set on fire by the Spirit whose very flame becomes the soul's manna. It was not a metrical expedient in the great hymn of the Veni Creator that brought the fountain of life and the fire into indisputable union-

Fons vivus, ignis, charitas.

In all the training and discipline, the toil of memory, the practice of piety, during more than forty years, the Holy Spirit had been the living fountain, too still to be heard, too hidden to be seen by the passerby. Everyone saw the fire: some were perhaps tempted to think that it stood by itself, with unrelated glow and all - separate flame. Nearer the truth was the sentiment I heard in a boys prayer at Bethesda: "O Lord, we should like Thee to open the graves today, and let the old people come back to see that their words are

not forgotten, and their prayers are not lost."

Chapter 3

The White Line of Revival

There are traces of the action of revivals in Wales from the first appearance of Christianity here. It explains much that is contained in legends of the saints; it has given form to some of the traditions which gather around the life of st. David; it reappears time after time, as at the coming of the little sons of St. Francis and the Lollards, and again at the dawn of Nonconformity, when, in the words of Walter Cradock, 'the Gospel ran over the mountains between Brecknockshire and Monmouthshire, as the fire in the thatch' - some hundreds of people, filled with good news, were telling it to others.

The Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century had two sources: one from within and the other from without. Daniel Rowland became the leader of the native move-ment. Howell Harris brought the fire from Oxford, and kept nearer, for a while, to Wesley and to Whitfield. But the two forces were soon merged and the whole movement was infused by the native spirit, assuming national characteristics. The old churches were renewed, new churches had to be formed. A new nation came out of it. In their work on The Welsh People, Principal Rhys and Sir D.Brynmor Jones remarked: "In 1730 the Welsh-speaking people were probably as a whole the least religious and most intellectually backward in England and Wales. By 1830 they had become the most earnest and religious people in the whole kingdom." While making some allowance for the exigencies of an antithesis, this statement, in its substance, is scarcely to be disputed. True, this result was not the fruit of the revival alone. The revival, which started in 1737, was followed by a great educational reform which was both secular and religious. A new literature had been born and a new social outlook had been gained. All these forces, building on the revival, helped to make Wales what it is described as having become by 1830.

During the nineteenth century there were several revivals - all of them national, in a modified sense, and one of them undoubtedly so. A brief sketch of the more re-markable of these will show how certain traits are transmitted from one to another, as by a hereditary law, and how these have again reappeared in the latest of all.

Every lover of Mount Snowdon knows Beddgelert and the Vale of Gwynant. In a farmhouse in the vale, one Sunday in August, 1817, a humble "exhorter" - Richard Williams by name - was expected to take a service. He came but the congregation was scanty. John ELias was preaching that day at Tremadoc, and the fame of the great preacher had, in spite of the distance, reduced the exhorters numbers almost to the lowest point. There was a hardness in the atmosphere too that made the discouraged preacher's task still more difficult. The people who were present envied those who had gone to hear John Elias. They sat before Richard Wifliams, but their ears were at Tremadoc. He struggled through the lesson and prayer and then took up the sermon, gradually warming to his task. And then, somewhere in the sermon, the inexplicable happened. Preacher and congregation were transformed. The humble "exhorter" stood forth a prophet of the Most High, in Pentecostal glow, and the house was filled with the Pentecostal cry of awakened souls. And in that Vale of Gwynant, that Sabbath evening, men said awe-stricken: "We never saw it on this fashon." Within five weeks of that day there was scarcely a house in the vale but the breath of prayer had filled it.

It reached the village of Beddgelert in its own way. On a Sunday in September a class of young girls was reading the crucifixion chapter in St.John's gospel. The teacher was a young woman of devout, earnest

mind. As they read the story, verse by verse in turn, something come into the narrative unfelt before. Silent tears stole down the cheek of each reader, and a sense of awe took them one and all. At the close, when the school was, as usual, being publicly catechized by one of the male teachers, his own spirit suddenly took fire in warning the young people against some local fair of evil repute. A line out of one of Williams of Pantycelyn's Welsh hymns seemed to possess him, "Gods grasp is the surest"; and as he repeated it more than once, the feeling which had melted and awed the young womens class affected the whole school. Not many days after, the chapel had become the scene of convictions and conversions. "Some were praying for pardon, kneeling on the floor of the pew; others, standing on a form, were uttering praise for Gods mercy; some were marching to and fro, singing with their whole soul the song of deliverance." It was a season of rejoicing. One day even, while busy hay making, someone started singing a hymn to himself, another caught it up, and another, until the whole band of haymakers, forgetful for a while of their toil, became a band of praying, singing worshippers. This revival continued for three or four years and its influence on the Snowdon district has been carried on to this day. It spread to other parts, but not generally.

An old survivor, being asked whether he could recall any signs preceding and heralding this revival, replied that he could remember nothing; "except," that the air for months seemed full of brotherly kindness and love."

Dolyddelen is far on the other side of Snowdon from Beddgelert, between Festiniog and Bettws-y-coed. Some twelve months previous to the Beddgelert incident, Williams of Wern was preaching here on the work of the Holy Spirit. In the course of his remarks he said: "What if you were to consent to have Him to save the whole of this parish? 'Ah, but how can we have Him?' Well, hold prayer-meetings through the whole parish; go from house to house -to every house that will open its door. Make it the burden of every prayer that God should come here to save. If God has not come by the time you have gone through the parish once, go through it again; but if you are in earnest in your prayers, you shall not go through half the parish before God has come to you." The seed was sown, but apparently it took no root, save in one unlikely soul. Among those attracted to hear the famous preacher was one woman, old, and lonely and irreligious. She was accustomed in her cottage to use the light of a rush candle, but for a prayer-meeting she felt that nothing poorer than a wax candle would do. Next morning she bought two, to be ready in time. But the weary months passed and no prayer-meeting called at her lowly door. She went at last to the shop where she had purchased the two wax candles and asked diffidently, "When is the prayer-meeting coming to my house?" The prayer-meeting which Mr. Williams of Wern said was to go from house to house." The shopkeeper felt rebuked, but answered off-handedly, "Oh! they care very little what anybody says." "Well, indeed, I bought two candles nearly a year ago, and have gone to bed many a time in the dark, leaving them unburnt, lest the meeting should come and find me without a candle." The word struck home; he told it to the church; the pilgrim prayer meeting was started, and the preachers prophecy fulfilled. It would be almost enough to say of this revival that it brought to Christ, amongst other men of note, one of the most eloquent of all the preachers of Wales, John Jones of Taly Sarn-"the peoples preacher, as he was affectionately called.

1829, 1839, 1849, 1859 - these four dates followed in such rhythmical order, with a decade between each, that they had almost produced in Wales a mild superstition. When 1869 passed, and then 1879, without any striking recurrence, there was on the part of many a real disappointment. But other people have fallen into the foolishness of dates.

The first of the four spread far and wide. It was accompanied by a good deal of physical manifestation of joy-shouting, leaping, and dancing - so much so as to make their English co-religionists anxious for the good name of religion. There is a tradition that Rowland Hill being sent down in the interest of sobriety, was himself so captivated as to forget to deliver his reproof. It is certain that reports make these scenes worse from a distance than they really are. Religious gossip is as loose as any other gossip. That there have been extravagances we may believe from some of last years incidents, but these, if they somewhat marred the effect, left a valuable balance in favor. The contemporary records in the magazines of the vernacular provide ample evidence of a deep and lasting revival on the eve of the Reform Bill.

A temperance movement preceded the Revival of 1839. The first advocates of total abstinence were not only subjected to violent attacks in the press and on the platform, but literally persecuted. In Montgomeryshire some even tasted the cup of martyrdom and so helped to defeat the malice of the foe. In the wake of this - or indeed in part parallel with it - came the religious renaissance, not with sound of tabret and athletic joy as in 1829, but intense, silent, almost somber. But it has been remarked that it was a very small percentage of those received into the churches then who went back. It is interesting to add that the immediate origin of the revival, apparently, was the visit of a Welsh minister from America, the Rev. B. W. Chidlaw.

The outburst in 1849 was largely due to the cholera scare. It bore the taint of fear. Thousands hurried into the churches, more particularly in populous centers, as in Glamorganshire. But "because they had no root, they withered away" in too many instances. Still, it is certified that many brought in through fear remained to learn the truth in love and live lives of faithful service. There are three gates into the Holy City from the north as well as from the south.

The revival of 1859-60 was more world wide, taking Wales on its way. It had already accomplished great things in America when a Wesleyan Methodist preacher, the Rev. Humphrey Jones, returning home to Wales, and to his native village - Tre'rddol, North Cardiganshire - began to hold mission services early in 1858. The birth of a revival seems always to be in some sequestered nook, to be nursed for weeks among the silence of the hills, or in some creek beside the sea. The fire spread from hamlet to hamlet, and to the larger towns it was only a report for months. The young Welshman from America found a comrade in the Rev. David Morgan, Calvinistic Methodist preacher. They preached prayer; they practiced it; they seemed to compel it. There was no special gift in either to mark them out for the work which God had called them to do. The health of the former broke down; the latter retired into the rank of ordinary preachers after the season of blessing. But during Gods season, they swept every audience into prayer. The churches of all denominations were moved to the core; very few districts were left unvisited by the power, but there were some. It bequeathed a blessing and a memory which lasted until 1904-5 came to take its place in the nations living heart.

The interval of forty-five years between the two Pentecostal seasons was not without its occasional showers of blessing, though they were mostly local and personal. The most noteworthy of these is associated with the name of the Rev. Richard Owen, Calvinistic Methodist preacher. It was spread over the years before and after 1880 - contemporaneously with some of the first evangelistic efforts of the Salvation Army. His methods were all his own. He was the least imitable of all that have moved the heart of Wales. He preached as though he were conversing all the time with the open Bible, scarcely lifting his eyes from it, but what conversations they were! When he passed away in 1887, "in the mid-journey of our life" he could number, it is said, as the record of his few flame-girt years, no less than thirteen thousand souls brought to Christ. "He had the privilege and the happiness," said Principal Edwards, "of setting at

noon."

One of the young workers of that period in South Wales was Miss Rosina Davies. And all through the years, up to the present, she has carried on a constant mission among all the churches. Even in the colder years her meetings often become reminiscent of 1859, and prophetic of 1904.

More particularly among English residents in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire, the "Foreword

Movement" of the Calvinistic Methodists- with Dr. John Pugh for its leader and Seth Joshua and others for its evangelists- had during recent years stirred a large amount of evangelistic zeal, and as will be seen in the course of the narrative, direct influences from this movement touched Evan Roberts. Nor should the eager but brief mission of the Rev. John Evans (Eglwysbach), the evangelist of Wesleyan Methodism in the Rhondda Valley, be forgotten. Death removed him in the midst of his task and perhaps the immediate results of his efforts were disappointing, but he belonged to the whole nation. A child of the 59 Revival, he was a life long revivalist and had been frequently given a foretaste of the harvest joy of 1905, though he did not live to mingle with the reapers.

We cannot pretend to have attempted more than to point out, in this series of memorable dates and episodes, the arches of the bridge spanning the gulf of the generations. It proves the proneness of Wales to revival. The birth of each of the four great divisions of the Free Churches has been hailed by a revival- Baptists and Independents at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Calvinistic Methodists in the middle of the eighteenth, and the Wesleyan Methodists at the dawn of the nineteenth. Nor should great individual contributions from the Church of England be left out of account; especially the work, both in sermon and song, of Vicar Pritchard, contemporary of the early Independents, who was followed by Griffith Jones of Llanddowror, evangelist and educationalist.

It is not too much to say that an air of wistfulness pervades the land at almost all times - either in retrospect of a past revival, or in prospect of a coming revival. It is either a charmed memory-" We were like them that dream; then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them"; or else it is a sorrowing, deepening appeal, "It is time for Thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void Thy law."

The wistfulness, on occasions, becomes almost, if not altogether, prophetic. It is not well to strain the language of hearts desire, and compel the event of today to exalt the eloquent earnest word of yesterday into prophecy, but such forecasts prove at least what currents of warmth are in the upper air. We select three illustrations from among several more that might be given. Some four years previous to the epiphany of the present revival a saintly old man, on his death bed and within a few days of dying in his Lords peace, remarked that a mighty revival would visit the land before long. "And mark my words, it will come this time from the south; the former came the direction of the north (referring to 1859-1860), but the next will be from the south." This was his interpretation of a vision he had seen of white horses travelling northwards from the south....One evening in August, 1904, returning home from a service in a village chapel, slowly, over a long steep road, under the shadow of an oak forest that fitfully swayed to the soft night wind, the present writer was considerably exercised by a remark which his companion made: "Do you know, I think we are very near something very wonderful? Some great things are going to happen in the churches very soon!" He could not explain to me why he cherished this assured hope. He felt it, he said. The speaker had lived all his life in one of those quiet rural neighborhoods which seem to be a little world in themselves, moving in their own orbit. I was interested and moved at the time, but much more so

as the first news of the revival, some three months later, began the fulfillment of his anticipation. "And there were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" - they were God's first audience when the Gospel was sung by the firstborn sons of light.

At the commencement of 1903 the late Dean Howell published a kind of New Year's epistle to the nation in it he dwelt solemnly on the fact that a revival must be near, or else the nation would go back. They were about to pass through a chill and wasting period of indifference, of formalism, of defeat, unless God in His mercy would visit them with a Dayspring from on High.

"Take note," he wrote, "if I knew this to be my last message to my fellow countrymen, before I am summoned to Judgement, the light of eternity already breaking on me, this is what I would say: that the chief need of my beloved nation at this moment is - A spiritual revival through a powerful outpouring of the Holy Ghost." He died, January 15th, just as his letter was being read.

Chapter 4

Whitening Fields

New Quay - colloquially stated to be fifteen miles from everywhere - looks out from between its rocks on Cardigan Bay, commanding as fine an expanse of sea as any sea-lover could wish. In summer time it is full, not so much of visitors, as of returned natives. The children of the coast are glad to revisit these hills and rocks after twelve months of toil in town and mine. Let it not be forgotten that it is in the same county as Llangeitho where God wrought wonders through Daniel Rowland in the eighteenth century.

For some time previous to 1904, many in these seaboard parishes had felt more and more ill at ease in Zion. The life of the churches was not what it should be. Ministers and teachers were often saddened by the partial estrangement of young people from the inner experiences of faith. The Rev. Joseph Jenkins, Calvinistic Methodist minister at New Quay had, among his own denomination, raised the question of a series of special conferences more than once. It was a call to searching of heart, to prayer, to self-judgment. The first conference was held here on the closing day of 1903 and New Year's Day, 1904, the young people being especially invited to attend with prepared minds. The Rev. V,W Lewis, of Carmarthen, the Rev. J.

M. Saunders, M.A., of Swansea, and his wife had been invited to take part. The meetings proved very helpful to all the churches of the district and left a healthy impression, but there was no remarkable sign of any sort to foretell what would come out of them - that out of three sounds would be framed "Not a fourth sound, but a star."

One Sunday evening in February Mr. Jenkins had preached on Faith Overcoming the World. In the course of his sermon, dealing with the world, he felt strangely drawn out, as though forced to give his very soul to his audience. He went home and by-and-by one of the members of his church, Miss Florrie Evans, after walking for half an hour outside the house, between two minds, at last stood at his door. She came in but at first could say nothing. Then she broke the silence with "Help me! The care of my soul is nearly killing me. I cannot live like this. I saw the world in tonight's sermon. I am under its feet". After some conversation he asked her, "Can you say 'My Lord, to Jesus Christ?'" "No, I understand that; but I cannot. How can I tell what He might ask me to do? Perhaps some very hard thing" "Yes, oh yes, He asks hard things - it is a very strait gate that leads to the peace and joy of the gospel."

Next Sunday, after the morning service, the young people's meeting was held as usual. No paper was forthcoming so Mr. Jenkins asked for "experience", remarking at the same time how scarce it was. One or two young men spoke but the minister was not satisfied. He said kindly that it was not a speech he wanted but personal experience. After slight silence Miss Evans rose and said- "I love Jesus Christ with all my heart." She said just that, and no more, and yet it was everything. The whole meeting found itself in tears, silently sobbing without knowing why. "Thank you," said Mr. Jenkins, "you have given the meeting a lift. "Don't thank me," she replied, "but the Holy Spirit. I was forced to say it."

What is there in the words themselves to account for all they have since produced? The question brings us to the shining mystery that guards the Spirit's sanctuary and procession. The words might well be spoken at any Christian Endeavour meeting and perhaps yield no harvest, or but little. But here they came in some golden moment of Providence. The meeting went on, that February morning, in the remote village by the sea, unknown, unreported. But the district was moved by the news, crowds came to the subsequent united meetings. Then when it seemed wise to have separate meetings in the various churches instead of the one united meeting, the work still proceeded slowly, quietly.

Early in August, Miss Rosina Davies was conducting special services in the Congregational Chapel, and at one of the meetings the manifestation of power was exceptional. The village was crowded with people from many parts. When they returned to Glamorganshire, many of them carried more fire than they could well keep to themselves. Early in September the gracious work was proceeding in many separate districts. While General Booth was making his triumphant tour from Penzance to Aberdeen reaping long-delayed appreciation - a work was silently progressing in many hearts, in several churches, with none to report it and none to recognize its hidden power. In the issue of the Congregational weekly, Y Tyst, for September 21st, the Rev. John Thomas of Merthyr began a short series of striking articles on "Recent Awakenings." He referred by name to the remarkable work which had been going on for some time in the English Methodist Church at Tonypany in Rhondda Valley, and to the missions of Miss Rosina Davis. In the closing article (October 19th) he quotes a description of the prayer-meetings which had been going on for some time in one church:

"We have now a young people's prayer-meeting every Thursday evening at 7, and Sunday afternoon at 4:30. In these meetings we invite anyone to take part, without naming, and we have blessed services. They sometimes last for three hours but no one gets tired. A brother or sister will rise and read God's Word, another will pray, another give out a hymn, another speak a word of experience, another sing, etc. They have continued up to the present moment and there is every sign that they will continue for some time longer."

This is interesting, showing that God never neglects His parallels; He prepares both the instrument and the hand that is to use it, both the sword and Cyrus who is to gird it. The spontaneous prayer-meeting, which was undoubtedly the making of the revival, was already being fitted and used to be ready when the fit hand would take hold of it.

Meanwhile, in Cardiganshire, the first conference had been followed by another in June at Aberayron, and now another conference was arranged to be held at Blaenarnerch - all the time within sight of the sea that sweeps Cardigan Bay. The date of this third conference was September 28th, and it was to make history. For to it came a young man named Evan Roberts, to drink the cup of the Lord's sufferings and to be baptized with His baptism.

In 1903 Wales was moving towards another crisis. The Education Act of 1902, met by English

Nonconformists with "passive resistance," produced in Wales what was practically a national revolt. However easy and joyous it might seem on paper, when resolutions were carried with acclamation to the tune of fervent speeches, it was another matter to the people themselves, as the leaders knew and recognized. It meant conflict, stern conflict, close to the defenses of everyday life. Parents would have to risk petty prosecution and possibly the loss of daily bread; at best, neighborhoods would be torn with dissension and misunderstandings. Although it is to the credit of both sides that the worst fears were not realized, the distraction and anxiety of thousands of hearts were none the less disturbing. The plough sank deep into the soil. They were not smooth, merry months that helped to prepare the nation to receive the thrilling message that came as a voice in the air with every autumnal wind of 1904.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/h-elvet-lewis/part-1-many-sowers-one-seed/>

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