

4. Mr. Evan Roberts

by W.T. Stead

The Revival in Wales is a spontaneous movement of God, led by the Spirit, and it has the potential to impact not only Wales but also the world.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:8, John 3:8, Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 2:4, James 4:10

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

Description

W.T. Stead shares about Mr. Evan Roberts, a central figure in the religious awakening in Wales, emphasizing that the movement is not of man but of God, led by the Spirit in spontaneous ways without human direction. Mr. Roberts humbly acknowledges that he does not preach or control the meetings, as it is the Spirit that guides them. His journey began with a profound encounter with God, leading him to share the message of salvation and witness the transformative power of prayer in bringing people to faith.

Transcript

MR. EVAN ROBERTS is the central figure, so far as there is any central figure, of the religious awakening in Wales. The Revival is not like the Moody and Sankey awakening, or the Torrey and Alexander Mission, or the organised Revivalism of the Salvation Army, of any one man or one organisation. Never in the history of Revivals has there been any Revival more spontaneous than this. It has burst out here, there, and everywhere, without leaders, or organisation, or direction. Hence, if Mr. Evan Roberts is spoken of as the centre, it is only because it happens to be one of the few conspicuous figures in a movement which he neither organised nor controls.

I attended three meetings at Mardy in the Rhondda Valley on Sunday, sat beside him on the platform, and had tea with him at a friend's house. After tea Mr. Roberts consented to an interview. He was simple and unaffected; absolutely free from any vanity or spiritual pride. He spoke in English with considerable ease, but his hearers say that it is only when he uses his Welsh tongue that they hear the melody of his voice.

"The movement is not of me," said Mr. Roberts-- "it is of God. I would not dare to try to direct it. Obey the Spirit, that is our word in everything. It is the Spirit alone which is leading us in our meetings and in all that is done."

"You do not preach, or teach, or control the meetings?"

"Why should I teach when the Spirit is teaching? What need have these people to be told that they are sinners? What they need is salvation. Do they not know it? It is not knowledge that they lack, but decision--action. And why should I control the meetings? The meetings control themselves, or rather the Spirit that is in them controls them."

"You find the ministry of the Singing Sisters useful?"

"Most useful. They go with me wherever I go. I never part from them without feeling that something is absent if they are not there. The singing is very important, but not everything. No. The public confession is also important--more so than the speaking. True, I talk to them a little. But the meetings go of themselves."

"Do you propose to go to England?"

"No. To North Wales next. They say North Wales is stony cold, but I believe the Holy Spirit will work there also. Oh, yes, God will move North Wales also."

"Can you tell me how you began to take to this work?"

"Oh, yes, that I will," said Mr. Roberts, "if you wish to hear of it. For a long, long time I was much troubled in my soul and my heart by thinking over the failure of Christianity. Oh! it seemed such a failure--such a failure--and I prayed and 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. At five o'clock it seemed to me as if I again returned to earth."

"Were you not dreaming?" I asked.

"No, I was wide awake. 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 in the land, and not this land only, but in all the world."

"Excuse me," I said, "but, as an old interviewer, may I ask if, when the mystic ecstasy passed, you put on paper all that you remembered of these times of communion?"

"No, I write nothing at all," said Mr. Roberts. "It went on all the time until I had to go to Newcastle Emlyn to the college to prepare for the ministry. I dreaded to go for fear I should lose these four hours with God every morning. But I had to go, and it happened as I feared. For a whole month He came no more, and I was in darkness. And my heart became as a stone. Even the sight of the Cross brought no tears to my eyes. So it continued until, to my great joy, He returned to me, and I had again the glorious communion. And He said I must go and speak to my people in my own village. But I did not go. I did not feel as if I could go to speak to my own people."

May I ask," I said, "if He of whom you speak appeared to you as Jesus Christ?"

"No," said Mr. Roberts, "not so; it was the personal God, not as Jesus."

"As God the Father Almighty?" I said.

"Yes," said Mr. Roberts, "and the Holy Spirit."

"Pardon me," I said, "but I interrupted you. Pray go on."

"I did not go to my people, but I was troubled and ill at ease. And one Sunday, as I sat in the chapel, I could not fix my mind upon the service, for always before my eyes I saw, as in a vision, the schoolroom in Lougher, where I live. And there, sitting in rows before me, I saw my old companions and all the young people, and I saw myself addressing them. I shook my head impatiently, and strove to drive away this vision, but it always came back. And I heard a voice in my inward ear as plain as anything saying, 'Go and speak to these people.' And for a long time I would not. But the pressure became greater and greater, and I could hear nothing of the sermon. Then at last I could resist no longer, and I said, 'Well, Lord, if it is Thy will, I will go.' Then instantly the vision vanished, and the whole chapel became filled with light so dazzling that I could faintly see the minister in the pulpit, and between him and me the glory as of the light of the sun in Heaven."

"And then you went home?"

"No; I went to my tutor and told him all things, and asked him if he believed that it was of God or of the devil? And he said the devil does not put good thoughts into the mind. I must go and obey the heavenly vision. So I went back to Lougher, and I saw my own minister, and him also I told. And he said that I might try and see what I could do, but that the ground was stony and the task would be hard."

"Did you find it so?"

"I asked the young people to come together, for I wanted to talk to them. They came and I stood up to talk to them,' and, behold, it was even as I had seen in the church at Newcastle Emlyn. The young people sat as I had seen them sitting all together in rows before me, and I was speaking to them even as it had been shown to me. At first they did not seem inclined to listen; but I went on, and at last the power of the Spirit came down and six came out for Jesus. But I was not satisfied. Oh, Lord,' I said, 'give me six more--I must have six more!' And we prayed together. At last the seventh came, and then the eighth and the ninth together, and after a time the tenth, and then the eleventh, and last of all came the twelfth also. But no more. And they saw that the Lord had given me the second six, and they began to believe in the power of prayer."

"Then after that you went on?"

"First I tried to speak to some other young people in another church, and asked them to come. But the news had gone out, and the old people said, 'May we not come too?' And I could not refuse them. So they came, and they kept on coming. Now here, now there all the time, and I have never had time to go back to college."

Not much chance, indeed, at present. Three meetings every day, lasting, with breaks for meals, from ten A. M. till twelve P. M., and sometimes later, leave scant leisure for studying elsewhere than in the hearts and souls of men. If only his body will hold out and his nervous system not give way, he will have time to study hereafter. At present he has other work in hand.

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