

LIFE AND PORTRAITURE

of
CHRISTMAS EVANS

A New Translation from the Welsh
with a
Memoir of the Author

by

Joseph Cross

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SERMONS FOR THE PRESS

During his sojourn at Cardiff, though now sixty-five years old, much debilitated, and almost blind, he wrote about two hundred sermons for the press, many of which have since been published. It is certainly very remarkable, that he should write, at his advanced age, with all the vigor and vivacity of his earlier years. Perhaps, of all the sermons he ever made, those composed at Cardiff are the best. Most of them were preached on the Sabbath, and written out during the following week. This circumstance, with their author's peculiar nearness to God, may account for their freshness and power.

Mr. Evans was in the habit of referring every important matter to God. We find in his diary the following paragraph:

“Cardiff, February 2, 1829. Lord, I have been importuned by many of my brethren in the ministry, to prepare a number of my sermons that have been in the course of my ministry the most useful in thine hand for the conversion of sinners, with a view to publication. I had no time when in Anglesea to engage in the work, because my circumstances required so much travelling every week. I left the work to lie by, the two years I was at Caerphilly; but here, at Cardiff, I have had a new impulse in my thoughts to enter upon it; and I come unto thee, my great Lord, to consult thee, who art the Head of the church, and the Head-Prophet and Teacher of thy people. Shall I proceed with the work or not? Is it a part of my duty, or is it a useless, foolish notion of my own?

“I entreat thy gracious direction in this matter, for the sake of thy great name. Suffer me not to afflict myself, when my eyesight is so weak, with a work that thou wilt not bless, but which shall be buried in the land of forgetfulness. If thou wilt not open a door — with thee are the keys of the house of David — in thy providence, that I may obtain subscribers, and bring the work through the press, without hazarding myself in such a way as will involve me in debt and disgrace.

“And also if thou, the great feeder of the flock, wilt not direct me to give the true gospel, not only without error, but with the savor and unction which accompanies the works of Bunyan and others, which thy Spirit is likely to make use of whilst thou hast churches in Wales: if they should not be for thy glory in the building up of thy church, and the calling of sinners, — if these objects should not be accomplished by the publication of the sermons, dispose my mind to relinquish the undertaking. But if thou wilt patronize the work, strengthen me to accomplish the design.

Lord, thou knowest I feel my own insufficiency for such an important enterprise, and my unworthiness to solicit of thee such a favor: but I cannot refrain from making these requests: therefore, for the sake of thine infinite merits, according to thy manner unto thy people, grant unto me my request. Amen.”

WELSH JUMPING

In the autumn of 1829, Mr. Evans wrote in his diary extensive notes of a conversation which he had with several ministers in Bristol, on “the manner of religious rejoicing so remarkable among the Welsh.” His friends condemned it in a sweeping sentence, under the name of “Welsh jumping.” Mr. Evans attempted its vindication. We insert his own account:

“I observed that I could find no account of it among the Welsh until the time of Harris and Rowlands; Calvinistic Methodists, who flourished in Wales about the same time as Whitefield and Wesley in England. The preaching of these men was the means of producing a religious revival throughout all the principality, which had sunk into a state of deep lethargy, since the time of the great awakening under Vavasor Powell, about one hundred years before. At this period nothing was to be seen in almost every parish but young men and young women flocking together into the churches and church-yards, and engaging in different gambols and pastimes, such as ball-playing, football, leaping, fighting, and such like frolics, as if Wales had been changed into an Olympic mountain, and old paganism restored again.

“It is true, there were some preachers and churches, both Congregationalists and Baptists, then existing in the principality; but their talents, their spirits, or their magnanimity could not storm such a fortress of impiety. And besides, there was a dreadful prejudice still remaining in the country against all sects, since the days of Charles II, and they suffered persecution even unto blood, for about one hundred years previous to the appearing of these men. But from the ashes of those sufferers the revival by Harris and Rowlands sprung up, as did Luther from the ashes of Huss and Jerome of Prague.

“Mr. Rowlands and Mr. Harris were both of the communion of the Episcopal church, and, as such, there was not so much enmity against them at first; but after they had come out, and when the people understood that they were preachers of the cross of Christ, considerable persecution arose against them from the multitude.

“But it was now too late — for the gates of the city were opened — the leaven was put in the meal — the fire had been kindled — the sword was drawn from the scabbard, and many had been wounded, (spiritually) and were ready to open the door for the gospel in spite of every danger. Harris, Rowlands, and the two William’s, had been clothed with power from on high, and the hammer of their ministry was sufficiently heavy to break in pieces the northern iron (Jeremiah 15:12).

“Several laymen of powerful minds were also raised up about this time; such as Mr. David Morris, and others, who were valuable auxiliaries to carry on the work. By their ministry, this praising and jumping in religious enjoyment began in Wales, which has not wholly left it on certain occasions until this day.

“As an apology for them, granting at the same time the possibility of extremes even in a good cause in the present state; and that graceless persons may feel something from these excitements as of the powers of the world to come, in the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost in the apostolic age; observe;

“1. That it appears to me like the residue of the Spirit, and the powers of the world to come; which were necessary to open a way for the gospel through the darkness and obduracy of paganism in the days of the apostles.

“2. It is no argument of importance against it, that many graceless persons felt a considerable degree of influence at the time, as well as others; for so it was in the case of Saul, king of Israel, and some besides named in Scripture.

“3. There is no essential difference between religious enjoyment in Wales and that which is now experienced in America; and that which accompanied the preaching of Whitefield in England, and even in Scotland: and that which also followed the ministry of President Edwards, in America, when whole towns and neighborhoods echoed with the sound of persons praying and praising God, as if a bursting cloud-shower of the Spirit of grace and prayer had descended upon them. Persons under the ministry of Whitefield wept, cried for mercy and even fainted by the power of this influence.

*“4. And such gracious influences are necessary for the spread of the gospel in every country, and in every land: and therefore the Millennium is described in the Bible as a period remarkable for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost — ‘**that a nation shall be born at once**’ (Isaiah 66:8), . . . and the ‘**flowing of the nations shall be to the mountain of the Lord's house**’ (Isaiah 2:3). It is this influence that has driven, as it were, the gospel into every nook of the mountains of Wales, as well as into its cities, towns, and villages; while in England, with all the advantages of education, the gospel, in a manner, is hid in a corner; and it has not run through the country, and searched out, and taken possession of all the inland parts of that spiritual Africa, and that for the want of these gales of divine influence, and powers peculiar to the gospel: and it can never be spread through every part of England as it is in Wales without these gifts. Common preaching will not do to rouse sluggish districts from the heavy slumbers into which they are sunk.*

“Indeed, formal prayers and lifeless sermons are like bulwarks raised against these things in England; and this evil genius has also entered the principality under the pretence of order. Five or six stanzas will be sung as dry as Gilboa, instead of one or two verses, like a new song, full of God, of Christ and the Spirit of grace, until the heart is attuned for worship. The burying-grounds are kept in fine order in Glamorganshire, and green shrubs and herbs grow on the graves, but all this is of little value, for the inhabitants of them are all dead — so is every form of godliness where its power is not felt. Order without life is exceedingly worthless. You exhibit all the character of human nature, leaving every bud of the flower to open in the beams of the sun, except in divine worship.

“On other occasions you appear to have as much fire in your affections as the Welsh have. If you are noticed in a court of law, the most efficient advocate, such as Erskine, will give you the greatest satisfaction; but you are contented with a preacher, speaking so lifelessly and so low that you can hardly understand the third part of what he says; and you will call this decency in the sanctuary. To-morrow, I shall see you answering fully to the human character, in your own actions.

*“When the speakers on the platform will be urging the claims of missions, you will then beat the boards, and manifest so much life and cheerfulness, that not one of you will be seen to take up a notebook, nor any other book, while the speaker shall be addressing you. A Welshman might suppose, by hearing your noise, that he had been silently conveyed to the midst of one of the meetings of the ‘Welsh jumpers,’ with this difference, that you would perceive many more tears shed, and hear more **‘calves of the lips’** (Hosea 12:2) offered up, in the rejoicing meetings of Wales. But you will use your heels well on such occasions, and a little of your tongues. But even in Wales, in certain places — that is, places where the fervent gales are not enjoyed which fill persons with fear and terror and joy in approaching the altar of God — you may see, while hearing a sermon, one looking into his hymn-book, another into his note-book, and a third turning over the leaves of his Bible, as if he were going to study a sermon in the sanctuary, instead of attending to what is spoken by the preacher as the mouth of God. If there is joy and gladness pertaining to many, the light of God’s countenance in the sanctuary should develop it; until a fire is kindled and he speak with his tongue, making melody unto the Lord in his heart, and praising Him with his lips.*

“5. It is in vain to urge objections against these powerful gales of divine influence, and allege that it is under the ministry of the illiterate preachers of Wales only they are experienced. Harris, Rowlands and the two Williams’ were not so, for they had been brought up for the established church. Whitefield and Edwards were men of education and they preached the doctrine which in England is considered evangelical.

“6. It is also beside the point to affirm that only persons of no weight, that is, ignorant boys and girls, are in the habit of thus rejoicing and praising God in His temple; for it is certain, that those who express their joy in this manner possess so much sound experimental knowledge, as to make them eminent in that respect. I have listened to many of them in the midst of their enjoyment, and have often been delighted.

“They repeated true, evangelical and substantial stanzas, replete with profound sentiment: for in such seasons, they could find out the very best, which made impressions on their memories; and these rapturous feelings developed them, as if the tongue were moved by the heat and force of the fire within. And many other things of an evangelical and gracious character they will utter on these joyful occasions, with such heavenly eloquence as would be inimitable, and impracticable even for themselves to utter with the same effect, without enjoying these meltings of spirit. This enjoyment is accompanied by many tears and much tenderness of heart: nor are persons of a dry spirit and hard heart ever regarded as fit subjects for this work of praise, in these blessed seasons of Christian enjoyment. It does not accord with any, but with him whose heart melts like wax, and runs in the form and mold of the gospel.

“7. There is no way in which churches or particular persons may enjoy this heavenly ecstasy, but by walking with God, and by cultivating a spirit of watchfulness and prayer, which shows its pure and holy character. It awakens watchfulness against all evil tempers, improper expressions, and wicked actions, lest the sense of it should be lost. Such a frame of mind cannot be expected by living in sin. These individuals come to the house of God with an earnest desire for this enjoyment, and dreading lest there should be a something in them which would cause God to deny them this unspeakable privilege. It is an exceedingly easy matter for a minister to manage a congregation while Christian enjoyment keeps them near to God. They are diligent and zealous, and ready for every good work. But it is very easy to offend this joyous spirit - or give it what name you please, enthusiasm, religious madness, or Welsh jumping (its English name), — and make it hide itself. A quarrel and disagreement in the church will occasion it to withdraw immediately. Indulging in sin, in word or deed, will soon put it to flight. It is like unto the angel formerly, who could not behold the sin of Israel without hiding himself; so is the angel of the religious life of Wales, which proves him to be a holy angel, though he has the name of a ‘Welsh jumper.’ My prayer is, that this angel be a guard upon every congregation, and that none should do anything to offend him. It is an exceedingly powerful assistant to accompany us through the wilderness. But the individual that has not felt its happy influences has nothing to lose; hence he does not dread a dry meeting and a hard prayer, for they are all the same to him; but the people of this enjoyment pray before prayer, and before hearing, that they may meet with God in them.

“8. The seasons when these blessings are vouchsafed to the churches of Wales, are to be noticed. It is generally at a time when the cause of religion is at low ebb — all gone to slumber. This happy spirit of enjoyment, like the angel of the pillar of fire, appears when there in distress, and everything at the worst. Its approach to the congregation is like the glory of God returning to the temple of old; it creates a stir among the brethren, — they have a new prayer, and a new spirit given them to worship God. This will lay hold of another, — some new strength and light will appear in the pulpit, until it will be imagined that the preacher's voice is altered, and that his spirit is become more evangelical, and that he preaches with a more excellent savor than usual. Tenderness will descend upon the members, and it will be seen that Mr. Wet-eyes and Mr. Amen have taken their place among them. The heavenly gale will reach some of the old backsliders, and they are brought with weeping to seek their forfeited privilege. By this time the sound of Almighty God will be heard in the outer court, beginning to move the hearers like a mighty wind shaking the forest. In these seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord some churches will receive.

“In the course of a year, additions of one hundred others a hundred and fifty, and some others upwards of two hundred new members. Sometimes, the gale seems as if it blew upon the outer court — upon the hearers, and the young people from ten to fifteen years of age — when nothing extraordinary appears in the light and effect of the ministry, nor in the church; but afterwards making its way through the outer court to rouse the inner court, until a great concern is awakened for the state of the soul. But observe: The revival that begins in the church, and proceeds from thence to the world, and not that which commences outside of the church, is more frequent, and more efficient in its converts, for the pangs of labor are to begin in Zion.

“9. Again, it may be remarked that the happy effects which follow these powerful revivals, evince their nature. They are certain, where they are strong, to bend the oaks of Bashan — men of strong and sturdy minds, and haughty hearts— to attend the ministry of the word. They will bring all the ships of Tarshish, the merchants of this world, into the harbor of hearing. The power of the day of the Lord will raze all the walls of bigotry to the foundations. The thoughts of eternal realities, and the spirit of worship, are by these blessings diffused abroad, and family worship is established in scores of families, where a few months before no regard was had unto it. The door of such a district, thus opened by the powers of the world to come, shall not be closed against the hearers of the gospel, until a goodly number of souls are there converted unto God. Where the living waters flow, dead fish are made alive by its virtues.

“10. Since the first appearing of these gracious gifts at Llangeitho, under the ministry of Mr. Rowlands, they have been showers of blessings, which are poured down on the congregations of the Baptists and Congregationalists as well as the Calvinistic Methodists; and sometimes one of these denominations is favored with them, whilst the others are destitute. These refreshing seasons were, at times, experienced in a very powerful manner at Llangeitho, for about fifty years; that is, all the period of Mr. Rowlands' ministrations in that church. About two thousand persons assembled there for communion once a month, from the several counties of Wales, even in winter, and about three thousand in the summer season; which rendered it the most extraordinary place in Europe: and beyond a doubt, hundreds of those who assembled there, on such occasions, are now in heaven singing the new song. If to live on the merits of Christ, to fear God, and praise him, and lead a sober and righteous life, is an evidence of a godly state, then this was visible at that time at Llangeitho.”

CAERNARVON

Mr. Evans' next settlement was in Caernarvon. The Baptist interest in that town was in a feeble and languishing condition. The church numbered about thirty members, but they were chiefly of the lowest class, and sadly disunited. They had a decent house of worship, but it was involved in a debt of £800.

“All things,” said Mr. Evans,” seemed like a waste howling wilderness; yea, a habitation of dragons, where they made their rest night and day.” Some advised the dissolution of the church, but he thought better to attempt its reformation.

His coming produced quite a sensation through the town. His first congregation was very large, and for some time multitudes flocked to his ministry, but they were only accidental hearers, generally members of other churches, who, when they had satisfied their curiosity, returned to their own places of worship.

His Welsh biographer mentions with commendation the sympathy and help which he received from the Wesleyan and the Calvinistic Methodists, and Mr. Evans himself calls them the Aarons and the Hurs that sustained his hands in Caernarvon.

His labors and zeal in this place were not less than in Caerphilly and Cardiff; but owing to many unfavorable circumstances, his success was far inferior. During the first year, however, he reduced the chaos around him to some incipient order; and was enabled, by the payment of a mortgage upon the church, to save it from sheriff's sale. He employed a Mr. Edwards to travel into England, Ireland, and Scotland, and make collections for this purpose.

Mr. Evans was already known extensively, as the author of the celebrated Specimen of Welsh Preaching, which had been translated into English, and published in many of the periodicals, eliciting universal admiration. Mr. Edwards had this piece reprinted, and distributed the copies wherever he went, thus making known the pastor of the church for which he solicited pecuniary aid.

Thou the aged servant of God saw few conversions, from his labors in Caernarvon, the seed which he sowed in tears upon that sterile sod has sprung up since his decease, and others have gathered the harvest. The Baptist church there has experienced a gracious revival, and many of the new converts attribute their salvation, under God, to Christmas Evans.

While in Caernarvon he penned in his journal the following pious reflections:

“I have been thinking of the great goodness of the Lord unto me throughout my unworthy ministry, and now, in my old age, I see the work prospering wonderfully in my hand, so that there is reason to think that I am in some degree a blessing to the church, when I might have been a burden to it, or rather a curse, by which she might have been induced to wish me laid in the earth, that I might no longer prevent the progress of the work. Thanks be to God, that it is not so! Though I deserve no better; yet I am in the land of mercy. This is unto me according to the manner of God unto his people. My path in the valley, the dangers, and the precipices of destruction upon which I have stood, rushes into my thoughts, and also the sinking of many in death, and the downfall of others by immorality, and their burial in Sabroth-Hattaavah, the graves of inordinate desire; together with the withering, the feebleness, and the unfruitfulness of some through the influence of a secret departure from God, and of walking in the hidden paths that lead to apostasy.”

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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