

The Inaugural Meeting at Princes Road.

by Gwilym Hughes

The inaugural meeting of the revival in Liverpool was marked by a lack of enthusiasm, but the missionary's rebuke and call to obedience sparked a breakthrough and a visible improvement in the revival feeling.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15:22, Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 30:21, Matthew 16:24, James 4:8

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

Description

Gwilym Hughes preaches about the inaugural meeting at Princes Road in Liverpool, where Evan Roberts began his work among the Welsh people. The anticipation and anxiety surrounding the visit, the initial lack of spiritual fervor, and the gradual increase in enthusiasm during the meeting are highlighted. Evan Roberts delivers a message on the importance of prompt obedience to the Holy Spirit, emphasizing sacrifice and giving one's heart to Christ. Despite initial challenges and a sense of disappointment, there is hope and confidence that a significant religious fervor will soon be witnessed in Liverpool, similar to the revival experienced in Wales.

Transcript

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LIVERPOOL, Wednesday, March 29, 1905.

Mr. Evan Roberts, this evening, commenced his work in Liverpool, and for the next fortnight or three weeks, so it is now arranged, he will minister among the scores of thousands of Welsh people who are residing in and around this great city. We of South Wales are well aware how heavily the Liverpool visit has, during the last month, weighed on the missionary's mind. It was one of the reasons given by him for his retirement into the seven days' silence and solitude at Neath, but he left his home at Loughor yesterday fully persuaded that his efforts here would secure the Divine blessing. Among the Welsh churches of the city and suburbs, embracing all denominations, the visit has been anticipated with feverish anxiety, and recent events, with the delays and uncertainties they involved, have served only to heighten the fever. The Liverpool Welsh Free Churches Council, the body that has charge of the mission arrangements, organised in preparation for it a thorough canvass of the Welsh people of Liverpool. These, it was found, numbered 30,000, and of these 4,000 are described as non-adherents -- that is to say, persons who do not attend any place of worship. During the next few days' special efforts will be made to bring these within the influence of the revival.

To-night's opening meeting was at Princes Road C. M. Chapel, a handsome edifice often described as the cathedral of Welsh Nonconformity. It stands on the Princes-road Boulevard -- a magnificent avenue leading to Sefton Park, and within easy access of the centre of the city. Simultaneously another meeting was held at the Mount Zion Wesleyan Chapel, close by, and this was likewise crowded out. That Mr. Roberts would appear at one or other of these meetings was generally known, but, outside the committee, no one knew which of the two places he would select. At six, the chapel doors were thrown open, and for the next twenty minutes a force of Liverpool police -- all Welsh-men -- had as much as they could do to control and marshal the great and excited crowd besieging the entrances. Under normal conditions Princes-road Church is assured to seat 1,800 people. This evening it was packed in every corner, though the aisles were kept free. The stewards had strict orders to prevent anybody standing in the aisles, and the injunctions were rigidly observed. Among the occupants of the deacons' pew I observed practically all the best-known leaders of Welsh Nonconformity in the city. The Rev. John Williams, the pastor of the church, one of the great preachers of Wales, was conspicuous, and so also were Dr. Owen Evans, ex-president of the Congregational Union of Wales, Revs. D. Adams (C.), W. M. Jones (C. M.) David Jones, W. O. Evans (W.), O. R. Owen (C.), J. Lewis Williams (C.), Owen Owens (C. M.), J. D. Evans (C. M.), W. Owen (C. M.) Robert Lewis (W.), J. Hughes, BA., B. D. (C.M.), Mr. W. Evans, chairman of the Liverpool Welsh Free Churches Council, Councillor Henry Jones (secretary), and others.

An hour ago, as I wended my way to this meeting, my companion, one of the best known laymen of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, incidentally remarked, "This is a great and risky experiment, to transplant the revivalist from his native Glamorgan." It was with some such doubts also that I scanned this great gathering. Before the missionary arrived, the atmosphere seemed to entirely lack that spiritual electricity we have been accustomed to associate with revival gatherings in the Southern province. Indeed, for the first half-hour the congregation seemed too eminently respectable to do anything of its own initiative, and assumed an air of expectancy and curiosity that was chilling, if not absolutely fatal to anything approaching enthusiasm and spontaneity.

The opening prayer was offered by the Rev. J. Lewis Williams (C.), who it was interesting to learn is the successor at the Great Mersey Street Church of the Rev. Peter Price, now of Dowlais, the writer of the recent attack upon the missionary and his methods. He was followed by the Rev. W. O. Evans (Wesleyan), and subsequently, after some urging from the "set fawr," a few prayers were offered in the congregation, and a number of hymns were sung. The revival "fire," however, had not yet been kindled.

Promptly at 7 o'clock Mr. Evan Roberts entered the pulpit from the vestry behind, looking in excellent health. With him were Miss Annie Davies and his sister, Miss Mary Roberts. They were followed by the Rev. D. M. Phillips, of Tylorstown. Their advent seemed to arouse no special interest. Evidently, the stolid, phlegmatic Northman is not so easily excited as his mercurial brother in the South.

Is the revivalist disappointed? This meeting, after his recent experiences, must seem to him something like an approach to the Arctic regions. He sits in one of the pulpit chairs, and for the next hour and a half utters not a word.

Meanwhile let us glance at the audience. Gradually we become conscious of an increase of fervour in the hymns. The prayers too, seem attuned to a more spiritual key. We hear the same hymns that we sing in the South, but -- with a difference. They are all here sung in the minor key, and the tempo is slow and at times almost dragging? Those who pray are of all ages, old and young. At last, here are two on their feet simultaneously, both praying loud and long, and ere they finish someone strikes up a well-known hymn.

Presently, the whole congregation is singing with something akin to enthusiasm.

A minute later Miss Annie Davies is rendering her first revival solo in Liverpool. It is "I need Thee every hour," and we note with delight that her voice is so far recovered that to-day it is as pure as it was in the early days of the revival, and shows no signs of wearing. Her example inspires many other sisters to participate in the service, and the prayers that follow in rapid succession from half a dozen young women in various parts of the building are stirring and truly eloquent.

It was 8.30 when the missionary first broke silence, and then it was in terms of severe reproof. Someone had started the quaint Welsh hymn "Y Gwr wrth ffynon Jacob," the congregation taking it up to all appearance with great heartiness. But when the fifth line was reached, in which a desire is expressed for closer contact with God, the missionary, who had for some half-hour been burying his face in his hands, suddenly sprang up and, with right arm uplifted and features tear-stained, peremptorily called upon the congregation to stop. There was instant obedience. "You ask for closer contact with God," he exclaimed in severe tones, "when there are in this very meeting hundreds of obstacles to the coming of the Spirit. There are scores, nay, hundreds here who during the last hour have disobeyed the Spirit. The lesson of prompt obedience to the Holy Spirit must be learnt at all costs. He must be obeyed at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, in small things as well as in great."

With this introduction the missionary proceeded to dwell upon the~ danger of offending God. "In that never-to-be-forgotten Cwmavon meeting," he remarked, "some of us saw what it meant to displease God." Christ had died for a whole world. He was entitled to receive a whole world in return. Was He to receive it? The sacrifice on the Cross called for sacrifice on the part of all Christ's followers. Then had been no successful gathering yet which had not cost something to somebody. Heaven had cost much. Those who would serve Christ must serve Him at the cost of sacrifice. They must in the first place give Him their hearts.

With dramatic suddenness the missionary now cut off his address with the remark, "I can proceed no further. There is someone here ready to speak." And after a second's pause a lady in the nave speaking in low, tremulous tones, recited portions of Scripture. Meanwhile Mr. Evan Roberts, glancing rapidly and excitedly around the congregation, cried out, "Come, oh! come at once; don't delay." And those near him observed with some alarm that he compressed his lips, as in a violent effort to suppress his emotions, that the veins in his temples and his neck became prominent, standing out like whipcord, and that he bent in the attitude of a man in a paroxysm of pain. He resumed his seat, and presently recovered his composure.

There was no call made for "confessions" or "testimonies," and yet for the next five minutes confessions came from all parts of the building, and this phase of the proceedings was appropriately closed by Miss Mary Roberts reading the 4th chapter of the first Epistle General of John. Then, as if moved by a common impulse, the congregation rang out in a thrilling rendering of a rousing Welsh hymn, and we felt that at last the congregation had been thawed, and was under the indefinable spell of the revival. Hitherto every word uttered in public had been in Welsh, but someone sang a strain of the revival melody "Come to Jesus," and English people present, recognizing their own language, summoned courage to participate in the proceedings. From this point to the end English prayers, and English hymns were frequently heard.

Still the missionary was not satisfied. Another hour had passed when he spoke again, and again it was a complaint that he uttered. Either the Holy Spirit worked differently in the North, or there was disobedience in the meeting, so we heard declared; but, continued the missionary, the Holy Spirit was the same North

and South. The Spirit was at His best at that meeting, but hundreds within the building were in deed, if not in words, saying Him nay. The result of this disobedience was, that he (the speaker) was not permitted even to give out a hymn, much less to test the meeting.

Later there was a visible improvement, for the revival feeling rose to a great height, though in no way approaching anything witnessed in Glamorgan. At ten o'clock the meeting was tested by the Rev, John Williams, and a dozen converts were enrolled. The revivalist's closing words were a solemn warning to unbelievers.

It must be recorded that at this inaugural meeting the revivalist fell far short of doing justice to the reputation that had preceded him, and possibly many left the building disappointed. It is yet too soon, however, to form any conclusions. Mr. Evan Roberts is evidently feeling his way, and those who know him best are confident that in a few days the extraordinary outburst of religious fervour which marked his visits to the towns of Wales will be witnessed also in this great seaport on the Mersey. As we left the crowded building, we had outside to fight our way into the streets. Through a great throng inside the chapel railings, who all through the evening had been holding a revival service of their own in the open air. In this service dozens of Welsh policemen of Liverpool, drafted thereto by the chief constable, took conspicuous part.

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