

Anatomy of a Revival (5)

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Wales 1904-05

The Unfolding Fiasco

1) The Pre-Seminarian

"Sometimes worried, sometimes amazed" at what they were witnessing, Rachel and Anne Phillips expressed their concerns over the mental health of the budding young revivalist, Evan Roberts.¹ It is pertinent at this juncture in our examination of the "revival" events to backtrack some weeks in the life of this erstwhile trainee for the Calvinistic Methodist ministry.

Since 13th September of 1904, he had been engaged on his pre-seminary course at Newcastle Emlyn grammar school.² He came there as one who had a long-time reputation for intensive piety and for receiving "spiritual" phenomena, visions, voices, etc.³ In this little Welsh market-town he was, without being initially aware of it, situated in the very area in which a "Keswick" generated revival had already been spreading since the previous February.⁴ We have examined the testimonies of participants in that revival,⁵ and noted that the meetings tended toward a form of social chaos in which even the leading minister, Rev. Joseph Jenkins, the seer of the "blue flame," confessed his inadequacy to control events. In this "Keswick" phenomena, there was therefore the very psychological and spiritual "DNA," so to speak, that was already breaking out into its full fruitage of fiasco in some of the meetings. The leaders in this revival were, however, expressing some concern about things getting out of control, and consequently they persistently endeav-

¹Kevin Adams and Emyr Jones, *Pictorial History of Revival* (CWR, 2004), p. 61.

²Kevin Adams provides details of Roberts' curriculum and outlines the general sequences of events (*A Diary of Revival* [CWR, 2004], pp. 49-50, 55ff.).

³See parts 3-4 of this series of articles in *British Reformed Journal*, 42-43 (Spring and Summer, 2005) for details and documentation supporting these assertions. Adams indicates that Roberts was remembered afterwards at Newcastle Emlyn Grammar School as being "a quiet boy of good character with something pleasant and likeable in his personality" (*A Diary of Revival*, p. 49).

⁴This was the "revival" spreading from New Quay some dozen or so miles north of Newcastle Emlyn.

⁵*British Reformed Journal*, 42 (Spring, 2005), pp. 41ff.

oured to hold some of the wilder manifestations in check, while they made efforts to maintain a prominent role for preaching. Evidently they realized that what they had started had potentialities which needed to be curbed.⁶ But they were somewhat vague in their discernment about where exactly the boundary lines were to be drawn between acceptable and non-acceptable “spiritual manifestations” in the revival meetings. As a result, this was to allow conditions to arise in which the young Evan Roberts suddenly “caught fire,” blew up, and burned like a Roman candle. The full force of the DNA (so to speak) in the Keswick doctrine was about to be unleashed. It would blossom forth in all its full potentiality, and the original “Keswick” men would henceforth hold themselves back and partly “distance” themselves from that which became what some termed the “Roberts Revival.”

At Newcastle Emlyn grammar school, Roberts had struggled with his own spiritual and mental condition and his studies. We have seen that he was something of an addict for “spiritual experiences,” the absence of which would torment him with self-doubts concerning his call to the ministry and his position before God. He tended to oscillate between depressions and “highs,” with, if anything, the depressions gaining the upper hand, whilst his studying degenerated to the point where his tutor was “angered with him.”⁷ This latter point is significant, in that his tutor was none other than John Phillips, brother to the Phillips girls and one of the sons of Rev. Evan Phillips, the local Calvinistic Methodist minister. During this time witnesses testify that for Roberts “the study of academic things became a torment to him ...” from which he would escape by engaging in “evangelistic meetings.”⁸

But the original “Keswick” revival was spreading southwards from New Quay, and it so happened that the Calvinistic Methodist Forward Movement had a preacher in this locality in the autumn of 1904. Seth Joshua, the former pugilist, with bristling walrus-moustache and stentorian voice, was touring the area holding “revival” missions in various chapels and villages.⁹ In mid-September he held a mission at New Quay, the epicentre of the revival in that region, and from 25th to 30th of the same month he was to appear leading a mission in Newcastle Emlyn. Joshua had been concerned about a new revival for some years, and testified in his own diaries how he had “wrestled for the personal baptism of the Spirit and for a national revival ...”¹⁰ He

⁶*British Reformed Journal*, 43 (Summer, 2005) and Adams, *A Diary of Revival*, pp. 42-46.

⁷B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival* (Evangelical Press of Wales, 1995), p. 18.

⁸B. P. Jones, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

had attended those conferences of ministers in Wales in August 1903 and 1904 where the "Keswick" doctrines of the "higher life" had been propagated and subsequently imbibed by such people as Joseph Jenkins of New Quay. Despite initially voicing some reservations about these doctrines,¹¹ Joshua was henceforth to be found in the van of revival preachers and propagators.

On 25th September, Joshua began his mission in Newcastle Emlyn, assisted by some 15 young people who had come down from Rev. Joseph Jenkins' church at New Quay. Among them were Florrie Evans and one Maude Davies.

The course of Joshua's meetings in Newcastle Emlyn is interesting. Initially, on the morning of Sunday 25th, so he wrote in his diary, he recounted to Evan Phillips' congregation at Bethel the details of the revival that had broken out at New Quay. Joshua found the congregation to be generally unresponsive and hard, and he tells how he "broke down under the emotion resting on [his] spirit ..." and while many others wept in the chapel, and despite preaching four times that Sunday, he concludes his diary entry here with "nothing has moved yet." As things progressed through the week, he discovered that there was "scarcely a soul here in the joy of assurance." One wonders what the erstwhile "revival" pastor Evan Phillips had been teaching these people over the last 40 to 50 years of his pastorate there at Bethel. Nevertheless, by the Monday night, Joshua could testify to some sense of "a touch of power" in the service—whatever that was supposed to be. Now it happens that on that same day, young Evan Roberts rose up from the sick bed (to which he had been confined for some four days), jolted by the request from his fellow grammar-school pre-seminarians that he come to the meeting. Roberts recorded in his diary that suddenly he "felt the Spirit descending on [him]" and that he became "possessed" by an irresistible urge, whereon he "rushed to the chapel without [his] overcoat." At that meeting, so Roberts would later testify, he wept bitterly for his hardness of heart, for he felt he did not love Christ the

¹¹On Seth Joshua and his brother Frank, both noted evangelists of the Forward Movement of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, see the biography by T. Mardy Rees (*Seth and Frank Joshua* [Principality Press of Wrexham, 1926]), and more recently Geraint D. Fielder's *Grace, Grit, and Gumption* (Christian Focus, 2000). According to Mardy Rees, Seth had a go at reading such Puritan tomes as those of John Owen, but he nevertheless had no room for any doctrine of a "limited atonement." How much of the great Puritan Seth was able to take in, we do not know.

¹²Cf. Adams, *A Diary of Revival*, pp. 56-57.

¹³Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Son.¹² At any rate, at this meeting Joshua sensed “a touch of power,” as he himself put it.

Tuesday 27th September came and the high-pressure meetings continued. During the evening meeting, Joshua records that several of the pre-seminarians were converted.¹³ Amazing! Pre-seminarians converted! Such was the state of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism. One of those pre-seminarians was one Sidney Evans, friend of Evan Roberts, later revival co-leader with him and ultimately a missionary in India.

On Wednesday 28th, Joshua stood himself down from preaching and turned the meeting over lock, stock, and barrel to the 15 youngsters who had come down with him from New Quay. It was the turn now of the likes of Florrie Evans, Maude Davies, and others. They spoke, exhorted, prayed and sung “as the Holy Spirit led them,” said Joshua in his diary entry. As they did so, “the fire burned all before it ... souls were melted ... many cried out for salvation.”¹⁴ During these proceedings, Evan Roberts continued his seeking for the “Spirit with power” insisting that either he gained this blessing or he would be laid up on a sick bed.

It is evident that the tempo and emotional temperature of Joshua’s meetings were building up higher and higher from one day to the next. This in itself smacks of psychologically propagated hysteria, something which I have myself experienced during “missions” promoted particularly by Pentecostal evangelists in Britain. But what is also evident is that Joshua, and those other ministers involved, seemed oblivious to the spurious nature of what was going on. Everything they were doing was a golden gift practically begging to be ripped to pieces by anyone with a modicum of knowledge of human psychology.

Anyway, the culminating high point of the mission came on Thursday 29th, as Joshua and his entourage, including Roberts, set out at six o’clock in the morning for another Welsh village to export the “revival” there. Blaennanerch was about 6 miles north-northwest of Newcastle Emlyn, and, like most little Welsh villages, had its almost obligatory Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, at which a “revival” mission meeting was to be held. Roberts himself was in the van of this revival group, accompanied by Rachel and Margaret Phillips, and the young people from New Quay. They held their

¹²Adams, *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59, partly extracting from the diaries of Seth Joshua and other sources.

¹³Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 59, quoting again from Joshua’s diary.

¹⁴Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 62.

first meeting at 7 a.m., after which, at the manse after breakfast, according to Roberts, the Spirit fell upon him at about 9:30 a.m., and the fire began to burn in his breast.

At the evening meeting at Blaennanerch, Roberts felt full of the Spirit almost to "bursting." This meeting was started and immediately "handed over to the Spirit." Roberts sat in a pew in a feverish state of agitation, between Margaret Phillips and Maude Davies. Whilst in this condition, he was noticed by a certain Mr. John Thickens, also present in the meeting, who later wrote that "while Mr. Joshua was speaking ..." he noticed "a young man sitting opposite us in obvious distress ... a young neurotic man ... that is, neurotic in our opinion."¹⁵ *Again we see Roberts giving an impression of some kind of nervous aberration or mental disturbance of some kind.* Whilst at prayer, in the throes of this mystical turbulence, he says he "felt a living force come into [his] bosom" which caused his legs to shiver. As the force grew greater and greater he felt he was going to burst. At this juncture he was on his knees, arms draped over the seat in front, gushing tears and copiously perspiring, such that one of the New Quay ladies came over and wiped his face. Margaret Phillips attended him to his right and Maude Davies to his left. Over the top of all this commotion, Seth Joshua was uttering the prayer that was later to become famous in revival tradition: "O Lord, bend us ... bend us ..." At this Roberts took up the refrain "bend us" for himself. Joshua, in his diary records how Roberts "caught at these words" and that it was "remarkable" to witness him praying. One of the young women sat alongside Roberts could later testify how the scene was "unforgettable" as Roberts' "whole body quivered with emotion."¹⁶

At this point Roberts rose and, in an impassioned torrent of words, told the astonished congregation that he had been seeking this fullness of the Holy Spirit for 13 years, and that this very night he had received it.

Reading the accounts of these events given in various sources, what is striking is that *yet again* there is an absence of reference to the glory of Christ. Physical phenomena and passionate emotions head the bill in all of this, infused with much emphasis on the "love of God." Indeed, the following day Roberts could list three great blessings that he had gained by his experience, *making no reference to Christ in any of them.*¹⁷ But this is what those people

¹⁵Cf. B. P. Jones, *Op. cit.*, p. 14, citing Thickens' articles some 50 years later in the Calvinistic Methodist magazine *Y Drysorfa* (The Treasury) for April 1961-December 1963.

¹⁶See Adams, *Op. cit.*, pp. 65-69, for all the details of this experience.

called revival. We must be grateful to them for one thing; they candidly and explicitly recorded their experiences. This allows us to examine their testimonies in the light of Scripture and to see the stark differences between the true work of the Holy Spirit and the spurious goings-on that bubble up to the surface in “revivals.”

By Saturday 31st September both Roberts and his friend Sydney Evans were ready to go forth and spread the revival but, first, they had to check out with the Spirit as to where, when, and who should go. Their method of making this “check-out” was *unbelievable*. They wrote down three questions on some papers, placed the papers on the two Bibles in the bedroom they occupied, and then left the room, one supposes, to let the Spirit do some writing on the papers in response. Both men testify to being afraid later to enter the room. At last, Roberts had the courage to go and look, and found, of course, that the Spirit had not responded ... nothing was written on the paper in answer to the questions. Roberts immediately felt, so he says, the Spirit speak to him directly and internally, rebuking him for not asking enough questions or, indeed, the *right* questions.¹⁸

Only Roberts’ undoubted sincerity, however deluded, would restrain us from calling all this outright charlatanry. But it is horrifying that this kind of nonsense lay at the heart of a supposedly great “revival” of the Christian religion. Breathtaking, in fact. Worse ... blasphemous. Sadly the whole business conveys to us the stark realization that these people, Roberts, Joshua, Jenkins, Phillips, et al., and the vast mass of the chapel-goers had just switched off the use of their mind when it came to matters of faith. Where was Roberts’ intelligence, for instance, when, on examining the blank response space on the question papers, he could yet immediately “hear” the Spirit tell him internally that he had asked the wrong questions? If the Spirit really spoke to him internally, why could not the Spirit then and there tell him the answers to the questions he claimed he should have asked? But this thought never seems to have occurred to the budding revivalist, nor even to his biographers and admirers, some of them men of high academic and ecclesiastical standing, who ought to have spotted this gross inconsistency if nobody else did. And it was a fact, consistently reported by Roberts, and recorded by his biographers and historians of the revival, that he continually claimed he “heard” the voice of the Spirit internally, prompting him right through the course of the revival.

¹⁷ Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁸ Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 71.

More blasphemous mysticism was to punctuate the progress of the revivalist through October 1904. On the 6th of that month he records that he and his companions had asked God for 100,000 converts in Wales. And in a vision he claims to have seen the Lord Christ presenting “a sort of a cheque” to God the Father with 100,000 written on it, “and it’s alright.”¹⁹

As October wore on, Roberts could testify that time set apart for his studies would somehow be transcended by experiences of the Spirit in which time seemed to supernaturally fly by, such that at the end of two hours or more he had done nothing with his books.²⁰ During this time, give him his due, he does record some remarks that reflect an orthodox reference to Christ. Doubtless he was reading his Bible, if nothing else, but sadly in amongst all this emerges a self-consciousness of his spiritual experiences and of how God was “working powerfully in me.”

During this month of intensive spiritual activity, Roberts was effectively “under surveillance” by the Phillips girls. Someone at their home—was it their father, the veteran revivalist from 1858-60?—had told Ann Phillips to “keep her eye on” Roberts because the family were evidently anxious about him. An evident strain of Arminianism surfaces here. Surely a man powerfully filled and anointed by the Holy Spirit is in the safest and best of all mental conditions. But from an Arminian standpoint the Spirit seemingly can overwhelm a poor mortal without really intending to do so. One has to be careful not to be too charged with the Power, so to speak, else it will begin to undermine one’s mental stability. Such are the anxieties expressed by the Phillips girls at this juncture, and Roberts himself can testify that on the night of 27th October he had an experience of the Spirit that was so “heavy” that he had to shout out to God to hold off.²¹ Strange that this “Spirit” seemed not to know the frailties of human nature, and could somehow bulldoze over the puny subject without realizing the damage it was doing. We are not persuaded that Roberts was experiencing the Holy Spirit of God in these experiences. But, there is the Arminianism, the very Finneyistic Pelagianism, that the Spirit is given like some giant commodity which the individual must take hold of ... and you take hold of and appropriate as much as you can ... but take care ... not too much or you’ll be overwhelmed and maybe mentally unhinged as a result.

¹⁹Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁰Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 72, again referring to events on “a Saturday in October 1904.”

²¹See Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 75, for details of Rachel Philips’ concern and Roberts’ experience.

Again, the Pelagianism emerges in the notion that the individual becomes somehow the repository of the Holy Spirit's power, which he is then able somehow to utilise at his discretion. The individual acts, and supposedly has the authority to call the Holy Spirit to empower his actions.

But what saith the Scriptures of this Divine Paraclete? He is the "Comforter," the "Spirit of Truth," the Agent of the New Birth, the Glorifier of Christ, the One who tends to Christ's people like a mother tends to her children. Yet here, in the Welsh revival, He is represented as if He is some impersonal force that can swamp and damage Christ's very people, if they appropriate too much of Him. What a contrast this all is to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and during the two millennia of church history. What numberless hopeless cases, who were, during the dark night of their pre-conversion state, subject to mental aberrations of all kinds, yet in their encounter with the Spirit of grace and holiness found peace and healing for their minds? What more beautiful story is there than that of "Legion" from the Gadarene tombs who was to be found "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and *in his right mind* ..." (Luke 8:35). And again, that wonderful story of the simpleton Mary Macrae, brought to an amazing regeneration and enlivening of her mind under the ministry of old John Kennedy of Killearnan. The direction of movement in biblical and ecclesiastical examples is in the opposite direction to that of Evan Roberts and his like.

Such then is the background to the Phillips girls and their anxieties about Evan Roberts' mental state. What is salient is that their anxieties are manifest during the month after Roberts has experienced his great reception of the Spirit with power. We are convinced that old Evan Phillips was remembering how the premier revivalist in the 1858-60 revival eventually became mentally unhinged. Convinced that the Wesleyan Revivalist Humphrey Rowland Jones was a godly man imbued with the Power of the Spirit of God, somehow old Phillips would have had to have a rational explanation to account for Jones' mental breakdown.²² Jones had been a salient example of a "revivalist" undergoing a serious breakdown whilst in the full flight of his ultra-fervent clamourings, when in December 1858, having got the 1858-60 Revival up and going in Wales, he took up his "revival" station at Queen Street Methodist Church in Aberystwyth. He soon laid claim to various "divine" revelations and prophesyings, which culminated in early 1859 when he prophesied that

the "Holy Spirit would descend in bodily form at Aberystwyth on a given date and at a given time, this event initiating the 'millennium.'" The specified date came, and a large gathering assembled expectantly, but, of course, nothing happened. Except that is, Jones' "breakdown" which immediately ensued, resulting in his flight from public life into oblivion and solitude for some four years. Yet the evangelical public in Wales were at that time, and indeed still are, convinced that Humphrey Rowland Jones was a "man of God" imbued from on high with the "power of God's Spirit." The fact was, that with Finneyistic Pelagian theology then running rampant in Wales, the conclusion these "revivalist" thinkers would deduce about Jones was obvious, that even a man of God can by his own free indulgence appropriate too much of God, and loose his marbles as a result. Possibly the old veteran Phillips saw the same tendencies in Evan Roberts and, out of a patriarchal concern for the young man, counselled his daughters to watch out for the revivalist's welfare, particularly vis-à-vis his "mental condition."²³

At this point, Rev. Phillips himself was to have a salient and decisive hand in the course of events. It was Sunday, 30th October. Seth Joshua had departed by now on further travels. The young people and the pre-semi-narians were gathering with the congregation at Bethel Chapel in Newcastle Emlyn to wait upon the ministry of the old patriarch. Rachel Phillips testified that in the morning service she was weeping, under the strange influences that pervaded the meeting. She tells that those who could see the face of Evan Roberts saw that his "face was shining" as if under some "wonderful influence." That afternoon Roberts was at the manse, sighing and yearning to start another prayer meeting. Rachel Phillips tried to deflect him, because, in her own words, she "feared he was going too far and doing himself harm." It is with reference to this moment that she later testified that "God knows what burdened us was care for his mental condi-

²²Eifion Evans seeks to whitewash Humphrey Rowland Jones in his account of Jones' "breakdown," attributing to him an aberrant mental condition due to the emotional stress of the protracted, intense revival meetings (*When He Is Come: An Account of the 1858-60 Revival in Wales* [Bala: Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1959], pp. 49-50). Evans is probably right in his diagnosis, but wrong in thinking it exonerates his subject. Instead, it exposes Jones as one imbued with a pseudo-spirit alien to the majestic presence evident in the apostolic ministry.

²³See Adams, *A Diary of Revival*, pp. 75-77, for details concerning the vigilance of Rachel and Anne Phillips over 28 October, 1904, on Roberts' experience of having to ask God to hold back because the experience was so intense.

tion."²⁴ And all this after a month of spiritual heights supposedly under the anointing of the Holy Spirit! But what is more breathtaking is that Roberts has now, in this mental state, reached the zenith of his spiritual experience. All through October he and Sidney Evans had been seeking what the Spirit wanted them to do, and they were gradually more and more made conscious of a burden to return to Roberts' home church to spread the revival from there.

In the evening service at Bethel that night, Roberts had difficulty holding his attention to the service. Rev. Evan Phillips had given out his text, "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son" (John 17:1). According to Roberts' friend Sydney Evans, it was probably the announcement of this text that sparked off a train of irresistible mental images. Roberts himself testifies that all he could see was—in his mind's eye, like a vision—his old companions sitting before him in the school room of his home church at Moriah, Loughor. In his visions he was addressing them, and he says that he "heard a voice in my inward ear as plain as anything saying, 'Go and speak to these people ...'"

Despite all efforts to the contrary, Roberts failed to banish the vision from his mind, and he tells that he heard nothing of Evan Phillips' sermon that night. After the service, he visited Rev. Phillips and recounted his story to him, and asked the old man whether the voice he heard was that of the Spirit of God or of the devil. Without hesitation Phillips replied that it was the voice of God and that Roberts should go to his people at Loughor.²⁵

In this kaleidoscope of mysticism, therefore, the fatal match was set to the powder keg. At the Calvinistic Methodist manse that night, they held a great prayer meeting of passionate fervour, and Roberts announced that he was willing to shed his own blood for the sake of Christ. He then intimated that he was returning home to Loughor the next day.

Thus the pre-seminarian threw up his studies at the grammar school, sincerely believing that the Holy Spirit was overriding the exigencies that attached to the training of gospel ministers, and departed Newcastle Emlyn the next morning on the 10:45 a.m. southbound train for Carmarthen. But not before he had first called at the post office to send a telegram to Florrie

²⁴Adams, *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

²⁵Adams, *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86, for the above details, showing how Roberts testified to "hearing a voice" in his head, as it were, which he evidently took as being the voice of God's Spirit.

Evans in New Quay, to tell her how he had been given his orders by the Holy Spirit by means of a vision.²⁶

2) The Revivalist

Having changed trains at Carmarthen, Evan Roberts arrived home at Loughor some 6 or 7 miles west of Swansea, and wasted no time in persuading the minister and deacons of his home church to allow him to hold a special youth meeting in the Sunday School room adjacent to the chapel. It was unusual, Brynmor Jones tells us, for a student minister to be allowed to do this, but Roberts certainly seems to have overwhelmed any doubts the church officers might have harboured. However, his minister left him with no illusions, telling Roberts he would “find the ground to be stony, and the task hard.”²⁷

Roberts began that very Monday night, 31st October, 1904. Just 17 youngsters gathered with him, and he explained fully his mission to them, and found that they seemed disinclined to listen. Nevertheless, he persevered, and at last, he says “the power of the Spirit came down ...” Sixteen of them thereupon stood up to “confess Christ.” The revival had begun.

In teaching these youngsters, Roberts put to them his spiritual plan thus:

- (i) We must search for our past sins, and confess them, otherwise we cannot have the Spirit.
- (ii) Anything doubtful in our lives must be removed.
- (iii) We must surrender totally to the Spirit.
- (iv) We must make public confession of Christ.²⁸

This was the beginning of Robert's intensive work. Soon he was exulting in what he thought was the Spirit of God's wonderful manifestations. In a letter written at this time, he describes meetings in which “the girls and young women [were] shouting aloud, having forgotten themselves ...” and “over thirty were baptized by the Holy Spirit ...”²⁹

By Wednesday 2nd November, Roberts could point to the conversion of his 16-year-old sister, hitherto a “sarcastic and peevish girl” but now happy

²⁶B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival*, p. 25.

²⁷B. P. Jones, *Op. cit.*, p. 26; Adams, *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

²⁸Adams, *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

²⁹B. P. Jones, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

and joyful. The following day, as the meetings began to build up in tempo, Roberts had another vision, this time of a nearly burned-out candle and the sun, which was, he tells us, a vision that the flickering and dimming light of the churches would soon be eclipsed by the blaze of a great revival. Ten people professed faith that night at first, but Roberts petitioned Christ for another ten, and ten more “converts” suddenly appeared in direct and immediate answer to this prayer. Now *that* is power for you! Just pray and specify what you want, say, ten more new converts. And lo and behold, WHAM! Ten more “converts” suddenly pop up, almost it seems, with the celerity of a slot machine delivery. Strange how the apostles in the New Testament didn’t seem to have things ironed out as efficiently as this. I wonder why? Charles Grandison Finney and all his Pelagian ilk would have revelled in it all.³⁰

The next day, Friday 4th November, Roberts had yet another vision, one of two galloping horses, one white and the other red. He does not tell us the significance of this vision.³¹ (Perhaps the white one represented the “Keswick” revival begun in February at New Quay, and the red one was to represent the new outbreak under Roberts’s own ministry, but evidently the young pulpiteer’s imagination did not extend far enough to be able to devise such an interpretation.)

Both young and old were attending the meetings now, and from all denominations, and the meetings were running from about 7 o’clock in the evening until sometimes one o’clock the next morning. The services of Sunday evening 6th November ran over until one o’clock the next morning, during which time the “Holy Spirit descended in power at Moriah [Calvinistic Methodist chapel] tonight, or rather—Monday morning ...” and several were “baptised in the Spirit.” “The services,” said Roberts, “finish later and later as they proceed.” He anticipated that in a week from then they would be still in the service at daybreak! Elsewhere in his diaries Roberts noted that he was “praying fervently till four o’clock in the morning” and, at another time, he wrote “went to bed at 3:15, it is improving”! And “some of us were in agonies for nine hours” waiting for the Spirit to descend.³² Indeed, Roberts’ own sister, swept up with her brother in the unfolding events, could record in her letters the pattern of meetings that went something like this:

³⁰See Adams, *Op. cit.*, pp. 90-92, for details of the above.

³¹Adams, *Ibid.* p. 93.

³²See Adams, *Ibid.*, pp. 96ff., for details of these meetings.

Sunday night, from 6 p.m. to 1:10 a.m. - 7 hours

Monday night, from 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. - 8 hours

Tuesday night, from 7 p.m. to 4 a.m. - 9 hours

And so on, with one Sunday session lasting over some 16 hours. She too, testified to being “led by the Spirit.” Describing the meetings at her own chapel at Moriah, Loughor, she related that one of the deacons seemed to be “mad ... mad with joy,” and laughing and clapping, while many of the congregation were actually standing up on the pews ...³³

Within no time, Evan Roberts’ fame began to spread rapidly beyond the confines of the districts around his home town of Loughor. The scenes witnessed in the chapels there began to be repeated up and down the coal-mining communities of the valleys of South Wales with a whirlwind intensity, penetrating eastward as far as Monmouthshire. Everywhere it was the same—preaching was suspended and replaced by marathon emotional prayer-meetings with spontaneous outbursts of singing punctuated by short exhortations or harangues from the revivalist or his colleagues. Sydney Evans, one of Roberts’ fellow pre-seminarians at Newcastle Emlyn had now abandoned his studies too, and was caught up in the revival, lending Roberts a hand in convening and leading the meetings. In addition, several other young people from Moriah Chapel at Loughor joined the team of evangelists, most of them being young women who brought forth an emotion-rousing ministry of song and testimony. The manifestations of the “supernatural” were experienced by numerous men and women in the vast congregations that gathered at the chapels night after night seeking the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

Right at this time, Roberts and his work came to the attention of the South Wales press, who immediately latched on to the phenomena, giving enormous and eulogistic coverage, even to the extent of printing off special “REVIVAL EDITIONS” of their papers. Long catalogues were printed of the numbers of converts in the various towns and localities of Wales, wherever the revival spread. The propaganda effect of this must have been enormous, generating a general fever of religious fervour throughout the Principality, and even beyond it into England and overseas. Interviewed by the South Wales *Daily Post* on 16th November, 1904, Roberts testified of how the Spirit

³³See Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 104, citing information from D. M. Phillips’ *Evan Roberts: The Great Welsh Revivalist and His Work* (London: Marshall Bros., 1906), pp. 231-240.

of God had "baptised him" and was constantly "sending him a message" telling him what to do, where to go, and who to take with him. Apparently he gave the *Post* an impression of a young man who "smiles when he prays ... laughs when he exhorts ..." and "punctuated his ministry with mirth and laughter."³⁴

At this juncture Roberts was just beginning his first journey into the labyrinth of mining valleys to the north and east of Loughor. He testified that the Spirit had told him to take "three young women" with him. It seems one was his newly converted sister, and the little troupe soon expanded to include five to six young women. Clustered around Roberts, they had their photograph taken for printing as a postcard, bearing the caption: "Mr. Evan Roberts and the Revivalists from Loughor."³⁵ It was printed by the Cardiff-published national daily paper of Wales, the *Western Mail*. Indeed, it appears that this paper published a whole series of such postcards, right from early on in the revival proceedings. It is evident, from an examination of the reports of the revival in that very newspaper, that editorial predilection was clearly sympathetic to the Revival, and to Roberts in particular.

It is also evident that Roberts had been so impressed by the likes of Florrie Evans and Maude Davies from New Quay, that he was convinced that women had a major role to play in the spreading of this revival. Bear in mind the stolid and staid traditionalism of masculine authority and ethos in the Welsh non-conformist pulpits at this time and, indeed, throughout the whole spectrum of society. Over against this, the advent of a pulpit full of fashionably dressed, pretty girls was going to hit these communities like a social and emotional thunderbolt. True, there were already women evangelists and ministers here and there in Wales, but they were generally very low profile and usually confined to the Salvation Army or the Wesleyans. The modern chroniclers of Roberts' revival can say that Evan Roberts' revival services changed this, as did those of Sydney Evans and Dan Roberts (Evan Roberts' brother). These young women are chronicled as having initially begun their work with Roberts with song and testimony, but, inevitably, they too became convinced that the "Spirit" was leading them to speak. Some of them "became evangelists in their own right during the revival, conducting their own meetings and

³⁴Adams, *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

³⁵Adams and Jones give some reproductions of these postcards (*A Pictorial History of Revival*, p. 85).

preaching their own sermons.”³⁶ Feminine charm being what it is, one can understand how the girls took the chapels by storm despite some resistance from a few here and there. Roberts was portrayed on the postcard surrounded by five of them, and given his close associations with them, rumours were bound to start, and they did. Adams insists that there was “no evidence of scandal” and he is probably right, given the marathon schedules the team worked to, and the fact that they always stayed in separate lodgings.³⁷ To this must be added the testimonies of scores of people who had close contact with Roberts, and all which agree as to the uprightness and sincerity of his character. But the public association and the postcards were unwise, and were the kind of things that would fuel speculation, especially amongst those not kindly disposed to religion. One ought always to remember the wise advice given by Paul: “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thess. 5:22).

Indeed, it must be said that the impact these young women made has not been fully understood or analysed in the literature pertaining to the revival. The whole matter begs for Ph.D. research theses from budding psychoanalysts. It is not for nothing that the apostolic injunctions forbid women to usurp the authority of men or to teach publicly, and admonish them to maintain their silence in the churches. The “Spirit” that allegedly “spoke” to Evan Roberts in 1904 telling him to take these girls with him was evidently a somewhat different Spirit to that who spoke to Paul in the New Testament.³⁸ But we see here a fundamental characteristic of all these revivals, that the written Word of God is pushed to one side whilst unscriptural practices are brought forward and justified on the grounds of the “Spirit’s leading.” And with full chapels, multitudes of “converts,” waves of emotion, who would dare to get up on their feet and rebuke such a tidal wave of passion by quoting Scripture? Who would have publicly rebuked and criticised the ministry of these attractive, delightful, young women? John Knox for one. Herman Hoeksema too. But nobody in South Wales in 1904 had their guts, and nobody in South Wales in 1904 would have had their knowledge and understanding of Scripture either.

The pattern of these revival meetings replicated itself universally. “In many ways,” says Adams, Evan Roberts “was the first breath of the twentieth cen-

³⁶ Adams, *A Dairy of Revival*, p. 129.

³⁷ Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³⁸ Cf. I Timothy 2:9-15.

tury." He became an ideal to which thousands more aspired as the new Charismatic phenomena of the early twentieth century began to unfold, especially in the hills and valleys of South Wales. These Pentecostals looked back on Roberts and saw in him a "pioneer" who understood the "immanence and direct revelation of the Holy Spirit" and thus he became an "icon" (YES! Icon!) "to be imitated."³⁹ Adams writes that Roberts' "message and personality stamped itself on a nation within a few months" even in those many revival meetings where he was not present.⁴⁰ The "icon" factor was to develop further. Adams can tell us that "Newspapers, periodicals, postcards, mugs and even cotton handkerchiefs carried [Roberts'] image during the revival months ..." From the potteries of Staffordshire came a china figurine of the Revivalist, indicating what was intrinsically the pagan character underlying the mysticism driving the whole movement.⁴¹ If this to the reader sounds ominously like Romanist idolatry then one only has to remember that Rome and Revivalism hold this in common that true religion is to be found in the mystic experientialism of intense prayer, fasting, and deep psychological exercises of the inner spirit. Witness Thomas à Kempis, Ignatius Loyola, Francis of Assisi, Francis of Sales, etc., and note their similarity to the spiritual exercises of Evan Roberts. And this is further borne out by the present endorsement by Rome of the modern Charismatic movement, resulting in "Pentecostal" and "revivalist" phenomena erupting widely throughout the Roman communion. In all of this, of course, the inscripturated Word of God gets marginalised, and the living experiential tradition of professing believers replaces the Word of God as the central epistemological ground of their faith. All of which is exactly what Rome wants. All of which is exactly what generations of Romanist mystics have practised.

To be continued (DV).

³⁹Adams, *Op. cit.*, pp. 130-131. Shades of Eastern Orthodoxy and Romanism!

⁴⁰Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴¹Adams, *Ibid.*, p. 123.