

## CHRISTMAS EVANS

Wales has had many famous preachers. Among them, Daniel Rowlands, Robert Roberts, John Elias, William Williams, Henry Rees, John Jones, and Davies of Swansea. But Christmas Evans, "the one-eyed preacher of Anglesea" seems to have exceeded all the others both in fame and spiritual power. He once said to Richard Rowlands: "Brother, the truths, the confidence, and the power I feel, will cause some to dance for joy in parts of Wales." "They will" replied Rowlands, with tears in his eyes. And so it was.

Christmas Evans, often called "The John Bunyan of Wales," was born on Christmas day, 1766, hence his name Christmas. His parents were very poor. His father died when he was nine years of age, and little Christmas did chores for six years for a cruel ungodly uncle. His education was neglected, and at the age of seventeen he could not read a word. Many accidents and misfortunes befell him. Once he was stabbed in a quarrel, once nearly drowned, once he fell from a high tree with an open knife in his hand, and once a horse ran away with him and dashed at full speed through a low and narrow passage.

After his conversion to Christ some of his former ungodly companions waylaid him at night and unmercifully beat him so that he lost one eye in consequence. But God mercifully preserved him through all these trials. He left his cruel uncle at the age of seventeen, and soon afterwards, during a revival, he identified himself with the church. From an early age he had many religious impressions, but he did not decide for Christ until his seventeenth year. New desires then awoke in his soul and he began to study to learn to read, and to improve his mind. He soon felt a call to the ministry, and this feeling was deepened by a remarkable dream he had concerning the second coming of Christ. He felt that he was only a mass of sin and ignorance, and was much discouraged by his early efforts to preach. He memorized the prayers and sermons of others and tried to pray and preach them.

In 1790 he was ordained by the Baptists and commenced work as a missionary among some of the humbler churches. For three years before joining the Baptists he suffered much from doubts regarding his own conversion to Christ; but soon after uniting with them all his burden of doubts rolled away and he received "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." He was surprised at first to see people brought to God through his ministry, but the Lord greatly blessed him and his meetings began to attract widespread attention. He made a tour of South Wales on foot and sometimes preached as many as five times during one Sunday. Although he was shabbily dressed and awkward, large crowds came to hear him preach, and often there were tears, weeping, and uncontrollable excitement. His sermons took great hold upon the people.

At twenty-six years of age Evans began to preach among the churches on the island of Anglesea, on the Welsh coast, and there he remained for twenty years preaching the gospel with much success. Here many of the churches had been carried away by the Sandemanian teachings, which seem to have been a form of extreme Calvinism, amounting to fatalism, depriving man of moral responsibility. The leader of the sect was a brilliant and cultured orator, and for years Christmas Evans labored and preached to counteract his teachings. Evans' controversies with the Sandemanians brought him into a place where he had lost much of the spirit of prayer and sweetness so necessary for the enjoyment of a Christian life. He felt an intense need and longing for a closer fellowship with God. He thus describes the manner in which he sought and obtained the richer and fuller Christian experience which he so much desired, and which set his soul on fire with divine unction and power such as he had never experienced before. "I was

weary," says he, "of a cold heart towards Christ, and His atonement, and the work of His Spirit — of a cold heart in the pulpit, in secret prayer and in study; especially when I remembered that for fifteen years before that heart had been burning within me as if I were on the way toward Emmaus with Jesus. A day came at last, a day ever to be remembered by me, when I was on my way from Dolgelly to Machynlleth, and climbing up towards Cadair Idris. I felt it my duty to pray, though my heart was hard enough and my spirit worldly. After I had commenced praying in the name of Jesus, I soon felt as if the shackles were falling off, and as if the mountains of snow and ice were melting within me. This engendered confidence in my mind for the promise of the Holy Ghost. I felt my whole spirit relieved of some great bondage, and as if it were rising up from the grave of a severe winter. My tears flowed copiously, and I was constrained to cry aloud and pray for the gracious visits of God, for the joy of his salvation, and that He would visit again the Churches in Anglesea that were under my care. I embraced in my supplications all of the churches, and prayed by name for most of the preachers of Wales. This struggle lasted for three hours. It would come over me again and again, like one wave after another, like a tide driven by a strong wind, until my physical power was greatly weakened by weeping and crying. Thus I gave myself up wholly to Christ, body and soul, talents and labors — all my life— every day, and every hour that remained to me, and all my cares I entrusted into the hands of Christ. The road was mountainous and lonely, so that I was alone, and suffered no interruption in my wrestlings with God. This event caused me to expect a new revelation of God's goodness to myself and the churches. Thus the Lord delivered me and the people of Anglesea from being swept away by the evils of Sandemanianism. In the first service I held after this event, I felt as if I had been removed from the cold and sterile region of spiritual ice, into the pleasant lands of the promises of God. The former striving with God in prayer, and the longing anxiety for the conversion of sinners, which I had experienced at Leyn, were now restored. I had a hold of the promise of God. The result was, when I returned home, the first thing that attracted my notice was, that the Spirit was working also in the brethren in Anglesea, inducing in them a spirit of prayer, especially in two of the deacons, who were particularly importunate that God should visit us in mercy, and render the Word of His grace effectual amongst us in the conversion of sinners."

It was doubtless about the time of this remarkable experience of the anointing of the Holy Spirit that Christmas Evans wrote "a solemn covenant with God," to every article of which he signed his initials. This covenant of consecration was as follows:

#### COVENANT WITH GOD.

I. I give my soul and body unto Thee, Jesus, the true God, and everlasting life; deliver us from sin, and from eternal death, and bring me into life everlasting. Amen. — C. E.

II. I call the day, the sun, the earth, the trees, the stones, the bed, the table and the books, to witness that I come unto Thee, Redeemer of sinners, that I may obtain rest for my soul from the thunders of guilt and the dread of eternity. Amen. — C. E.

III. I do, through confidence in Thy power, earnestly entreat Thee to take the work into Thine own hand, and give me a circumcised heart, that I may love Thee; and create in me a right spirit, that I may seek Thy glory. Grant me that principle which Thou wilt own in the day of judgment, that I may not then assume pale-facedness, and find myself a hypocrite. Grant me this, for the sake of Thy most precious blood. Amen. — C. E.

IV. I entreat Thee, Jesus, the Son of God, in power, grant me, for the sake of Thy agonizing death, a covenant interest in Thy blood which cleanseth; in Thy righteousness, which justifieth; and in Thy

redemption, which delivereth. I entreat an interest in Thy blood, for Thy blood's sake, and a part in Thee, for Thy name's sake, which Thou hast given among men. Amen. — C. E.

V. O Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, take for the sake of Thy cruel death, my time, and strength, and the gifts and talents I possess ; which, with a full purpose of heart, I consecrate to Thy glory in the building up of Thy Church in the world, for Thou art worthy of the hearts and talents of men. Amen. — C. E.

VI. I desire Thee, my great High Priest, to confirm, by Thy power from Thy High Court, my usefulness as a preacher, and my piety as a Christian, as two gardens nigh to each other ; that sin may not have place in my heart to becloud my confidence in Thy righteousness, and that I may not be left to any foolish act that may occasion my gifts to wither, and I be rendered useless before my life ends. Keep Thy gracious eye upon me, and watch over me, O my Lord, and my God for ever! Amen. — C. E.

VII. I give myself in a particular manner to Thee, O Jesus Christ the Saviour, to be preserved from the falls into which many stumble, that Thy name (in Thy cause) may not be blasphemed or wounded, that my peace may not be injured, and that Thy people may not be grieved, and that Thine enemies may not be hardened. Amen. -- C. E.

VIII. I come entreating Thee to enter into a covenant with me in my ministry. Oh, prosper me as Thou didst prosper Bunyan, Vavasor, Powell, Howell Harris, Rowlands, and Whitefield. The impediments in the way of my prosperity remove. Work in me the things approved of God that I may attain this. Give me a heart "sick of love" to Thee, and to the souls of men. Grant that I may feel the power of Thy Word before preaching it, as Moses felt the power of his rod before he felt the effect of it on the land and waters of Egypt. For the sake of Thy precious blood, Jesus, my all in all, grant me this. Amen. -C. E.

IX. Search me now, and lead me in the paths of judgment. May I see in this world what I really am in Thy sight, that I may not find myself otherwise when the light of eternity shall dawn upon me, and open my eyes in the brightness of immortality. Wash me in Thy redeeming blood. Amen. — C. E.

X. Give me power to trust in Thee for food and raiment, and to make known my requests to Thee. O let Thy care be over me as a covenant privilege betwixt Thee and me, and not simply as a general care which Thou shewest in feeding the ravens that perish and clothing the lily that is cast into the oven, but remember me as one of Thy family, and as one of Thy unworthy brethren. Amen. — C. E.

XI. Take upon Thyself, O Jesus, to prepare me for death, for Thou art God; and Thou needest but to speak the word. If it be possible —but Thy will be done — let me not linger in sickness, nor die a sudden death without bidding adieu to my brethren, but rather let me die with them around me, after a short illness. May everything be put in order ready for that day of passing from one world to another, so that there may be no confusion or disorder, but a passing away in peace. O grant me this for the sake of Thine agony in the garden. Amen. — C. E.

XII. Grant, O blessed Lord, that no sin may be nourished or fostered in me which may cause Thee to cast me off from the work of Thy sanctuary, like the sons of Eli; and, for the sake of Thine infinite merits, let not my days be longer than my usefulness. Let me not become, at the end of my days, like a piece of lumber in the way of the usefulness of others. Amen. — C. E.

XIII. I beseech Thee, my Redeemer, to present these supplications of mine before the Father; and oh, inscribe them in Thy book with Thine own immortal pen, while I am writing them with my mortal hand in my book on earth. According to the depths of Thy merit, and Thy infinite grace, and Thy compassion,

and Thy tenderness toward Thy people, O attach Thy name in Thine Upper Court to these humble supplications of mine ; and set Thine amen to them, even as I set mine on my side of the covenant Amen.— CHRISTMAS EVANS, Llangevni, Anglesea, April 10, 18— .

After his entire consecration to God, and after receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit while he wrestled in prayer on his way from Dolgelly to Machyndleth. Christmas Evans began to preach with a new unction and power. A great revival spread from preacher to people all over the island of Anglesea, and then over the whole of Wales. The people were often so wrought upon by Evan's sermons that they literally danced for joy, and their actions obtained for them the nick-name of "the Welsh jumpers." Often the audiences were moved to weeping and tears. Once when Evans preached concerning "The Demoniac of Gadara," and vividly portrayed the deliverance of the demoniac, the wonder of the people, and especially the joy of the demoniac's wife and children when he returned home healed and saved, the audience laughed and wept alternately. One biographer says that " the place was a perfect Bochim for weeping." Shouts of prayer and praise mingled together. One who heard this wonderful sermon says, that, at last, the people seemed like the inhabitants of a city which had been shaken by an earthquake, that in their escape, rushed into the streets, falling upon the earth screaming, and calling upon God!

"The powerful sermons, the breath of heaven, the weeping, the praising, the return of sinners to God," now characterized Evans' meetings wherever he went This was especially true when he preached his famous " Graveyard Sermon," in which he described the world as dead and buried in the graveyard of Law, with Justice guarding the gates but Mercy coming to unlock them. This sermon has been published almost everywhere. The preaching of it brought conviction of sin like a deluge over the people. The scene resembled the one at Shotts, in Scotland, when five hundred persons professed conversion to Christ under the preaching of a sermon by John Livingston. It was similar to that at Llanidloes, Wales, when a thousand persons decided for Christ under one sermon preached by Michael Roberts. Or it resembled the time when twentyfive hundred persons were added to the churches as the result of one sermon preached by John Elias, the mighty Welsh preacher.

Evans was "a man the spell of whose name, when he came into a neighborhood, could wake up all the sleepy villages, and bid their inhabitants pour along up by the hills, and down by the valleys, expectant crowds watching his appearance with tears, and sometimes hailing him with shouts." "It must be said, his are very great sermons" says Rev. Paxton Hood, "the present writer is almost disposed to be bold enough to describe them, as the grandest Gospel sermons of the last hundred years". One biographer describes his manner while preaching as follows: "Christmas Evans, meantime, is pursuing his way, lost in his theme. Now his eye lights up, says one who knew him, like a brilliantly flashing star, his dear forehead expands, his form dilates in majestic dignity; and all that has gone before will be lost in the white-heat passion with which he prepares to sing of Paradise lost and Paradise regained".

The anointing of the Holy Spirit was the great secret of Evans' power. Writing to a young minister, he says: "You will observe that some heavenly ornaments, and power from on high, are visible in many ministers when under the Divine irradiance, which you cannot approach to by merely imitating their artistic excellence, without resembling them in their spiritual taste, fervency, and zeal which Christ and His Spirit 'work in them. This will cause, not only your being like unto them in gracefulness of action, and propriety of elocution, but will also induce prayer for the anointing of the Holy One, which worketh mightily in the inward man. This is the mystery of effective preaching. We must be endued with power from on high". Someone said to Evans, "Mr. Evans, you have not studied Dr. Blair's Rhetoric." Evans, to whom Dr. Blair with his rules was always as dry as Gilboa, replied: "Why do you say so when you just

now saw hundreds weeping under the sermon? That could not be, had I not first of all been influenced myself, which, you know, is the substance, and mystery, of all rules of speaking."

Evans collected much money for the building of churches, the Baptist churches of Anglesea being more than doubled under his ministry. In one place where he was raising money to build a chapel, the money came very slowly although the audiences were very large. There had been much sheep-stealing in the neighborhood, and Evans decided to use this fact to advantage in collecting money. He told the people that undoubtedly some of the sheepstealers must be present in the congregation, and he hoped that they would not throw any money into the collection. A big collection was taken. Those who did not have any money to give borrowed from their neighbors to put in the collection.

"Dear old Christmas," as he was familiarly called in his old age, finished his course with joy, and fell asleep in Christ July 23, 1838, with a song of victory on his lips.