

A. B. EARLE

It was claimed that the famous Spirit-filled evangelist, A. B. Earle, author of "Bringing in the Sheaves," and "The Rest of Faith," preached more frequently than any other man living at the same time. In fifty years he traveled 325,000 miles in the United States and Canada, preached 19,780 times, and 150,000 persons professed conversion in his meetings. He often preached three or four times in one day. He usually held union meetings, and frequently ten, twenty, or even thirty churches united in his protracted meetings. In one city fifteen hundred persons professed conversion to Christ as a result of his labors, and during an evangelistic tour of nine months' duration over five thousand people were gathered into the churches where he held meetings. He deserves to be ranked with the greatest evangelists and soul winners of all time.

A writer in a leading British religious paper said concerning Mr. Earle: "His preaching was not eloquent. His delivery was not beyond the average. His voice had no special power. His large angular frame and passionless mouth were decidedly against him. His sermons seemed sometimes as though composed thirty years ago, before we so often heard, as now, the more clear and ringing utterances of free grace, and the name of Jesus in almost every sentence. He expressed his own emotions very simply, and did not often refer to them. His rhetoric was often at fault, and sometimes even his grammar. Truly the enticing words of man's wisdom were wanting in his case.

"The first time I heard him I came away in wonder as to wherein his unusual gospel power lay; but as I listened to him again and again, I could not help realizing how the congregation, and my own soul with them, were held by the power of God. When he preached on the value of a human soul, I do not remember a single thought or illustration that was new to me; and yet I came away overwhelmed in this realization of the infinite preciousness of each child of Adam, and found myself as I awoke the next morning, weeping in sorrow and anxiety for lost sinners. That day there were, I trust, two souls given me in private conversations.

"Yet there was nothing like the electric power which enabled Massillon, in the last century, to cause a multitude to start at once from their seats, in an agony of mortal terror, nor even the sobbing and outcry, as under Jonathan Edward's celebrated sermon on 'Eternity.' All was still. But about forty souls were baptized two or three days afterward.

"Coming to the meeting perfectly free to follow the guidance of the Spirit, the preacher seemed as simple and as easily guided in any direction as the smallest child in the house. The congregation, which seemed to be so wonderfully swayed by him, were really controlled by the same Holy Spirit which controlled him. He simply watched for and recognized the guidance of God, and walked in it. . . .

"There was no rule in his movements. He sometimes asked the awakened to come forward, sometimes to rise in their seats; sometimes no expression was called for. All was simple and natural; and the very simplicity itself, and the unexpectedness of the direction of the meetings, surprised the unconverted out of their defences"

Earle was a Baptist, but he was strongly in favor of union meetings in evangelistic work. He believed that one of the most potent factors in bringing souls to Christ was the sight of Christians of different denominations working together in perfect harmony. His union meetings were so many and so large that he had the privilege of laboring with no less than eight thousand ministers, in almost every state in

the United States, in three of the provinces of Canada, and in the British Isles. "I have never charged any special sum for my services as an evangelist," says he, "preferring to leave it to the people to give me, as a freewill offering, just what they chose at the close of each series of meetings." His famous book, "Bringing in the Sheaves," has had an immense sale, and the proceeds were considerable.

Earle was a strong believer in the preaching of future punishment. "I have found by long experience," says he, "that the severest threatenings of the law of God have a prominent place in leading men to Christ. They must see themselves lost before they will cry for mercy. They will not escape from danger until they see it. I have reason to believe that a single sermon I have often preached on 'The Sin that Hath Never Forgiveness' (Mark 3:29), has been the means of more than twenty thousand conversions." He also says, concerning this sermon: "I have known scores to give themselves to Christ under a single sermon on this subject, again and again." "The wicked never flee from 'the wrath to come' until they are fully satisfied there is wrath," says he.

Earle began preaching in 1830, when eighteen years of age, but his greatest success was after his own Christian experience was deepened, about the year 1860. In his little book entitled "The Rest of Faith" written in 1871, he tells us how his own soul was led into the "rest of faith" and enjoyment of the deeper things of God. "About ten years ago" says he, "I began to feel an inexpressible hungering and longing for the fulness of Christ's love. I had often had seasons of great joy and peace in Christ, and in His service. I had seen many precious souls brought into the fold of Christ. I fully believe I then belonged to Christ, that my name was in His family record.

"I loved the work of the ministry, but had long felt an inward unrest, a void in my soul that was not filled. Seasons of great joy would be followed by seasons of darkness and doubt. If I had peace, I feared it would not continue; and it did not.

"Many anxious Christians came to me, complaining of the same thing. How could I help them on that point, when I did not know how to get right myself? I took them to the seventh chapter of Romans, and there left them, saying, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' I was there myself, and supposed I must live and die there.

"In this state I was exposed to severe temptations and attacks of the enemy. I made strong and repeated resolutions that I would be faithful, but could not keep them. Then I sought and found forgiveness again, and was happy, and said, 'Oh, that I could always enjoy such peace!' But it was soon disturbed by some word, or act, or heart-wandering.

"Thus I lived on for many years: now happy in my Christian experience, and now unhappy; sometimes doubting and fearing, and sometimes resting. God gave me success in winning souls, and granted me many hours of sweet communion with my Saviour, for which I am truly grateful; still I was unsatisfied, — I wanted an uninterrupted rest and peace.

"I often read those precious words uttered by our Saviour, 'If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you'. I longed and prayed to be there, but knew not the way. Oh that someone had then taught me the way of rest in Jesus!

"I frequently met Christians who claimed sinless perfection: many of them were, indeed, a better type of Christians than ordinary professors; but they did not seem perfect to me. The rest in Jesus, for which I longed, was still unfound.

"At last I felt that the question for me to settle was this, — Can an imperfect Christian sweetly and constantly rest in a perfect Saviour, without condemnation?

"This I revolved in my mind for a long time. I read, as far as I could, the experiences of those who seemed to live nearest to Christ. I searched the Scriptures for light, and asked such as I believed had power with God to pray with and for me, that I might be led aright on this great question. At length I became satisfied that Christ had made provision for me and all His children to abide in the fulness of His love without one moment's interruption.

"Having settled this, I said: " I need this ; I long for it; I cannot truly represent religion without it, and Christ is dishonored by me every day I live without it.

"I therefore deliberately resolved, by the help of my Redeemer, to obtain it at any sacrifice; little realizing how unlike Christ I then was, or how much would be needed, to bring me there.

"I first procured a blank book, which I called my 'Consecration Book,' and slowly and solemnly, on my knees, wrote in it the following dedication:

"Andover, February 10, 1859.

"This day I make a new consecration of my all to Christ.

" Jesus, I now forever give myself to Thee ; my soul to be washed in Thy blood and saved in heaven at last; my whole body to be used for Thy glory; my mouth to speak for Thee at all times ; my eyes to weep over lost sinners, or to be used for any purpose to Thy glory ; my feet to carry me where Thou shalt wish me to go; my heart to be burdened for souls, or used for Thee anywhere ; my intellect to be employed at all times for Thy cause and glory. I give to Thee my wife, my children, my property, all I have, and all that ever shall be mine. I will obey Thee in every known duty. A. B. E.'

"I then asked for grace to enable me to carry out that vow, and that I might take nothing from the altar. I supposed, with this consecration, entire as far as knowledge went, I should soon receive all that my longing heart could contain; but in this I was sadly mistaken.

"I then came nearer to Christ. But as clearer light began to shine into my heart, I saw more of its vileness.

" I find in my journal the following : " ' Boston, December 22, 1859.

"The last three weeks have been weeks of great searching of heart. I never had my heart so searched before. I detect pride, envy, self-will, a great deal of unbelief, my love to the Saviour to be very weak. Yet I have consecrated all to Christ, and cannot withdraw it from the altar. Oh, can a worm so vile be like Christ? I know it is possible; and if I am ever to be like Him, why not now, while I am where I can do good in leading others to Him.

" I felt like a patient who, though in the hands of a skilful physician, groans and writhes under the severe treatment which has been found necessary in order to save his life. But my constant prayer was, "Be thorough with me, Jesus, — be thorough." Many a discouraging day followed this consecration and these heart-searchings. I grew weak and small and unworthy in my own estimation. "At times my joy and peace were almost unbounded. Sometimes I felt that I grasped the prize so earnestly sought, but was shown hidden sin in my heart which greatly humbled and distressed me. How fully I realized the words of J. B. Taylor, who said, while seeking this blessing, " Notwithstanding my profession that I had

crucified the world, the flesh, and the devil, I have had keener sorrows for indwelling sin than I even experienced before conversion.

""Oh, the distress which I have felt on account of pride, envy, love of the world, and other evil passions which have risen up and disturbed my peace, and separated between God and my soul!" How many have realized all this, and even more, in their struggles after abiding rest in Jesus !

""One sin that troubled me most, and was the hardest to overcome, was a strong will, — a desire, and almost a determination to have my own way; — and thus— even in regard to little things, or any little injury or supposed wrong — to speak without reflection, and sometimes severely, even to those I knew were my friends ; to say, " I will do this," and " I will do that."

"" This I clearly saw must be overcome, if I would become a consistent and useful Christian. As I could not do it myself, I gave it over to Jesus: He could give me grace to overcome even this. But I found I gave nothing into the hands of Jesus, except by a sinful faith. My faith was very deficient and weak: to believe the promises fully was not easy. I believed the theory of religion; but to have my heart grasp the reality, without wavering, was more difficult. Yet I found my faith growing stronger, until at last I came to believe just what God had said in His Word. I found first the blade of faith, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. No rest could be obtained until I could believe just what God had said, and trust Him fully.

"" I felt that I must have in my heart something that I did not then possess. Before I could be filled with the fulness of Christ's love I must be emptied of self. Oh, the longing of my heart for what I then believed, and now believe, to be sweet and constant rest in Jesus I I believed I should receive, and thought it was near.

"" I soon found it easier to resist temptation. I began to trust Christ and His promise more fully.

"" With this mingling of faith, desire, and expectation, I commenced a meeting on Cape Cod. After rededicating myself, in company with others, anew to God, I was in my room alone, pleading for the fulness of Christ's love, when all at once a sweet, heavenly peace filled all the vacuum in my soul, leaving no longing, no unrest, no dissatisfied feeling in my bosom. I felt, I knew, that I was accepted fully in Jesus. A calm, simple, childlike trust took possession of my whole being. . . .

""Then, for the first time in my life, I had the rest which is more than peace. I had felt peace before, but feared I should not retain it; now I had peace without fear, which really became rest. . . .

""This change occurred about five o'clock, on the evening of the second day of November, 1863 ; and although I never felt so weak and small, yet Jesus has been my all since then. There has not been one hour of conscious doubt or darkness since that time. A heaven of peace and rest fills my soul. Day and night the Saviour seems by me.

""My success in leading souls to Jesus has been much greater than before. . . .

""Temptation is presented, but the power of it is broken. I seem to have a present Saviour in every time of need; so that for several years I have done the trusting and Jesus the keeping. . . ."

As we learn from his most famous book, " Bringing in the Sheaves," Earle experienced wonderful spiritual power in his meetings after receiving the above experience. The sensible presence of the Spirit was sometimes so strong that the whole audience would be melted to tears, or feelings found vent in

sobs or audible expressions of praise. The impenitent were awed and subdued by the presence and power of God, and they often flocked to God in multitudes. At one time Earle was so worn out and weary from praying with so many seekers, he had to leave them to pray their own way to Christ. People could often be heard praying at midnight in streets and houses and fields and barns as a result of his meetings.

Earle depended entirely on the Holy Spirit's power to win souls to Christ. He says: "I have observed for nearly forty years past, that the secret of success in promoting revivals of religion is in having our own hearts filled with the Holy Spirit." Again, he says: Nothing can be a substitute for real power from on high. No amount of study, or talent, or effort, however untiring, can take the place of the fulness of Christ's love; ' Not by might, nor by (human) power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.' "

When Earle preached on " The Unpardonable Sin," in San Francisco, the power of God was so manifest that about five hundred persons rose for prayer. At a meeting in Burlington, Vermont, when he preached on "The Joy of Salvation," about fifty ministers knelt at the altar to make an unconditional surrender of their all to God.

In his great sermon on "Joy", Earle shows the power of the life which is "filled with joy and the Holy Ghost". He tells of one woman who had been a Christian for years, and her husband had grown more skeptical all the time. But a few days after she was filled with joy and the Holy Ghost, he came to the meetings all broken up under a sense of his sins. He said that his wife had been a professing Christian for many years, but he had no desire for her kind of religion. But during the last few days she had been such an angel in the home that he could hold out no longer.

Earle believed that the "joy of the Lord" is the great secret in soul-winning. He believed that nothing would draw sinners to Christ so quickly as to see the joy of salvation in believers. This is the great point brought out in his book "Bringing in the Sheaves" With the Psalmist he prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit; Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm51:13).