

3. The Revival

~Other Speakers M-R: David Matthews:

THIS REVIVALIST was tested in that way, but with different results. Such is God's amazing grace. It must have been a trying ordeal to have to inform his principal of this decision. But Mr. Phillips was a man of keen understanding and sympathetic nature. Perhaps he felt convinced that the "whim" would soon pass—just a transient emotion—after the first flush of the magnetic experience had expended itself. Arriving home for the weekend, Evan Roberts had leisure and opportunity to examine the ground and, in the orthodox manner, consult the elders about the possibility of arranging a service. It appears that he was led to call a service exclusively for young people, so that he might be free to tell them something about the happenings of the last few days and what he had passed through. Accordingly his wish was made known and an announcement made to this effect. Many of the youth of his acquaintance, convinced that Evan had something unusual that he wished to disclose, came in large numbers, full of animated curiosity. Had such a thing been known before? Not to their knowledge. What momentous hours those were that preceded that service! Can we imagine the tense anxiety of the youthful leader? But no one ever surmised or anticipated what the far-reaching results would be.

There is very little evidence to guide us, except for disjointed reports given by the young people who were present. They reviewed the occurrence in the light of a movement that shook the nation from center to circumference. Very simply, and without any attempt at producing effect, Mr. Roberts rehearsed solemnly and deliberately his experiences, emphasizing the deep hunger of his own heart for a new Britain for God and for a deeper knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit within. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts," were the words impressed upon his mind, as he tried to unfold the mysterious dealings of the gracious Spirit with him. Slowly and quietly—for it must be emphasized that fluency of speech had never been a marked characteristic of his—he spoke of the deep things of God and Christ, the hours passing quite unobserved, while tears coursed uninterruptedly over the cheeks of the listeners. People passing by the church commented freely and wonderingly upon the unusual spectacle of the lights burning in full blaze at such an hour. What did it mean? Inside the building strange things were happening. Young men and women who had never been known to speak openly of any experience of saving grace stood and testified fearlessly. Others were bowed in prayer. Some sang the hymns of Zion. Tears, sobs, sighs, and songs of praise were intermingled, continuing until near midnight. The happy throng dispersed in all directions, somber midnight gloriously disturbed by the psalms of the sanctuary. Next day the village was agog.

When Mr. Roberts arrived for the pre-arranged service next evening, the chapel was besieged with curious worshipers, hardly knowing what would transpire. This chapel was not closed afterward night or day for many months, we are told. When it became known that some of the outstanding characters of the neighborhood had been converted after withstanding Gospel appeals of eminent preachers for a lifetime, and that these were declaring new-found joy and faith without shame or fear, the excitement became tense. Rumors sped far and wide. Down in the bowels of the earth, miners not only discussed the services but actually sang boisterously the grand old hymns taught them in their childhood and almost forgotten through sin.

Everything sprang into new life. Former blasphemers were the most eloquent, both in prayer and praise. These men appeared to be making up for lost time—the years that the locust hath eaten" (Joel 2:25). Drunkards forgot the way to the saloons, which in fact were empty in a few nights. All the former inebriates were busy worshipping. Scores of the most respectable young people of the churches, who had previously never entertained such a thought, joined together and preached in the common, where gypsies usually camped. There they showed the benighted ones the simple way of salvation. Nothing daunted or discouraged them. Was it not the "new wine" of the kingdom that made them bold and merry of heart? It was the young people who responded with greatest alacrity to the searching challenge of absolute surrender and consecration to the service of the Lord. Wherever they went, the very air became vibrant with songs of praise. Hundreds of them, thrilled with an experience to which they had hitherto been strangers, scattered the "divine flame" recklessly abroad—to be seen once in a lifetime! But it was a wonderful privilege to have witnessed, at least once, a land in the throes of revival. God has thus vindicated Himself, leaving His Church without an excuse. He is the same—"I am the Lord, I change not."

Personally known to me was a man who had acquired such proficiency in swearing that even his old companions turned away from him as he blasphemed with frightful vehemence. As a youngster, he had attended Sunday school regularly and thus had accumulated a rich store of Scripture knowledge, which made him the envy of many. To every appearance, he was a most promising Bible student. Alas! as he developed into manhood, he became a ruthless blasphemer. His very knowledge of the Scriptures enabled him to swear with vitriolic fury. His co-workers in the mine moved to a distance when once he commenced to swear. This

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foul-mouthed man was one of the first to break the silence by bursting into agonizing prayer. Let it be added at once, he was as eloquent in prayer as he had once been in profanity. It was thrilling to hear him addressing Jehovah at the throne of grace. His conversion astounded the neighborhood, as Saul's change staggered the early Church. Everyone marveled at the skill with which he strung long Scripture passages together at the mercy seat—another tribute to the efficiency of Sunday school tuition!

At every service the evangelist emphasized the sentence, "Obey the Holy Spirit." It was his special word to the Church of God. Congregations were urged to sing, pray, or testify, just as they were moved. Human prudence suggested that the meetings would assuredly end in riotous confusion. But human reasoning went far astray in its predictions. They did nothing of the kind. No human agency controlled the services; it had been customary for one person to control the worship of the sanctuary. Here was something entirely new. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." This was bewilderingly strange to those who had been nurtured under orthodox methods. Nothing like it had ever happened before—at least, not in Wales. Past revivals, even the 1859 revival to which many made hallowed reference, was a very different movement from this one. David Morgan, of Ysbutty, its great leader, had swayed the people by his preaching. Thousands were brought to Christ through his instrumentality. It was not so with this movement. "Obey the Holy Spirit . . . Be filled with the Holy Spirit . . . Do not grieve the Holy Spirit by disobedience"—Evan Roberts reiterated those words tirelessly. Men, women, and even children, came under the spell of the message. Incredible things happened as a result. In the homes, on the highways, down in the coal mine, in business houses, and even in the schools, hymns were sung.