

Evan Roberts.

BY W. T. STEAD.

The revival in South Wales is not the work of any one man or of any number of men, but the most conspicuous figure in this strange religious awakening is undoubtedly that of the young Welsh collier student, Mr. Evan Roberts. Until last November no one had heard of him. Today his name is on every tongue in Wales, and everywhere in all the land people are asking what manner of man this new evangelist may be.

Mr. Evan Roberts is a tall, graceful young man of twenty-six, who, until last year, was at work as a collier in the Broad oak colliery, Loughor, a Welsh village near which an express train was wrecked a few months ago, with great loss of life. He is the son of Methodist parents, and attended Movrah Methodist church in Loughor. Like many Welshmen, he is a poet, and contributed many fine verses to the *Colwyn Gymrang* in the Cardiff Times under the name of "Bwlchyd." He was always of a pious disposition, but according to his own account, although he was a church member and a worker in the Sunday school, he was not a Christian until little more than fifteen months ago. I asked him: "Can you tell me how you began to take to this work?"

"Oh, yes, that I will," said Mr. Roberts, "if you wish to hear of it. For a long, long time I was much troubled in my soul and my heart by thinking over the failure of Christianity. Oh! it seemed such a failure—such a failure—and I prayed and prayed, but nothing seemed to give me any relief. But one night, after I had been in great distress praying about this, I went to sleep, and at one o'clock in the morning suddenly I was waked up out of my sleep, and I found myself, with unspeakable joy and awe, in the very presence of the Almighty God. And for the space of four hours I was privileged to speak face to face with him as a man speaks face to face with a friend. At five o'clock it seemed to me as if I again returned to earth."

"Were you not dreaming?" I asked.

"No, I was wide awake. And it was not only that morning, but every morning for three or four months. Always I enjoyed four hours of that wonderful communion with God. I cannot describe it. I felt it, and it seemed to change all my nature, and I saw things in a different light, and I knew that God was going to work in the land, and not this land only, but in all the world."

"Excuse me," I said, "but, as an old interviewer, may I ask if, when the mystic ecstasy passed, you put on paper all that you remembered of these times of communion?"

"No, I wrote nothing at all," said Mr. Roberts. "I went on all the time until I had to go to Newcastle Emlyn to the college to prepare for the ministry. I dreaded to go, for fear I should lose these four hours with God every morning. But I had to go, and it happened as I feared. For a whole month he came no more, and I was in darkness. And my heart became as a stone. Even the sight of the cross brought no tears to my eyes. So it continued until, to my great joy, he returned to me, and I had again the glorious communion. And he said I must go and speak to my people in my own village. But I did not go. I did not feel as if I could go to speak to my own people."

"May I ask," I said, "if he of whom you speak appeared to you as Jesus Christ?"

"No," said Mr. Roberts, "not so; it was the personal God not as Jesus."

"As God the Father Almighty?" I said.

"Yes," said Mr. Roberts, "and the Holy Spirit."

"Pardon me," I said, "but I interrupted you. Pray go on."

"I did not go to my people, but I was troubled and ill at ease. And one Sunday, as I sat in the chapel, I could not fix my mind upon the service, for always before my eyes I saw, as in a vision, the school room in my own village. And there, sitting in rows before me, I saw my old companions and all the young people, and I saw myself addressing them. I shook my head impatiently, and strove to drive away this vision, but it always came back. And I heard a voice in my inward ear, as plain as anything, saying, 'Go and speak to these people.' And for a long time I would not. But the pressure became greater and greater, and I could hear nothing of the sermon. Then at last I could resist no longer, and I said, 'Well, Lord, if it is thy will, I will go.' Then instantly the vision vanished, and the whole chapel became filled with light so dazzling that I could faintly see the minister in the pulpit, and between him and me the glory as the light of the sun in heaven."

"And then you went home?"

"No; I went to my tutor, and told him all things, and asked him if he believed that it was of God or of the devil? And he said the devil does not put good thoughts into the mind. I must go and obey the heavenly vision. So I went back to my own village, and I saw my own minister, and him also I told. And he said that I might try and see what I could do, but that the ground was stony, and the task would be hard."

"Did you find it so?"

"I asked the young people to come together, for I wanted to talk to them. They came, and I stood up to talk to them, and behold, it was even as I had seen it in the

church at Newcastle Emlyn. The young people sat as I had seen them sitting, all together in rows before me, and I was speaking to them even as it had been shown to me. At first they did not seem inclined to listen; but I went on, and at last the power of the Spirit came down, and six came out for Jesus. But I was not satisfied. 'O Lord,' I said, 'give me six more—I must have six more!' and we prayed together. At last the seventh came, and then the eighth and the ninth together, and after a time the tenth, and then the eleventh, and last of all came the twelfth also. But not more. And they saw that the Lord had given me the second six, and they began to believe in the power of prayer."

"Then after that you went on?"

"First I tried to speak to some other young people in another church, and asked them to come. But the news had gone out, and the old people said, 'May we not come too?' And I could not refuse them. So they came, and they kept on coming now here, now there all the time, and I have never had time to go back to college."

Not much chance, indeed, at present. Three meetings every day, lasting, with breaks for meals, from 10 a. m. till 12 p. m., and sometimes later, leave scant leisure for studying elsewhere than in the hearts and souls of men. If only his body will hold out, and his nervous system does not give way, he will have time to study hereafter. At present he has other work in hand.

It has been said that Mr. Roberts never preaches. He does, however, or rather he did at the beginning of his career, deliver long addresses, which were simple, direct Gospel appeals. Joyousness was the note of all his discourses; the joyousness of a junior partner conscious that his Senior is with him and is intrusting him with a most responsible mission.

He exclaimed once, "Oh, if you only saw Christ you would love him. How can I repay him for the privilege of going through Wales to proclaim his love?"

At the end of November he gave it as his conviction that one hundred thousand souls would be won before the end of the revival in Wales. In December he said, "At one time I said I would be satisfied with one hundred thousand converts and then would be willing to die, but now I want the whole world."

Again he says, "Isn't it all wonderful how the Spirit responds? It is not I, it is the Spirit, the Spirit." To describe the address that follows as a sermon would be a misnomer. He is buoyant, joyous, bubbling over with merriment. It is "the joy of Christ," he explains, "and you can laugh—yes laugh out of sheer joy at the throne of grace."

Yet he always shrinks modestly from claiming any of the results that follow his mission, sometimes he declines to let his movements be announced. "People must not rely upon me." This is his constant cry, "I have nothing for them. They must rely upon him who alone can minister to their needs."

When I talked with him he said, "The movement is not of me, it is of God. I would not dare to try to direct it. Obey the Spirit, that is our word in everything. It is the Spirit alone which is leading us in our meetings and in all that is done."

"You do not preach, or teach, or control the meetings?"

"Why should I teach when the Spirit is teaching? What need have these people to be told that they are sinners? What they need is salvation. Do they not know it? It is not knowledge that they lack, but decision—action. And why should I control the meetings? The meetings control themselves, or rather the Spirit that is in them controls them."

"You find the ministry of the Singing Sisters useful?"

"Most so. They go with me wherever I go. I never part from them without feeling that something is absent if they are not there. The singing is very important, but not everything. No. The public confession is also important—more so than the speaking. True I talk to them a little. But the meetings go of themselves."

All his movements are governed by the answers he receives to prayer. "Will you go to Cardiff?" they asked him. He paused, and then replied in the negative, the answer to his thought-prayer having been almost instantaneous. He usually speaks in Welsh, but he can speak English, although not with the beauty and polish of his native tongue. The newspapers publish translated scraps rather than reports of his remarks. Here are a few sentences:

"Whilst sect was fighting against sect the devil was clapping his hands with glee, and encouraging the fight. Let all people be one, with one object—the salvation of sinners. Men refused to accept the Gospel and confess because, they said of the gloom and uncertainty of the future. They looked to the future without having opened their eyes to the infinite glories of the present." "All must obey" he declares, "all must work. There is no room in the church for idlers. Are you an idler? Then your place is outside." "Be as simple in your worshipping as possible, the simpler the better. There is no need to shout," he went on, "and no one need be ashamed to confess Christ."

He dwells sometimes on the sufferings of Christ until he falls prone, sobbing his utterance. While absolutely tolerant of all manifestations of the Spirit, he is stern to check any disorder. At Ferndale, where some persons had been disturbing the meeting by exuberant and assembly

noises he said, "He who would walk with God must come to his house in a spirit of prayer, of humility, of awe. Joy is permissible in the house, but it must be sanctified joy. For think of the majesty of the Divine Person. Father—yes, a Father truly, but we must be even as little children, in humility, remembering that we are sinners. We can, we are taught to entreat for the descent of the Spirit, but beware lest the entreaty becomes a rude imperious command, if we truly walk with God there can be no disorder, no indecency."

On another occasion he pleaded for a service of silence, to convince the world that the power at work in those gatherings was the power of the Holy Spirit, not that of man. "Let us have five minutes of absolutely silent prayers"—an effective reversion to the practice of the Society of Friends.

His method of conducting a meeting is to allow it to allow it to conduct itself. But he usually contrives to expound his four principles, and to summon his hearers to make public confession.

After emphatically disclaiming any share in the religious upheaval, which he attributed solely to the Holy Spirit, Mr. Roberts said:

"I will give you a message. I should like the people to believe. They wait for me. They should wait only for the Spirit. Some one said they are almost breaking their heart for me to go. Will they almost break their heart for the Holy Spirit? Then it must come down. What does the Word say? 'Ask and receive.' It is just that 'Ask and ye shall receive.' That is the promise. Believe it. Don't wait for me. Some are talking of the share that this denomination or that has in the work. It is not denominational. In Loughor we had all denominations—Methodists, Churchmen, Congregationalists, Baptists, every one. 'Give me a message distinct, plain, for the people Mr. Roberts.'"

He waited a minute or two before answering, and then said:

"This is the message. Of course I had to pray for it. To ask for guidance how the prophecy of Joel is being fulfilled. There the Lord says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.' If that be so all flesh must be prepared to receive it. Note the four conditions:

"First. The past must be clear; every sin confessed to God. Any wrong put upon any man must be made right.

"Second. Everything doubtful must be removed once and for all out of our lives.

"Third. Obedience prompt and implicit to the Holy Spirit.

"Fourth.—Public confession must be made of Christ.

"These are the four conditions given if every church will comply with these four conditions, then all will be made one. Once the Spirit comes down and takes possession of a man, he is made at one with all men. All denominations are one. You know what Christ said 'If I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' There it is. Christ is all in all."—Watchman.

The following lines were for years among the choice poetical treasures of Mr. and Mrs. John Nalder, and were read at the funeral service of Deacon J. Nalder in the Baptist church at Windsor, N. S., Feb. 25th, 1905.

"A VOICE FROM HEAVEN ANTICIPATING RESURRECTION GLORY."

I shine in the light of God;
His likeness stamps my brow;
Through the valley of death my feet have trod,
And I reign in glory now!

No breaking heart is here,
No keen and thrilling pain,
No wasted cheek, where the frequent tear
Hath rolled and left its stain.

I have reached the joys of heaven,
I am one of the sainted band,
For my head a crown of gold is given,
And a harp is in my hand.

I have learned the song they sing
Whom Jesus has set free,
And the glorious walls of heaven still ring
With my new born melody.

No sin, no grief, no pain;
Safe in my happy home;
My tears all fled, my doubts all slain,
My hour of triumph's come!

Oh friends of mortal years,
The trusted and the true;
Ye are watching still in the valley of tears,
But I wait to welcome you.

Do I forget? Oh, no!
For memory's golden chain
Shall bind my hearts to the heart's below
Till we meet to touch again.

Each link is strong and bright,
And loves electric flame,
Flows freely down like a river of light,
To the world from whence I came.

Do you mourn when another star
Shines out from the glittering sky?
Do you weep when the raging voice of war,
And the storms of conflict die?

Then why should your tears run down,
And your hearts be sorely riven,
For another gem in the Saviour's crown,
And another soul in heaven?

This poem was greatly admired by those who heard it, and several persons have wished to see it in print. It was indeed most fitting for the occasion. It ought to do good wherever printed. Could you not give it space in your columns.

Yours truly,

W. F. T.