

Llangeitho and Welsh Revivals D. Geraint Jones

Wales, like America, has been called the land of revivals, and throughout its history has known many periods of blessing. The period between 1735 and 1905 was a time of almost continual blessing, with very few years passing without there being a revival somewhere in Wales, either on the local, regional or national level. There were few places that were so signally blessed during a large part of this period than Llangeitho in Cardiganshire.

Revivals Under Daniel Rowland

During the ministry of Daniel Rowland, from his conversion in 1735 until his death in 1790, there are said to have been about seven periods of powerful revival. Some of these are have been recorded, and we know when they occurred, but concerning others we have no accounts, or do not know for sure when they happened.

The first, early in his ministry, is said to have begun while he was reading, or rather praying, the words of the Anglican Prayer Book Litany, 'By thine agony [in Welsh 'extreme agony'] and bloody sweat'. John Owen, one of Rowland's early biographers, says:

'The touching and melting manner in which Rowlands repeated these words, affected the whole assembly so much, that they almost all wept, and wept loudly... Many in the congregation were really convinced and converted, as their subsequent conduct proved.'

In 1762 a very powerful revival broke out at Llangeitho as a result of the introduction of a new hymn-book by William Williams, Pantycelyn. It spread throughout Cardiganshire, and several other counties, even reaching North Wales. It was notable for the degree of rejoicing, with many jumping and leaping for joy. William Williams, wrote a couple pamphlets in defence of the revival, demonstrating that it was only natural for those who had seen their dire condition under the wrath of God to rejoice when they receive a free pardon through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The revival continued in strength until about 1764.

In April 1779 a revival broke out in the remote mountainous area of Soar-y-Mynydd, Cardiganshire. One Sabbath afternoon, whilst a very ordinary exhorter, Jack Edward Watkin of Llanddewibrefi, was preaching, the fire kindled, and 'numbers who had been so far hearers only became deeply concerned for their everlasting safety.' The meeting continued until daybreak on Monday morning. Daniel Rowland heard the news, and resolved to go and preach there.

'He preached, and the power was still present, and even mightier than on the preceeding Sabbath. On his return home he said to his friends, "It is a heath fire and will spread abroad." And it did spread.... until it reached many and far-distant localities in South and North Wales, and thousands were brought to seek everlasting life.'

One of those localities was Llangeitho itself since in May 1780, Sally Jones of Bala could write in a letter to a young curate, Thomas Charles (soon to be her husband):

'I suppose you have heard of the great revival of Religion that is in South Wales - The last crop probably that the 1st Reformers shall here upon earth reap of their labours... I hear that some Clergymen in South Wales are called and made flaming ministers of the Sanctuary and that there has been upwards of three hundred received into the Society at Llangeitho since Xmas.'

Another revival is said to have begun at a prayer-meeting at Llangeitho, and spread by means of prayer meetings, as well as by preaching. Yet another began at Llangeitho chapel while Rowland was preaching.

'The whole chapel seemed as if it was filled with some supernatural element, and the whole assembly was seized with extraordinary emotions; hundreds of them,

with tears streaming down their faces, some evidently from excess of sorrow, others from the overflowing of joy; some broken and contrite with penitence, and others rejoicing with the hope of glory.'

No certain dates are given for either of these two revivals.

The Revival of 1790

Daniel Rowland died on Saturday October 16th, 1790, and within a month a revival had again broken out at Llangeitho. There had been revivals in other places previously. Revival had broken out at Llangwryfon, Cardiganshire, in 1789 and a large number had been added to the church. Early in 1790 revival had broken out in Llanwrtyd, Breconshire and the surrounding area as a result of the preaching of Dafydd Morris. He had preached at the Association at Cilycwm with great unction, and the fire followed him as he preached through Brecknockshire. But at Llangeitho revival broke out and spread through family worship. William Williams, Pantycelyn, writing to Thomas Charles, Bala, in early 1791 stated:

'A great revival has taken place in many parts of our country - from 5 to 600, to my knowledge, have been added to the number of those who profess religion, during the last two years.'

One who was affected by this revival, though not converted, was a 12 year old lad called James Hughes, who lived a couple of miles from Llangeitho. There would often be preaching at Y Gelli, a gentleman's house, on Sunday nights and also week nights, and he would go along to hear the Calvinistic Methodist preachers, and see the people rejoicing and singing. Many nights in the summer he would be working in the fields, tending his father's sheep, and could hear the singing in the valley below, all along the banks of the river Aeron, that runs through Llangeitho.

But the revival subsided, and so did the impressions it had made on James Hughes. Other revivals, however, were being kindled throughout the length and breadth of Wales, so that Thomas Rees in his History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales could say that the 'last ten years of the eighteenth century were an almost unbroken season of revivals.'

The Revival of 1797

Revival kindled once again at Llangeitho in 1797. It began gradually, and increased in strength, until many were powerfully effected. One Sunday morning in September 1797, before the revival had really started, the Rev. Dafydd Parry was preaching at Llangeitho. Among

the congregation, outside and at the back of the chapel was James Hughes, listening, but not really listening. Later the same day Dafydd Parry was to preach at Y Gelli, and so James Hughes went along with the other young people of the neighbourhood. Mr. Parry's text that evening was Cant. 3:6 - 'Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?' During the sermon something happened; some heavenly power descended on the whole congregation, and James Hughes, to his surprise, found that he could not stop himself shouting 'Amen' at the top of his voice. On the way home he had sweet fellowship with the young people of the society, and went to bed that night a new creature.

During the revival hundreds, including James Hughes, were wonderfully converted, and added to the church. James Hughes later became the minister of a Welsh congregation in London, was a poet, and wrote a Welsh Commentary on the Bible.

The Revival of 1804

The next gracious visitation that Llangeitho experienced was in 1804. It began at Aberyswyth, to the north of Llangeitho, at a Sunday School in the charge of two youngsters, Owen Jones and Robert Davies. Thomas Charles refers to it in a letter to a ministerial colleague in

1805:

'This [revival] first began at Aberystwyth, in the Sunday-School there; in which two young men, under twenty years of age, were the teachers. . . . This work prevails at present over a large district, fifty miles by twenty. In travelling the roads, it was pleasing to hear the ploughman and the driver of the team singing hymns whilst at their work. Nothing else was heard in all those parts. This I can testify, with satisfaction and joy.'

At Llangeitho it was said that it was not as powerful or as general as previous revivals. Between the years 1805 and 1809 there were many revivals throughout the length and breadth of Wales, many very powerful, and thousands were savingly wrought upon and gathered into the churches of all the Nonconformist denominations.

The Revival of 1811

The revival of this year began about Easter time. It was called the silent revival, because there was not as much breaking out into praise and rejoicing during the public means of grace as there had been in previous revivals at Llangeitho.

It should also be mentioned that this was the year that the Calvinistic Methodists broke with the Established

Church and ordained their own ministers. Rowland had been against any separation from the Church of England during his life, and the leadership at Llangeitho was still resistant in 1811. So when the break was made, instead of the ordination services being at Llangeitho and Bala (the two centres of the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion), they were held at Llandeilo and Bala.

The Revival of 1812

There was another revival at Llangeitho the following year. Revival started at Lledrod and from there spread to Swyddffynon, Tregaron, and Llangeitho. During the revival Ebenezer Richard, Tregaron, preached at Llangeitho one Sabbath morning with such power and heavenly unction, that 28 were pricked to the heart by the sermon. At the next society meeting, there were 28 more than usual, and they all attributed their conviction to that sermon. Hundreds were received into church membership at Llangeitho and the neighbouring churches. One of converts was Evan Evans, who was only eight years old at the time. He remembers seeing many times the congregation crowding into the chapel; the men with their hats in their hands. During the fervent preaching, there would be a shower of hats thrown up into the air. At other times during prayer meetings, he witnessed some jumping for joy. Many other places in Cardiganshire and elsewhere were blessed with this

revival. In some places the young people in the Sunday Schools were particularly affected.

The following year there was another shower, more powerful than any before, though only brief. The members of Llangeitho were still divided over the issue of the ordination of 1811. Some would not receive communion from the hand of one who had not been ordained by the 'holy hands of a Bishop.' Eventually things came to a head, and the matter was referred to the next Association meeting. It was decided that they were to blame for refusing one who had been ordained to administer the communion. A date was set for Ebenezer Richards (who had been ordained in 1811) to officiate. Mr Richards preached a rather flat sermon before the communion. But 'about half way through the communion some indescribable influences descended from heaven without warning, until the people began to glorify God with shouting and leaping... This settled the dispute with what they called the "new order."'

The Revival of 1819

In early 1817 probably the most powerful revival seen in North Wales began on the Lleyen peninsular, and then in August spread to the little village of Beddgelert, nestling under the shadow of the Snowdonian mountains. A great number of churches were affected as the revival radiated

outwards. It continued in its strength for several years. In 1819 many places in South Wales were beginning to be similarly blessed.

The means of kindling the revival in Llangeitho in 1819 was a sermon by Ebenezer Richards, Tregaron on Matt. 25:46 - 'And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.' In the society meeting the following week there were 17 who all testified that that sermon had had a powerful effect on them.

The Revival of 1824

The 'Beddgelert' revival had hardly cooled when in 1824 the Calvinistic Methodist churches of Cardiganshire were blessed once again. Howel Howells of Trehill commented in that year: 'There are wonderful and free outpourings of the Holy Spirit this year on several parts of the cause.'

The Rev. David Evans, Aberaeron, was preaching in Llangeitho, on the words of Matthew 20:6 'Why stand ye here all the day idle', and a gracious influence descended upon the congregation, which was the occasion of the start of a powerful revival, during which about 200 souls were added to the church. This revival was ably nurtured under the ministry of the Rev. Ebenezer Richards, Tregaron.

The Revival of 1832

In 1828-30 the churches of Carmathenshire, and some of the bordering counties received an abundance of revival blessing. In 1831-3 the churches of North Wales, particularly Caernarfonshire, were likewise visited with an outpouring. In 1832 the Calvinistic Methodist churches of Cardiganshire were once again recipients of blessing.

At Llangeitho revival began once more during a sermon. On the last day of the annual Association at Llangeitho, on August 9th, at 6 o' clock in the evening the Rev. William Evans, Tonyrefail, Glamorganshire preached on the words 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.' (Psa. 84:4). During this revival close to 200 members were added to the church.

The Revival of 1859

In 1839-43 revivals were prevalent in both North and South Wales. They began this time in the North and then spread South. Though there were local revivals in North Cardiganshire in 1839-41, Llangeitho was not affected. It was in a revival 1841 that Dafydd Morgan, who was greatly used in the 1859 revival, felt the call to the ministry. Llangeitho was similarly passed over by the revivals that swept North and South Wales in 1848-50, but it was not bypassed by the next major move of God

which swept the whole of the country in 1858-60.

In late 1858 revival had begun under the ministrations of Humphrey Jones and Dafydd Morgan, and was beginning to spread. A resident of Llangeitho wrote in 1859:

'Before the Revival this church was in a sleepy state. It was rich and needed nothing. Some were very prejudiced against the Revival because it was not of the same type as the great Llangeitho revivals. Twenty-seven years had elapsed since the last upheaval, and the leaders spoke as if the time of revivals was past.'

The Rev. Robert Roberts, the resident minister, was rather cool in his attitude to the Revival in its early stages, but the people were so anxious to hear its pioneer, Dafydd Morgan, that the opposing barrier of the pastor's feelings had to give way.

Here is the account of the service given by Dafydd Morgan's son J.J. Morgan:

'When David Morgan came, Mr. Roberts with a ministerial friend sat beneath the pulpit. After the address, the Revivalist as usual announced an after-meeting. From his point of vantage, Roberts could see that none remained who did not already profess religion. When he heard David Morgan asking those who sat on the benches by

the big seat to move back to the pews to make room for the converts, he whispered to his friend what he had noticed, and they both bowed their heads and hid their faces from very shame, thinking that the Revivalist was making himself ridiculous. However, he cried, "Throw the doors open." This was done, and men and women streamed in, seeking with tears a place in the church of Christ, and filling the vacated benches.'

A correspondent wrote to a contemporary magazine in August 1859:

'We have had experience at Llangeitho of four revivals within a period of fifty years, but this is the most powerful. Dozens of old folks who had stubbornly resisted all these revivals have been forced to bend now. We have received three hundred new members within the first five months of this year.'

Here is an account of the Association held at Llangeitho in that year, given by J.J. Morgan:

'The South Wales Quarterly Association of the denomination was held at Llangeitho, August 3, 4, 1859. . . .

Thursday [4th] was the great day of the feast. Thousands assembled in the field before 6 A.M., many of whom had

been "praising" till midnight on the previous day. While the Rev. Daniel Rowlands (Llanidloes) preached, a young man in the audience began to tremble like an aspen leaf, presently falling prostrate on the ground. Some of the handy "ambulance men" of the Revival rendered "first aid" and carried him off the field. In his swoon, the youth poured forth a succession of sublime sentences. Thomas John, Kilgerran, followed him, leaving the service, and excusing himself later by saying that he was anxious not to miss the ministry of the man whom God had suddenly ordained on the field.

At the end David Morgan announced that a prayer-meeting would be held on the field at eight o'clock, as only a fraction of the multitude could find room in the chapel for the Ordination Service. This was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable prayer-meetings ever held in Wales. There were 20,000 present, nearly all "rejoicing." As the Severn stream is met and engulfed by the flowing tide, so the prayers offered on the platform by selected brethren were submerged by billows of "praise" sweeping up from the sea of worshippers surging on the field. Four young men were called into a waggon to lead in prayer, the youngest of whom was a young farm-hand of seventeen or so, in uncouth garments inches short at the ankles and the wrists; but he might have been a young seraph to judge by the spiritual force which overwhelmed the worshippers as, with uplifted arms and melting voice,

he pleaded, "May the Heavenly Dove descend now on this meadow!" Having prayed himself, the Revivalist requested the vast host to spend two minutes in silent prayer. With bowed heads and streaming eyes the thousands responded, and the solemn and intense silence of those moments was as full of eloquence as any episode of this notable Association. David Morgan again offered prayer, commending all the servants who were to preach during the day to God, and beseeching especially that the North Wales brethren should be baptized with the Revival fire and carry it home. The throng seethed meanwhile like boiling oil. One of the prominent ministers exclaimed rapturously, "Mr. Morgan bach! I am ready to go to heaven this moment!" "I am very glad," he coolly rejoined, "to find one in this world prepared to go there."

After the Rev. Robert Roberts had made the announcements, he added: "Hundreds of you have come from distant shires to see Llangeitho, a small village, but not without lustre in the religious history of Wales. It is no wonder that strangers resort hither - heaven has been in the habit of coming here, and angels have made this place their rendezvous. Be careful; they are in bands on their wings above your heads at this moment. I had a strange dream three weeks ago. I dreamt that I had gone to heaven to solicit a delegate to the Association. A bright being with a gemmed crown on his head came to me, asking where I was from, and when I told him, he cried,

'Llangeitho! It was at Llangeitho I got this crown and these pearls.' Then I recognised Daniel Rowland, and told him we were anxious that the great King should send a representative to our approaching Association. Rowland took the crown from his head, and casting it at the feet of the King, he presented the suit of the Llangeitho suppliant. 'Tell him,' answered the King, 'that I will not send any one; I shall be there myself! "'

A few minutes later, Thomas John, Kilgerran, walked in a field near by lost in reverie. A friend stopped him, and said, "What a glorious sight that was, when the thousands were engaged in silent prayer at Mr. Morgan's request! Did you ever see anything like it, Mr. John?" He answered solemnly, "I didn't see one of them: I saw no one but God. I am going home," he said suddenly. "' How terrible is this place!' It is too terrible for me. My flesh is too weak to bear this weight of glory."

In the morning service on the field at ten, John Hughes (afterwards Dr.), Liverpool, preached on "Life more abundantly." He was followed by Owen Thomas, London (afterwards Dr. Owen Thomas, Liverpool), who took as his text, "We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." He praised God for the manifold signs that the Cardiganshire people had not received the grace of God in vain. He repeated a pithy hymn enumerating some of the choicest blessings of redemption, introducing

as a refrain after each line or couplet, "'Twas not in vain." A spectator wrote: "The scene that followed was beyond the power of human imagination to describe. Let it be understood that the rapture and the rejoicing were rational and unconfused. Those who would frown upon it are men with little feeling if they have any religion, or with no religion if they have any feeling." In the evening service in the chapel, the first preacher was Evan Harris, Merthyr. After him Dr. Owen Thomas preached on Hebrews ix. 14: "How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purge your conscience from dead works, &c." He compared the conscience to a tablet receiving a record written with invisible ink. The sheet is white to all appearance, but hold it before a fire, and every sentence, every word, every letter, and even the small dot above the i, emerges distinctly into view. He described their guilty conscience arraignment Joseph's brethren in Egypt; and gave an account of a maniac in an American lunatic asylum, who had been seen by a friend of his constantly firing imaginary pistols and screaming alternately, "He is dead! He is dead! " It was a man who had slain his opponent in a duel. He characterised hell as a madhouse where the lost for ever live their sins over again. With overpowering effect, he lifted up the cry of the lost soul - "How have I hated instruction? How? HOW?" The whole crowd leaped on their feet like a panic-stricken army, and a profound, despairing groan burst from every breast. Now were callous men, who had hitherto been insensible

to the full force of the Revival, seen with blanched faces; and maidens that had before indulged in wanton levity, throwing their aprons over their faces, broke into loud and unrestrained weeping. The preacher continues his awe-inspiring shouts - "How hath my heart despised reproof? How? HOW? How have I not obeyed the voice of my teachers? HOW? It is the voice of an awakened conscience! Is there anything that can silence an accusing conscience? Is there anything that can appease and purify a guilty conscience? Blessed be God! There is; the BLOOD OF CHRIST!" In the centre of the chapel sat a farmer who had begun to sigh and moan in the early part of the sermon, sinking deeper and deeper towards the floor of the pew as the preacher proceeded to enforce the condemnatory truths of his discourse; but when the minister proclaimed that the blood of Christ purified, he sprang from his crouching posture on the floor to the top of the seat, crying, "God be thanked for the Blood! " A mighty chorus of "Hallelujahs" and "Praise God" broke out all over the building. The trumpet-voice of the preacher - the most penetrating in Wales - was instantly drowned. Like a lion whose prey had slipped from his grasp, he made a mighty effort to master his audience again, but in vain. The "rejoicing" lasted for hours. David Morgan moved about the aisles and the pews administering spiritual cordials to those exhausted souls who were "faint yet pursuing." Many of them were so spent that they had to be conveyed in carts and waggons

to their homes. So ended "the Association of the great Revival" in Llangeitho. It has been maintained that it was the most remarkable ever held in South Wales. A leading article in the premier Welsh newspaper of the day states that its most striking feature was a pervading and overwhelming solemnity, convincing even the most stoical that eternal realities had come into intimate contact with the men and women present.'

Post 1859

The 1859 revival was the last revival to visit Llangeitho. Wales experienced many local revivals during the remaining years of the century, but no national revival until that of 1904-5. Whilst most of Wales was set ablaze by Evan Roberts and others, 'in Llangeitho chapel all was as motionless as the statue of Daniel Rowland'. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who spent a large part of his childhood in the Llangeitho area, explains why:

'Our minister was a moral, legalistic man - an old schoolmaster. I do not remember that he ever preached the Gospel, and none of us had any idea of the Gospel. He and the head deacon, John Rowlands, looked upon themselves as scholars. Neither had any sympathy for the Revival of 1904-05, and both of them were not only opposed to any spiritual stress or emphasis, but were equally opposed to every popular innovation. Those who

came home for their holidays from Glamorganshire, who spoke of their having been "saved", were regarded as hot-heads and madmen from the South... Although there is a statue of Daniel Rowland in the village, his influence had long since disappeared from the place, and "Ichabod" had been written across everything. While large congregations still met to worship on Sundays, morning and evening, it was the strong sense of tradition which accounted for it. Llangeitho had lost the fire and the rejoicing of the Methodist Revival to the same extent as Westminster Abbey had lost the life and vitality of the Early Church - "The glory had departed from Israel".'

Sadly Llangeitho has proved the truth of Thomas Charles' dictum:

'I am persuaded that unless we are favoured with frequent revivals, and a strong, powerful work of the Spirit of God, we shall, in a great degree, degenerate, and have only "a name to live:" religion will soon lose its vigour; the ministry will hardly retain its lustre and glory; and iniquity will, of consequence, abound.'

God has richly blessed Llangeitho, and indeed the whole of Wales, in past years. May He, in His mercy, visit this highly favoured land once again with a mighty outpouring of his Spirit, to glory of his Name.

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