



CHRISTIAN RESOURCES

THE LIFE OF

DANIEL ROWLAND



BISHOP WARWICK COLE-EDWARDES

Next to Whitefield in apostolic might, and faith, and zeal, stands Daniel Rowland of Llangeitho. In natural boldness and energy of character, tempered with gentleness and love, he had few equals in the age in which he shone. In fervour of spirit, in singleness of eye and heart, in compassion for souls, he is marked out among a thousand. The success of his ministry was truly marvelous. He blazed like a torch in majestic brightness – illuminating the darkness of his native mountains. He went forth in the strength of his God, breasting storms of persecution, and carrying with him from valley to valley the glad tidings of salvation. The power of the Spirit seemed to follow his footsteps, and his words were like “sharp arrows of the mighty”. Multitudes flocked to hear him, and thousands owned him as their father in Christ. With a few such men, what might Wales have been, what might it be now? With a few such men in our day and land, what might not Scotland be!

An old man, of such shrewdness, who had heard both Whitefield and Rowland, was once asked by a friend as to the respective excellencies of these two mighty men. He gave judgment in favour of the latter, Whitefield, he thought, might have been the greater power in arresting and alarming the unconverted, but Rowland, he thought, excelled him in building up and comforting the children of God. His sermons were exact in method, and more replete with matter, as well as more impressive by reason of their edge and point. Whitefield’s sermons might be forgotten; Rowland’s were graven at once for life upon the soul. Forty years after the death of the latter, his sermons and sayings were fresh in many a memory. The former, it is said, at times “lost his matter”, when overpowered by the rush of feeling. Not so the latter. With increasing animation, he seemed to gather new power and substance. His bursts of uncontrolled emotion, were also outbreaks of mainly thought and vigorous truth. But each had his peculiar gifts and excellence; and both were singularly acknowledged by God in their different spheres.

Let not these remarks, however, lead to the conclusion that Rowland was comparatively unsuccessful in awakening souls. On the contrary, we find that this, especially towards the outset of his ministry, seems to have been the work assigned him. His word was as a fire and as a hammer breaking the rock in pieces. He seems to have entered upon the ministerial office ere he had experienced the power of the gospel upon his own soul. Hearing, however, that a neighbouring minister, a dissenter, had been much blessed in arousing the careless, he thought that his must be the kind of preaching most suited to the congregation, and, such passages as these, “The wicked shall be turned into hell”, “The great day of his wrath has come”, he endeavoured to thunder forth the terrors of judgment, and call on his hearers to flee from the wrath to come. The people flocked to him in crowds, and it is said that no fewer than a hundred individuals were brought under convictions by his preaching, before he himself had felt the terrors of the law, or tasted the peace of gospel. Yet even from the first he seems to have been in earnest about his people. Though in such ignorance, he yet was trying to fulfil his duty towards them. He knew that he was set over their souls, and would not be contented till he saw some kind of

impression produced upon them. He longed after success, even when he scarce knew what he expected or desired. He saw that if there was any truth at all in eternal realities, the people ought to feel something when they were preached, and not to sit with dry eyes, and unmeaning apathy in their countenances when heaven or hell was set before them as their everlasting portion; and nothing would satisfy him till he saw some corresponding impression. Nor was he disappointed. Being in earnest himself, his people caught the infection of his earnestness, and multitudes were moved and melted. It was shortly after this that he himself passed from death to life. This of course only lent forth energy to his efforts. His zeal was both purified and kindled into intenser warmth and glow. His conscience was in his work before, now his whole soul and heart were thrown into it.

But for some time after his own awakening, he continued in something of the same terrific strain. The truth was, he preached as he felt, and he was then groaning beneath the terrors of a violated law. He was in bondage and agony himself – wounded by the “barbed arrows of a frowning God”, writhing under the torture of an unappeased conscience – and he spoke in the bitterness of his spirit, pouring forth the feelings of his bleeding heart. He preached now as if standing on Mount Sinai or Mount Ebal, as if within the very sight of hell. His warnings were like the utterances of some solemn prophet. His voice was like the trumpet of doom.

It seems to have been nearly two years before he found full liberty and peace of soul. Light had for some time been dawning, but at length is burst forth into full brightness. He found peace for his own soul, and forthwith he began to preach that peace to others. From the first his ministry had been the reflection of his own inward spiritual state. He preached as he felt. He preached the law, because he felt the law. He preached terror, because he felt terror. And now when he tasted the liberty of Christ, he began to proclaim it. He had found forgiveness, and he preached it from what he had experienced. He had been delivered from bondage and darkness, and he proclaimed the way of deliverance to others. Not that he might lead them through the same long dreary process which he had undergone; no, but that he might warn them against it, and save them from it. The change in his preaching was soon noticed and felt. He had “cast down many wounded”; he now raised them up and healed them. He had broken the bones of many; he now came to bind them up. He had been successful as a preacher of the law; but he was still more so as a preacher of the gospel. Most willingly and movingly did he now set for the free salvation of Christ, entreating men to be reconciled to God. After this time, he seemed to go forth armed with sevenfold power, because clothed more fully with salvation. Multitudes were awakened and savingly converted; and the work of God extended itself on every side. Souls were saved, whole districts were aroused, men flocked to hear him from every quarter; religion prospered; and, as might have been expected, opposition and persecution awoke and strove to check the work.

The effects of Rowland's preaching after this time were remarkable, both for the greater numbers awakened, and also for the manner in which their awakening took place. Formerly, they were overwhelmed with terror; now they were melted down under the influence of joy and love. It seemed like the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. So powerfully did the "glad tidings" affect their minds, that they were unable to contain themselves, and according to the warmth of the Welsh manner, would even leap for joy, making the hills and valleys echo with their songs of praise. This glorious work was not confined to Liangeitho, but diffused itself on every side, spreading over several counties. We are told that the number of those converted at this time was reckoned by thousands. What minister of Christ in our day can count the seals of his ministry during a few years by thousands, or even by hundreds? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these his doings?

The assemblages that came together to hear Rowland were amazing. Sometimes we hear of ten, and fifteen, and twenty thousand, listening to him in the open air. At his monthly sacraments, and on other occasions, such audiences were drawn to hear him – and he usually preached out of the church windows to the multitude standing without. They came from almost every county in Wales, some of them walking seventy or eighty miles, and returning home with praises on their lips.

During Rowland's ministry, several remarkable seasons of revival were experienced. At no time does his preaching seem to have been unfruitful; but still, at different times, a larger blessing seemed to be vouchsafed. At several distinct periods of his ministry, spring-tides occurred. The narrative of each of these is full of interest. How it so happened with him, and with others, Stoddard and Edwards, we do not now attempt to explain. We know that it was so, and we know also, that many in our own day have found this to be the case. In most instances, we believe the ministerial life may be said to be of a succession of harvests, following each other at short and irregular intervals. It may be added, why it should not be all one perpetual harvest? Perhaps, if we were to investigate the matter closely, the reasons would be in ourselves – in our indolence, relaxation of effort, prayerlessness, contentedness with what has been accomplished, want of spiritual ambition, or true compassion to souls. But, generally, this has been the state of matters, both in particular parishes, and over more extensive districts. In Rowland's case, it seemed as if a sifting season were required after the first awakenings; for it was after he had been tried much by divisions and parties, that in the year 1762, God again visited his people, and poured out His Spirit. At that time, we were told that "a most extra-ordinary revival of religion took place under his preaching". Previously, there had been a considerable ebbing in spiritual things, but then the full spring-tide set in, and continued for some time to flow.

The year after this revival took place. Rowland was ejected from the Church of England. His faithfulness, his energy, his unwearied labours, his extraordinary

success, were too much for the Bishop of his diocese; and without any warning, without any charge preferred, he was summarily deprived of his licence! Two clergymen came from the bishop with the mandate. He was reading prayers as they entered the church, and as soon as he had finished, they delivered him the letter of ejection. He obeyed upon the spot, and bidding farewell to the church and pulpit where he had so often preached with such marvelous success and power, he went out, followed by his immense congregation, weeping and broken-hearted. As the persuasions of his flock he took his station on the churchyard wall, and there preached to them the word of life. This took place in 1763, when he was about the fiftieth year of his age. Immediately a large chapel was erected for him, and the work of God went on, in spite of all Episcopal efforts to quench the flame. It was called, by the way of distinction, "the great revival", and beginning at Llangeitho, spread swiftly over Wales. "The outpourings of the Spirit, we are told, was most marvelous in its effects. It seemed as if the whole chapel was filled at the time with some supernatural element; and the whole congregation was struck with some uncommon astonishment, and seized with peculiar emotions. Hundreds were bathed in tears, some overwhelmed with grief, and some with joy, some broken in heart with godly sorrow, and some rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory".

Persecution began to increase against him. Not only were attempts made to prevent him preaching, but his life was several times aimed at, though, by the good hand of God upon him no evil was permitted to befall him. In spite of all obstacles, he pressed forward in his career of usefulness, and the blessing followed his footsteps wherever he went.

To the end of his life, the blessing accompanied him; and even to the age of seventy-seven, he went about preaching the everlasting gospel, the Lord owning his ministry, and giving him seals of his apostleship in his declining years. "I attended", says Mr. Charles, "An Association of the Methodists at Llangeitho. There were at the association about twenty clergymen, and between sixty and eighty lay preachers. You may suppose how glad I was to hear once more the old grey headed Elijah proclaiming the deep things of God, with a pathos, perspicuity, and energy peculiar to himself". He said to his people the last Sabbath that he addressed them, I am almost leaving, and am on the point of being taken from you. I am not tired of the work, but in it. I have some presentiment that my Heavenly father will soon release me from my labours, and bring me to my everlasting rest. But I hope he will continue His gracious presence with you after I am gone". He slept in Jesus on Saturday, December 16th, 1790, in the seventy seventh year of his life, and fifty third of his ministry.