

LIFE AND PORTRAITURE

of
CHRISTMAS EVANS

A New Translation from the Welsh
with a
Memoir of the Author

by

Joseph Cross

Copyright © 1846

CHAPTER NINE

PORTRAITURE OF CHRISTMAS EVANS

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Mr. Evans was a good-looking man, nearly six feet high, and well proportioned. His intellectual faculties, phrenologically speaking, were amply developed. He had lost one of his eyes in his youth, but the other was large and bright enough for two. It had a peculiarly penetrating glance; and when kindling under the inspiration of the pulpit, added wonderfully to the effect of his eloquence. All his features were expressive of intelligence and love; his whole bearing, dignified and majestic; and the blending of great and amiable qualities in his character commanded at once the reverence and the confidence of all who knew him.

MORAL AND CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

From the time of his conversion to the day of his death, Mr. Evans exhibited a consistent and exemplary piety. Though he several times fell into darkness and doubt, and lost a portion of his burning zeal, he never forfeited his place in the church, or tarnished his Christian name. The uprightness of his deportment was acknowledged by all his neighbors; and those of other denominations, differing widely from him in creed and custom, always accorded to him the reputation of “**a holy man of God.**”

But his piety was never ostentatious or austere. Modesty and humility were among his most prominent qualities and a high degree of Christian cheerfulness characterized his conversation. However low, at times, his religious enjoyment, he was always careful to walk with becoming circumspection before the world that the cause of Christ might suffer no reproach through his imprudence.

SOCIAL DISPOSITION

Mr. Evans was naturally of a quick and irritable temper; but Divine Grace subdued his constitutional impetuosity, made him “**gentle toward all men,**” and clothed him with “**the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.**” He was eminently social in his feelings, and took great delight in the company of his friends. It cost him no effort to render himself agreeable in any society. In the cottage and the mansion he was equally at home, and the unlettered peasant and the erudite philosopher were equally interested by his conversation. He never had any children of his own, but was always remarkably fond of the children of others. After discoursing for an hour on the sublimest topics of the Christian faith, in a style befitting their importance, to the great delight, and often to the amazement of all who heard him, he would descend to the relation of some pretty story, in a manner so affectionate and familiar as at once to win the hearts and enlighten the minds of half a dozen bright-eyed little creatures, grouped around him like Peter Parley's scholars in the picture.

READING AND STUDY

Mr. Evans was a great lover of books. He seized and devoured with avidity every interesting volume that fell in his way. He never resorted to reading, however, as a mere pastime. He sought for mental and spiritual treasures to enrich his sermons. For this he beat the fields and dug the wells of knowledge. Everything was made subservient to his holy calling. Everything was pressed into his preparations for the pulpit.

His authors were selected with prudent discrimination, and perused with earnest attention, indicating an intense desire to be thoroughly furnished for his work. He studied what he read. He was extensively acquainted with the best theological writers of the age, and quoted them frequently in his discourses. But there is one volume to which he referred more frequently than to all the rest, “the book of books divine.” He was emphatically “**a man mighty in the Scriptures.**” From the word of God he derived the principal matter of his preaching.

Even that lofty imagery, which constituted the peculiar charm of his ministry, was ordinarily but an amplification of scriptural tropes and descriptions. In theology, next to the Bible, Dr. Owen was his favorite author. He paid considerable attention to Oriental manners and customs; was well read in history, ancient and modern; and particularly fond of tracing the rise and fall of empires.

DEVOTIONAL HABITS

Mr. Evans was eminently a man of prayer.

Prayer was his daily bread, the very breath of his spirit. He considered himself entitled, through Christ, to all the blessings of the gospel, and came boldly to the throne of grace in every time of need. During his whole ministerial life, much of his time was spent in the closet. It was his custom for many years, to retire for devotion three times during the day, and rise regularly for the same purpose at midnight. The disorders of the church, the slanders of his enemies, and the various afflictions of life, all drove him to the mercy-seat, and made him peculiarly earnest and importunate in supplication. After these seasons of agony, he came into the church, or the social circle, as an angel from the presence of God, and **“all his garments smelt of myrrh and aloes and cassia from the ivory palaces.”**

He never undertook a new enterprise, without first asking counsel of the Lord.

When he had a call to another field of labor, he could not decide upon the matter till he had spread it repeatedly before the throne. When he was about to preach at an association, or on any important occasion, he wrestled for hours with the angel of the covenant, nor relinquished his hold till he felt himself **“endued with power from on high.”** Then he came forth to the congregation, as Moses from the Tabernacle, when he had communed with God. Just before leaving home on his tour of collection for the Caernarvon church, the last labor of his life, he penned in his book of appointments the following paragraph:

“O Lord, grant me my desire on this journey, for thy name's sake. My first petition; — Comfort in Christ — the comfort of love — the bowels of love and mercy in the denomination — the fellowship of the Spirit. — Amen. My second petition; — that the sermons I have prepared for this journey may increase in their ministrations like the five loaves and two fishes. — Amen. C. E.”

CHRISTIAN BENEFICENCE

Mr. Evans was a poor man, but **“rich in good works.”** Suffering poverty always excited his pity, and opened his purse. Wherever he beheld distress, he was **“ready to distribute, willing to communicate,”** according to the ability which God had given him. His salary in Anglesea, for twenty years, was only seventeen pounds per annum; and afterward, only thirty. With so small an income, he could not be expected to bestow much upon the various objects of charity. But he gave annually one pound to the Bible Society, one pound to the Missionary Society, and ten shillings to the Education Society, besides contributing liberally to the poor and the sick in his neighborhood.

Sometimes his liberality was larger than his purse. A Protestant Irishman, poorly clad, told him that he spent much time in reading the Scriptures to his illiterate countrymen, he pulled off his own coat, and gave it to him. At another time a poor Jew, who had recently been converted to Christianity, a new suit of clothes, the best he had in his wardrobe. While he visited a brother in the church, who had been reduced by protracted illness to a condition of great distress; and finding the family almost in a state of starvation, emptied his pocket of the only pound he had.

His wife remonstrated with him, told him she had not bread enough in the house to last twenty-four hours and demanded what he would do now he had given away all his money. His only answer was: “**Jehovah-jireh; the Lord will provide!**”

The next day he received a letter from England, enclosing two pounds as a present. As soon as he had read it, he called out to his wife; — “Catherine! I told thee that Providence would return the alms-pound, for it was a loan to the Lord; and see; here it is, doubled in one day!”

It is evident from this incident, that Mr. Evans' liberality was the fruit of his faith in God; and the good man's confidence is never put to shame. “**There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.**”

SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS

“**Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.**” There is no virtue more beautiful in its character, or more important to the Christian, than that thus enjoined by the Son of God. The spirit of forgiveness infinitely transcends all the effects of mere human philosophy, and allies man to his Maker. In this amiable quality, Christmas Evans was never wanting. He took a thousand times more pleasure in pardoning the offender, than the offender in asking his pardon.

“It was only,” says his Welsh biographer, “for the person who had given offence to make some sort of acknowledgment, to say there had been a misunderstanding Mr. Evans would anticipate him with: ‘O, say nothing about it! Let it be buried! Very likely I have been in fault myself!’”

The spirit of Mr. Evans' diary everywhere corroborates this description of his character. We extract a single paragraph:

*“I trust that by the grace of God, I have overcome my natural disposition to anger and revenge. I have been enabled to forgive my greatest enemies, and pray that they may be forgiven of God. I can say from my heart, with Stephen; ‘**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!**’ I have no wish that any of them should suffer for their attempts to injure me, but that they may all be led to repentance, and settle their matters at the mercy-seat, where I hope also that the multitude of my own trespasses will be covered and forgotten.”*

His mercy was as impartial as it was cordial. He had held a controversy with a minister of another sect, who, forgetting the rules of Christian courtesy, treated him very unkindly before the public. This minister was afterward arraigned and imprisoned on a very serious allegation. If he had been convicted, degradation from the ministry would have been the smallest part of his punishment. Mr. Evans, learning the fact, and believing the prosecution unjust and malicious, felt greatly distressed for his polemical opponent.

On the day of trial, he retired to his room, and poured out his heart to God on his behalf, for a long time, and with peculiar fervor. Then he waited with great anxiety for the issue. As he sat at the table, with several friends and brethren, a minister, who had been at court, entered the room, and said: “Mr. is acquitted!”

Mr. Evans instantly fell upon his knees, with tears streaming down his face, and exclaimed: "Thanks be unto thee, O Lord Jesus! For delivering one of thy servants from the mouth of the lions!" He then arose, saluted his friend, and joined in the mutual congratulations of the company.

CATHOLIC GENEROSITY

That Christmas Evans was no bigot, might be inferred from the above anecdote. But we have other and ampler evidence of his Christian catholicity. He was a Baptist; and, with the rest of his brethren, a strenuous advocate for exclusive immersion. He was a Calvinist, and thought it very important to vindicate against Armenian views what are sometimes called "the doctrines of grace." But he was also a Christian, and held all other Christians as brethren. He did not repudiate the sincerely pious, because they could not say his Shibboleth."Kind, candid, and ingenuous, he judged of things according to their real value and importance, and appreciated true talent and virtue wherever he found them.

His creed was not; "I am of Paul;" nor, "I am of Apollos;" nor, "I am of John the Baptist;" but, "We are all of Christ!"

He was not blinded by the senseless prejudice of sect He was influenced less by the peculiarities of his denomination than by the love of Christ. Many of his warmest friends were ministers of other orders; and of the Methodists and Congregationalists at Caernarvon, he made honorable mention in his diary.

The most despicable reptile of the moral world is envy, the spirit that prompted revolt in heaven, and hurled archangels down to hell. Yet it is often found among Christians; among the ministers of a religion whose very principle is charity

"Some men, like King Saul, can never bear a rival. If the thousands of Israel raise the voice and tune the lyre in honor of some victorious David, the evil spirit comes upon them, and they launch their javelins at the young anointed, and seek to smite him even to the wall."

From such feelings Mr. Evans was always free. His large heart was utterly incapable of anything of the kind. He esteemed others better than himself, and in honor preferred his brethren. Wherever he discovered talent and sanctified ambition in a young preacher, he never exerted an influence to hinder him, but heartily bade him God speed. He did not deem it necessary to smite him on the head with a cudgel to keep him in his place. He was not afraid that others would outshine him in the pulpit He would gladly have taken his place at the feet of any of Christ's ambassadors. He was willing to accord due praise to merit, not only in the dead, but also in the living; not only in those of other countries and other denominations, but also in those of his native principality and the Baptist church. His immediate contemporaries and neighbors were often the subjects of his highest encomiums. His heart was as large as the world!

INGENUOUSNESS AND HONESTY

A late American writer has said of insincerity, that it is the most detestable of all vices for which men go unhung. Yet it must be admitted, there is no vice more prevalent, even among the professed followers of Him, **“who knew no iniquity, neither was guile found in his lips.”**

The sentiment that it is right to deceive for the good of the church, is not peculiar to the Papists. Perhaps the enlightened Protestant can scarcely be found, who would verbally avow such a doctrine; but it is often practically avowed, even by the messenger of truth; and ecclesiastical elevation is sometimes attributable more to dishonesty than to real virtue or talent.

Christmas Evans' popularity, however, could boast a better origin. It was the spontaneous fruit of his graces and his gifts. He was never indebted to unfair and underhanded measures for his success. His conduct was always open and ingenuous. Of deceit and secret design he was incapable. He never attempted to build up his own church by proselyting the converts of other churches. In one instance, when a young man, who had been educated for the ministry in the established church of England, came to him, desiring baptism by immersion, instead of eagerly seizing upon so valuable an acquisition to the Baptists, as some doubtless would have done, he endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, and yielded at length only to his fervent importunity.

He deemed the slightest departure from truth, in any instance, a crime, and a deep disgrace to the Christian character. He was innocent and unsuspecting as a child. His frank and confiding disposition was unquestionably the occasion of most of his heavy trials. Jealous and malicious men took advantage of his Christian simplicity, and made one of his sweetest virtues a poison to his peace.

He once employed a person to sell a horse for him at a fair. After some time, he went out to see if he was likely to succeed. There was a man bargaining for the animal, and the contract was nearly completed.

“Is this your horse, Mr. Evans?” said the purchaser.

“Certainly it is,” he replied.

“What is his age, sir?”

“Twenty-three years.”

“But this man tells me he is only fifteen.”

“He is certainly twenty-three, for he has been with me these twenty years, and he was three years old when I bought him.’

“Is he safe-footed?”

“Very far from that, I assure you, or I would not part with him, and he has never been put in harness since I have had him either.”

“Please to go into the house, Mr. Evans,” whispered the man whom he had employed to make the sale, “for I shall never dispose of the horse while you are present.”

The frank manner, however, in which Mr. Evans told him all the truth, induced the dealer to make the purchase at a very handsome price; while it procured for Mr. Evans a good name, which is better than gold.

SARCASTIC REBUKES

In conversation he was always careful of the feelings of others. He would never employ a sarcastic remark, but for the purpose of merited rebuke.

“It is better,” said he, “to keep sarcasms pocketed, if we cannot use them without wounding the feelings of a friend.”

But he was capable, when occasion required, of wielding this weapon with terrible effect. Take the following instances.

Just before his removal from Cardiff to Caernarvon, he was conversing on the contemplated change in a circle of several ministers. His labors had been solicited in two or three other places, and the company was canvassing the comparative claims of the different churches.

A feeble-minded young man present, who “thought more highly of himself than he ought to think,” said: — “It is my opinion, Father Evans, that you had better go to Caernarvon. It is not likely your talents would suit either of the other places, but I think you might do very well at Caernarvon.”

Mr. Evans opened his large eye upon the speaker, and replied; — “And hast thou peeped? When didst thou creep from the shell?”

Once, two ministers, of different sects, were disputing in his presence on what he deemed an unimportant matter of ecclesiastical discipline.

One of them asked: — “What say you, Mr. Evans?”

Mr. Evans replied: “I saw two boys quarrelling over two snails. One of them insisted that his snail was the better, because it had horns; while the other as strenuously argued for the superiority of his, because it had none. The boys were very angry and vociferous, but the two snails were friends.”

The disputants burst into a hearty laugh, and the debate ended.

A shallow atheist was ridiculing the idea of a God, because, as he alleged, he had no sensible evidence of his being.

Mr. Evans answered: "My friend, the mole in the meadow has never seen a king; shall he therefore say there is no king? Thou atheistic mole! Thou hast never travelled out of thy own narrow field; and if thou hadst, thou hast no eyes to see with; and wilt thou dare to say there is no God? Dost thou think all others as blind as thyself? All that thou canst say is that thou dost not see God, and dost not wish to see him. How dost thou know that the being of a God is not so manifest on the other side of the river of death that no doubt is entertained concerning it throughout all the expanse of eternity? Can the earth-mole say there is no grand Llama in Tibet? Poor worm! Thou must travel through the gates of death, and fathom the bottomless pit, and measure the land of destruction, and scale the very heaven of heavens, and surround all the borders of time and eternity, before thou canst assure thyself there is no God!"

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
