

JOHN ELIAS

PRINCE AMONGST PREACHERS

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The silhouette of John Elias by courtesy of the
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John Elias was born in May 1774 and began his public work officially twenty years later at a time when France was being convulsed by the events of the Revolution and Wales was being shaken by a powerful religious revival. Elias belonged therefore to the second generation of Methodist leaders. The great pioneers of the Evangelical Revival—Howel Harris, Daniel Rowland and William Williams, Pantycelyn,—were dead before Elias emerged as a preacher and leadership had now devolved upon men like Thomas Charles (1755-1814), his brother David (1762-1834), Thomas Jones of Denbigh (1756-1820), Nathaniel Rowland (1749-1831), son of Daniel Rowland, Robert Roberts of Clynnog (1762-1802) and his brother John (1753-1834). It would be inaccurate to think of this as a period when the powers of the Evangelical Revival were on the wane. On the contrary, it was a time of increasing Evangelical influence and spectacular advance. True enough, it was a time of consolidation. The enthusiasm of the pioneering days was now being crystallised in a whole plethora of organisations. The Calvinistic Methodists by ordaining their own ministers in 1811 emerged as a separate denomination. But from about 1780, the spirit of the Evangelical Revival was beginning to transform the older Dissent so that within a generation the majority of Welsh Christians were animated by the theology and vigour of militant Evangelicalism. In this development, Sunday Schools, cottage meetings and religious magazines were of great significance. But the most creative influence of all was the preaching of the Gospel. A whole host of preachers took Wales as their parish and travelled up and down the land, addressing people in the open air or conducting services in

barns and farmhouses, as opportunity offered. Chapels were beginning to spring up even in the most inaccessible places and a travelling preacher would be sure of a welcome—and a congregation—at almost any time during the week. Not since the Age of Saints at the very dawn of our history had the preacher enjoyed quite the influence that was his in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It is no exaggeration to call it the Golden Age of Welsh preaching. And amongst the throng of preachers, none had greater influence than John Elias.

His career illustrates the profound social changes that accompanied the religious transformation. The immense influence that Elias wielded by 1830 contrasts vividly with the insignificance of his origins. He was born at a farmhouse called Crymllwyn-bach in the parish of Aber-erch,¹ a couple of miles outside Pwllheli in the direction of Cricieth. His parents were Elias Jones and Jane Joseph. They lived at Crymllwyn-bach with Elias's paternal grandparents, John Cadwaladr and Ann Humphreys. This is how the grandfather became a formative influence in Elias's spiritual life. He took him to the parish church and taught him the liturgical responses. It was his custom to conduct family prayers morning and evening, using the edition of the Bible published by Peter Williams (1723-96) for the lections, and prayers composed by the distinguished educationist, Griffith Jones (1683-1761). It was John Cadwaladr also who taught Elias to read. While still at a tender age he was taken to hear some of the Methodist preachers who visited the locality and again it was the grandfather who initiated the child into the art of reading the Scriptures in public. John Elias had no formal education, apart from the few months that he was to spend at the school conducted by Evan Richardson (1759-1824) at Caernarfon.

His father was a weaver and John Elias was trained in

¹ There is a photograph of Crymllwyn-bach and other places connected with John Elias in J. M. Jones and W. Morgan, *Y Tadau Methodistiaidd* (1897), II, opposite p. 456, and a better one in *John Elias* (Banner of Truth, 1973).

the same craft. In order to get work he had migrated to Ynyspandy, near Penmorfa, the home of the Methodist preacher Griffith Jones. It was during his time here that he became a fully-fledged Methodist as a member of the 'society' meeting at Hendre Hywel, just above Pren-teg. Here too he began to exercise his gifts as an exhorter and his fellow-members persuaded him to seek official acceptance by the Monthly Meeting as a preacher. This he did and, after close interrogation by the older ministers, he was approved as a preacher by the Monthly Meeting held on Christmas Day 1794 at Bryn'rodyn. It was here too that John Jones of Edern (1761-1822), so tradition has it, insisted that the twenty-year old John Jones of Aber-erch adopt his father's Christian name as his own surname. And so it may be said that in conformity with apostolic precedent John Elias was given his new name on the day when he was commissioned to preach the Gospel.

His origins, then, were insignificant enough. Or, at least, so they would seem at a time when society was still dominated by semi-feudal conceptions of social advantages. He had no imposing lineage, no wealth, no education, no influential friends, no dignified profession. But so rapidly were social conditions changing that these disabilities were fast becoming providential advantages. The bulk of his work was to be done amongst the socially depressed people of Wales. His language was their language. However much he was to criticise the morals and attitudes of these people, he was still one of them. And even though in later life he sometimes succumbed to the temptations of snobbery, and to the misuse of his power as a religious leader, his fundamental loyalty to the ordinary people could always be appealed to. For him (as indeed for Howel Harris before him) there was something wonderful in the way in which he had been elevated from a low social station to be a leader of men. He attributed it to the direct intervention of God. In the autobiography that he wrote a few weeks before his death, he says,

I have nothing to say of myself but sinfulness, infirmity, and great wretchedness. But I would like to speak highly of the goodness, the mercy and grace of God towards me. Here is the poor raised from the dust, the needy lifted out of the dunghill and placed by God with the princes of his people.²

Right at the centre of his career was his preaching. He was a man with a burning message and an incomparable ability to proclaim it. But that is not all. John Elias's preaching—and that of scores of others in that generation,—was accompanied by a divine unction and spiritual consequences in thousands of souls that defy merely historical analysis. God's hand indeed was upon him.

2

Elias had a commanding presence. He looked taller than his five-foot-ten-inches because of his thinness. He was dark-skinned and his high cheekbones and the pockmarks left by the ravages of smallpox gave his face a stern and ascetic character. But the outstanding feature of his face were the eyes—sharp, penetrating eyes. Invariably before he started preaching, he would sweep the congregation with those commanding eyes to ensure the fullest possible attention from everyone. His voice was clear and piercing rather than full and musical. Even when he preached in the open air ten thousand people could hear him distinctly. He enunciated every word with precision with none of the tendency, so common in later Welsh oratory, to elide words into one another and to indulge in an elaborate sing-song rhythm. Elias's voice was the perfect instrument for public speaking and excellently fitted for direct communication with his hearers.

The main characteristic of his preaching in his early years was disciplined passion. Both Thomas Charles and his

² Translated from Goronwy P. Owen's excellent edition, *Hunangofiant John Elias* (Mudiad Efengylaidd Cymru, 1974), 80.

own teacher, Evan Richardson, by their friendly criticism of his early efforts, had helped him to overcome certain weaknesses in his public delivery and at the same time they had convinced him that natural gifts need to be disciplined carefully if the cause of the Gospel is to be served. And so Elias always took his oratorical craftsmanship seriously—as a good Calvinist should, whatever his craft may be! Some critics complained that his movements when preaching were formal to the point of being unnatural.³ This criticism does give some hint of his characteristic stance. At the commencement of his sermon he invariably stood perfectly straight, hardly making a movement at all. Whatever movement he made was calculated to capture the attention of his auditors—always a difficult thing in open-air preaching. Robert Williams, an elder at the church at Llanfechell, Anglesey, once claimed many years after Elias's death that "Mr Elias could create a profounder impression by taking off his hat than many other preachers could with their best sermons."⁴ This was but to say that Elias's movements in pulpit or on the stage at an open-air assembly were carefully subjected to the demands of the preacher. Once the attention of the congregation had been gained, Elias would then allow the exposition to be animated by the fire of his own passion. It was in this connection that the overwhelming power of his preaching became evident. And the impact of his feeling was all the more powerful because it contrasted with the prosaic and calm nature of his expository comments on his text. He usually spent some time to elucidate the text, referring to numerous commentators and evaluating their views. In this way he sought to ensure that everyone who was listening fully understood the meaning of the text. Clarity of exposition was a matter of the first importance to Elias and he never forgot that the vast majority of his congregations were ordinary, uneducated people. He went

³ J. Roberts and J. Jones, *Cofiant...John Elias* (1850), 162.

⁴ W. Pritchard, *John Elias a'i Oes* (1911), 70-1.

to great lengths to ensure that his vocabulary and syntax were immediately comprehensible to even the least cultured of his hearers. It is this insistence on clarity which explains another aspect of his sermons that was sometimes criticised. It was said that his sermons were disjointed and lacked a unifying theme. This was partly due to his analytic approach to his text. He liked to expound it word by word, or clause by clause. He was more concerned with letting the Bible speak in its own way than with imposing a thematic unity upon his message. But another consideration was that uneducated people tend to think in paragraphs whereas the academic mind delights in a more comprehensive development of a general thesis. By moving from point to point, guided always by the text in front of him, Elias was able to carry his congregation with him. But within his treatment of these individual points he allowed his own passion for the Gospel and for the destiny of souls to become apparent. Dr. Owen Thomas said of him that he possessed an "incomparable oratorical imagination." He knew how to convey with vividness, urgency and power, the message of the Gospel. And this was fused with his uncanny grasp of the spiritual and cultural make-up of the people in front of him. This means, of course, that precisely because these unforgettable passages in his sermons were perfectly tuned to the condition of the sinners with whom he was concerned, they cannot have quite the same shattering impact on people of a later age who read about them. But the evidence is overwhelming that the disciplined passion of Elias's sermons produced the profoundest possible effects in the minds and hearts of the people who heard him.

Let us consider an example or two. On Tuesday evening, 19 December 1809, he was preaching at Pall Mall Chapel, Liverpool. His text was Ephesians 2. 12: "at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel . . ." When he came to the words "without Christ", he said,

O the wretchedness of the condition of those men who are without Christ! No tongue can ever tell, and no finite mind can ever fathom to eternity, the thousandth part of the misery of men without Christ! Bare, without a robe! Ill, with no physician! Hungry, having not the bread of life! Filthy, with no fountain! Guilty, with no righteousness! Lost, with no Saviour! Damned, with no Atonement!

When he reached this point, he bent forward with his face on the Bible and wept, and the congregation too. When he raised his head, he shouted joyfully through his tears, "Blessed be God!—Christ is available tonight to those who have hitherto been without Him!" And scores in that congregation gave vent to its relief by shouting, "Thanks—thanks be to God."⁵ This was quite spontaneous. No one doubted Elias's sincerity as he expressed in this passionate way his concern for sinners. But a time was to come when the sincerity of such effusive expressions of feeling in public would be open to doubt. It is instructive that Dr. Lewis Edwards (1809-87), principal of the Calvinistic Methodist College at Bala from 1837 until the time of his death fifty years later, should say of Elias, "Perhaps he would have been more acceptable to the learned if he had not acted so much."⁶ This is the voice of the staid Nonconformity of the Victorian era for which preaching had become part of the machinery of triumphant Dissent. The word "acted" is significant in Edwards's judgment. It was becoming increasingly difficult with the growing emphasis on "respectability" to bel-

⁵ Roberts and Jones, *op. cit.*, 87. An outline of the sermon is to be found also in *Drysorfa* (1848), 73-4, although these actual words do not appear there.

⁶ William Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 87. It should be said that Edwards always tended to be critical of Elias. When the two shared lodgings for some days at Jewin Chapel house during Edwards's student days, Elias refused to talk with the young man. Edwards had received denominational permission to attend the Seceders' College at Belfast, but instead had gone to the new University College, London. And in Elias's view, Edwards's disobedience had been made even more serious by his action in enrolling in an 'infidel' college. V., Trebor Lloyd Evans, *Lewis Edwards* (1967), 35-7, 49.

ieve that passionate preaching could be anything but "acting", a contrived performance. For an intellectual like Lewis Edwards, extreme expressions of feeling were embarrassing. But Elias knew his auditors. He had to do, not with the "learned" and respectable, but with the rough and unlettered common people. One of the best-known episodes in his career as a preacher demonstrates his influence over suchlike.

The year was 1802. It was a Sunday during the season of harvest. And at Rhuddlan it was both market day and hiring fair. The noise was deafening and early in the day many were heavily under the influence of drink. Between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, John Elias ascended the steps in front of the New Inn and a small company of friends from Denbigh, St. Asaph and elsewhere in the Vale of Clwyd gathered round to support him. He gave a hymn out to sing. It was sung with great vigour and the noise of the roisterers in the fair began to subside a little. Many of the farm hands put aside the scythes and sickles they carried with them. Then Elias took out his Bible and read a portion, as only he could. Then he engaged in prayer, a prayer of thankfulness to God that He had not destroyed the sinful world in his wrath, and a prayer of intense intercession for those who were desecrating the Sabbath that day. And as he prayed for them, his tears rolled down his cheeks. Then he took as his text, Exodus 34. 21: "Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest; in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest." It was a well-chosen arrow aimed right at the heart of that fair. As he developed his theme, the significance and the sanctity of the Sabbath rest, the tension of the sermon mounted until he reached a crescendo with the accusation, emphasised by his outstretched arm and bitter tears, "You thieves! You thieves! You thieves! You have stolen my God's Sabbath! You have taken the day of my Lord!" One who was present reported that these words "struck the crowd like a thunderbolt and filled every mind with fear and trembling." And the results

were startling. "I heard many of those who were present saying that they would not for all the world go there or anywhere else to seek hire on a Sunday; and such a fair was never held there afterwards nor anywhere else in Flintshire."⁷

Let it be admitted that this event had been in preparation for many years; that many hundreds of farmers and labourers who attended that fair had come into contact with Methodist preaching somewhere or other before 1802. And let it be admitted as well that even hardened worldlings in that age felt uneasy in their consciences about desecrating the Sabbath. Historically, it is appropriate to see Elias in the role of a reaper harvesting grain sown by other hands over many years. But when all this is allowed, it is still a matter of wonder that one preacher, facing a mob bent on pleasure and more than a little drunk, could destroy the institution of the Sunday fair in a whole county with one sermon. It is a remarkable proof of the power of the preached word in 1802—and of the stature of the preacher.

The rough, the drunk, the adulterers, were always amongst Elias's audiences. How could they not be? When he was preaching at an open-air assembly in Anglesey at the height of his influence, his close friend Richard Lloyd of Beaumaris (1771-1834), calculated that there were 12,000 present in the congregation. One of Elias's biographers, Richard Parry ('Gwalchmai': 1803-97) disagreed. He calculated that there were no more than 10,000. But even if the more modest figure be accepted, it meant that a quarter of the island's population were present. And that would provide a very mixed congregation indeed. As was the custom then, Elias was invited to say a few words of guidance and warning to the large crowd. Amongst other things, he said,

It is just coming up to quarter past seven o'clock:
there is no need for anyone to hurry. We have a

⁷ J. Roberts and J. Jones, *Cofiant...John Elias* (Liverpool, 1850), 41-44; *John Elias* (Banner of Truth, 1973), 86-90.

long summer's evening before us . . . God forbid that any of us should be guilty of putting the heavenly dove to flight. Let no drunkard be seen on the roads tonight, on pain of losing his soul. Let there be nothing in anyone's behaviour, in the houses or outside, that would injure the feelings of any magistrate or civic official . . . We expect the behaviour of the whole crowd to be exemplary tonight: if not, this will be the last association ever to be held in this town¹⁸

The age when Nonconformity thought of the immoral as outsiders had not yet dawned. It was assumed that they would be present to listen to the preaching. This is shown even more effectively in an address given by Elias on a similar occasion at Holyhead in 1824. Dr. Owen Thomas (1812-91), whose biography of John Jones, Tal-sarn, is one of the classics of Welsh prose, was present and provides us with a vivid account of the incident. At the request of the chairman, Elias got up slowly, and began to speak with his usual deliberation.

"Are there drunkards here? I'm afraid there are. May I make an appeal to you? Will you just for today try to control yourselves? Even if you have no respect for God Almighty, no respect for the laws of the land, no respect for your own selves—I admit I'm striking a low key,—will you, just for today, be sober and seemly for our sakes? By coming to meetings of this kind to drink and be drunk and behave in an unruly manner, you are breaking our character. Our enemies in the land have not died out yet. They are ready to use every pretext which they suppose will serve their purpose as an occasion against us. And we can fall back on nothing save our character. We are not rich; we are not learned; we are not clever; we do not possess high titles; none of our people holds

¹⁸ R. Parry (Gwalchmai), *Adgofion am John Elias* (1859), 16.

high office. But we have our character; we think a lot of our character; we want to keep our character; we will not allow anyone, if we can help it, to break our character. And the drunkards of these Associations are breaking our character . . . What shall we do with them, brothers? . . . I feel a desire," he said as he became more agitated, "to put them up for auction to anyone who will take them, so that they will never bother us any more." Then, stretching forth his arm as though he were holding them in his hand, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Who'll take them? Who'll take them? Anglicans, will you take them? 'Us! In our baptism we profess to reject the devil and all his works. No, we will not take them.' " Then a moment of silence followed. "Congregationalists, will you take them? 'What? Us! Many years ago we left the Church of England because of its corruption. No! we will not take them.' " Silence again. Then, with his arm stretched out, he shouted again, "Baptists, will you take them? 'Us! We immerse all our people in water to show that only the clean are acceptable to us. No! we will not take them.' " Silence again. "Wesleyans, will you take them? 'What? Us! Good works are an issue of life with us; we do not wish to have them.' " Then, stretching his hand out as though he were holding them in it, and casting a glance over the crowd, he shouted at the very highest volume of his voice, "Who will take them? Who will take them? Who will take them?" Then in an instant his whole nature was convulsed; his eyes flashed and he made a most odd movement; he turned his face towards his left, and in a rather low voice, and yet distinct enough for the whole congregation to hear, he said, "I rather thought I heard the Devil at my elbow saying, 'Knock them down to me; I will take them.' " Then, he raised

his eyes, and with a grave, extremely serious look on his face, he searched the congregation with his eyes and, for about a quarter of a minute, he never said a word. And then he turned again to his left and pointing with his right forefinger at his left elbow, he moved it up and down, once, twice, thrice, and then shouted with tremendous force until his voice echoed through the town, "I was going to say, Satan, that you could have them: but . . ." and he raised his eyes towards heaven, and with a victorious, yet tender voice, he cried, "I hear Jesus shouting, 'I will take them; I will take them; to wash them of their filth, to sober them in their drunkenness; to purify them of all their uncleanness in my own blood.' "

Dr Thomas ends his description by saying, "The preachers on the stage were all behaving as though they were besides themselves. The huge crowd was seething; and the effects were such that many had broken out in ecstatic displays of emotion . . . If anyone ever possessed oratorical imagination, John Elias possessed it."⁹ But it was an "oratorical imagination" inspired not by the wish to provide a sophisticated audience with a pleasing esthetic performance but by a consuming urge to transmit the heart of the Gospel message to people who were living in moral squalor. And he was addressing them directly; they were there in front of him. He speaks of "the drunkards of these Associations". They are not aliens living in another world. Later on in the century such talk by a Nonconformist leader would be inconceivable because by then the immoral had become strangers. And in consequence the Gospel was seen as a source of moral standards by which they could be chastised or condemned. Not so for Elias. For him the Gospel was to be proclaimed in the hearing of the morally depressed as a message of grace that would transform their lives. When preaching on the words

⁹ Owen Thomas, *Cofiant John Jones, Talsarn*, 86o-2.

“that whosoever believeth in him should not perish”, Elias akes the point succinctly,

Whosoever. There is an infinite breadth in this word; whosoever, no matter of what nation, no matter how wretched or unworthy he might be; whosoever believeth.

All that was asked was faith in Jesus Christ. No other qualification was needed. And Elias had a steadfast grasp of this basic Scriptural principle. One important consequence of it was that preachers like Elias lay great store by the popular appeal of their preaching. The immense crowds that listened to the sermons in the open-air assemblies were taken as proof of divine approbation. There was none of the suspicion that to popularise the Gospel was to demean it. In some Nonconformist circles in the twentieth century, and under theological influences far removed from those acknowledged by Elias and his colleagues, it became fashionable to think of the Gospel as an esoteric body of wisdom suitable only for a minority which possessed a refined spirituality. Not so for Elias. The popular preacher need make no apology for his popularity. Needless to say, such an attitude carried with it immense spiritual temptations. It was but a small step from glorying in the universal appeal of the Gospel to making personal popularity an end in itself. And that could lead the preacher to pander to the crowd by playing to the gallery, and so perverting the Gospel in order to gain its plaudits. One of the most engaging characteristics of Elias was his sensitivity to this danger. However prone he might have been to succumb to the temptations of arrogance as a church statesman, he was entirely humble in this respect. He has some moving words on the topic in his autobiography,

Many times I trembled lest I should be tempted to pride on account of my popularity. But the Lord preserved me through his grace. The thought of the weakness and imperfection of my best sermons made me grieve as I recalled a sermon praised by the public.

Many an evening after preaching it was a relief to be able to pray that my sermons be washed in the blood of the Lamb. The thought that thousands of hearers had had no benefit depressed me and made me sad to think that I travelled the country to so little purpose.¹⁰

Elias's contemporaries used to insist that his early ministry had a power and unction all its own. As Dr. Owen Thomas put it, "the effects produced by his ministry during his first twenty years were such that even those who heard him during his later years could form no conception of them."¹¹ The watershed lay somewhere between 1814 and 1820. It is clear that Methodism in both England¹² and Wales was undergoing a considerable transformation just at this time and that the militant popular evangelicism of the previous period was being seriously modified by influences that were politically conservative, morally legalistic and tending rapidly towards dividing the Evangelicals along rigidly denominational lines. It spelled the dissolution of the older Evangelical Consensus and the construction of the ecclesiastical establishment that was to dominate Welsh religious life in the later nineteenth century. It is one of the most remarkable things about the character of John Elias that he contributed to both the old and the new. His career bridges two periods. He was in his first twenty years the outstanding exponent of enthusiastic and popular Evangelical preaching. During the last twenty years of his life, he appears increasingly as the outstanding statesman of a denomination. The revolutionary had become emperor. Inevitably, the role of preaching was modified by such changes.

It would be wrong to suppose, nevertheless, that Elias's own preaching had entered on a period of decline. In his pulpit—as on the open-air stage—he was still the servant of the Word and his dedication to it often enabled him to preach with overpowering effect even when confronted by

¹⁰ Goronwy P. Owen, *op. cit.*, 71.

¹¹ Owen Thomas, *op. cit.*, 855-6.

¹² V. Professor W. R. Ward's significant study, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (Batsford, 1972), especially chapters 4 and 5.

a hostile congregation. In illustration of this, the events at a service in connection with a Monthly Meeting at Cemais, Anglesey, in 1831 might be quoted. On 10 February 1830, John Elias had married, as his second wife, Ann, the widow of Sir John Bulkeley of Pesaddfed. Her first marriage had a romantic touch to it. She was a local beauty who worked as a maid on Sir John's domestic staff. Tradition has it that he opened the window one day and asked Ann, who was doing some chore outside, "Ann, will you marry me?". And she replied instantly, "Yes, Sir John." At the time of Sir John's death in 1819, Elias had sent his condolences by letter to the widow but it was not until 1829 after the death of Elias's first wife the previous year that they became more closely acquainted. Despite the fact that Lady Bulkeley was in origin a working-class girl, she was now considered by Elias's friends as one of the gentry, the social class that had been so ready to harrass the Methodists even in Elias's early days. As a consequence, they were of the opinion that he had betrayed the ordinary Methodist. There was widespread resentment against him which was not in the least mollified when he left his old home at the shop in Llanfechell to live in the style of a gentleman at Y Fron, Llangefni. There was even talk of bringing him under the discipline of the Monthly Meeting. After all, had he not argued vehemently many years before that those who were "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" should be censured strictly by the churches?¹³ And were there not persistent rumours that Lady Bulkeley had a decided weakness for the ways of the world? Not to mention the fact that she was not known to be soundly converted?¹⁴ Whatever substance there might

¹³ The article is reprinted at length in Roberts and Jones, *Cofiant*, 297-304.

¹⁴ Lady Bulkeley, however, underwent a spiritual crisis in 1824. Elias, when writing to her on 20 March, said "... there is in the Gospel of Xt everything that we stand in need of, held out to such sinners as we are, there is an Allsufficient Saviour: perfect righteousness—free forgiveness & a Compleat Salvation—and all without money and without price—and we are invited, guilty, poor and lost as we are to be partakers of this great Salvation. Believe the testimony of God concerning his Son, accept the precious Redeemer as your own, depend on him, give up yourself to him, rest in him, and then your soul shall have a resting place for ever. O beware of unbelieving dispondence! . . ." Bangor MS. 539, I. 13.

be in these suspicions, Elias was well aware of them and had withdrawn from the active work of the Monthly Meeting. His admirers however, after much pleading, prevailed upon him to go Cemais to preach. It was a tense occasion. But before he had got very far with his sermon, the tension had been transformed into jubilation. And as Elias descended from the pulpit, even his sharpest critics vied with one another to shake his hand and welcome him back.¹⁵ It was in the same year that he preached one of the most forceful sermons of his life. It was a time of spiritual ebb, especially in the churches of Caernarfonshire. Elias chose as his text at the Pwllheli Association that year, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered" (Psalm 68. 1). So powerful was the impact of that sermon that it initiated a vigorous revival over a wide area in which no less than three thousand people were converted.

John Elias must take his place, then, as a preacher of unique power. Humphrey Gwalchmai (1788-1847), a contemporary who was in an excellent position to judge, said of Elias in the memorial sermon he preached after his death, "Hardly a service conducted by this brother, and that for many years, passed without someone being converted." And the fact that Dr Owen Thomas's admiration for Elias amounted to hero-worship does not detract from the authority of his judgment on him as a preacher,

We feel that John Elias was quite indescribable as a preacher. He possessed something which it is quite impossible, we believe, to convey any impression of to those who did not hear him themselves, and something that made his influence upon his hearers incomparable . . . He was, without a doubt, the most popular preacher, if the Principality be taken as a whole, that ever arose in Wales. He was so from his earliest beginnings, and he was so to the end.

¹⁵ The story as told by an eye-witness is to be found in Jones and Morgan, *Y Tadau Methodistiaidd* II, 445-6.

He was so at home and elsewhere; in Anglesey as well as Monmouthshire; in Llanrhuuddlad or Llangefni, as in Llangeitho or Carmarthen. He was so in the towns and in the rural areas; amongst the rich, the noble and the learned, as with the poor, the ordinary folk and the uneducated.¹⁶

3

It is very tempting in a secular age to reduce the work of John Elias and his contemporaries to the interplay of social forces, psychological tensions and personal genius. There is every justification, of course, for studying these aspects of historical development. They have their place in the picture. But they are by no means the whole of it. We are dealing with part of God's mighty work of salvation amongst the Welsh people. It has long been fashionable to make much of the dramatic prowess of men like Elias. He himself has not infrequently been described as a kind of Henry Irving who, had he been born at a later time and in a less Puritanical society, would have become one of the immortals of the theatre. There is a deep secular cynicism in this kind of evaluation. The real drama in Elias's preaching stemmed not from his own oratorical genius but from God's gracious intervention in the lives of so many thousands of Welshmen in that age. It was by divine commission, not by personal accident, that Elias was a preacher of the Gospel. In his own estimation, his histrionic gifts would be nothing but the snare of the Devil were they not subservient to the drama of salvation. We need, then, to know something of Elias's theology if we are to appreciate his work in a thoroughly Christian way.

In his autobiography, Elias describes the general unanimity in matters of doctrine that prevailed in Wales when he began his public life. There were some who embraced

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, 854.

Antinomianism and others who favoured Sabellianism, but they were a small minority. Amongst the vast majority, he tells us, there was no controversy, no preaching debatable matters, or subtle and abstruse things. "Everyone, small and great, preached plainly and with absolute clarity." And the subjects that they principally dwelt upon were,

the Fall of man and his total depravity; the wretchedness of his condition under the curse and wrath of the just God; his complete inability to save himself; and free salvation by God's sovereign grace and love; Christ as full Saviour, appropriate to the chief of sinners; inviting the lost to come to Him and to believe in Him; and urging believers to 'be careful to maintain good works.' This was the sum and substance of their preaching....This is the kind of preaching that conquered Wales.¹⁷

This brief summary gives no more than the basic principles of the Evangelical Consensus that provided an inner unity to the doctrine which was the common ground that united preachers of Evangelical convictions no matter to what church organisation they might belong. But there is more to be said. John Elias understood these basic principles in terms of that form of Calvinism known as the Federal Theology or Covenant Theology. To say this is to place Elias in one of those streams of thought that deeply affected the development of the European and American mind. Ever since its celebration by William Williams, Pantycelyn, in the most majestic of his poems,¹⁸ this theology had been popular amongst Calvinistic Methodists and through the 1823 Confession of Faith it became the official theology of the connexion. Amongst the articles contributed by Elias himself to the Confession were those on the Covenant of Works, the Election of Grace and the Person of Christ the Mediator, and the Eternal Covenant. And he provides a fuller exposition of his standpoint

¹⁷ Goronwy P. Owen, *op. cit.*, 76.

¹⁸ *Golwg ar Deyrnas Crist.*

in his book *A Scriptural View of the Sinner's Justification* (1821).¹⁹ In many ways it is a good book. Dr. Owen Thomas, although not uncritical of some details, says rightly of it that it shows "a rare ability to provide within what is but a comparatively small compass a clear and full and accurate exposition of the subject in hand."²⁰

In this theology, God is seen as a covenanting God. He wills to be in covenant with man. He made a covenant with Adam and if Adam observed the terms of the covenant, he would achieve eternal life. The terms of that covenant are discernible in the moral law, and the best summary of that law is the Ten Commandments. But tragedy intervened. Adam sinned and since he was the representative of mankind, his tragedy became every man's tragedy. And so "the whole nature of man, body and soul" has become depraved. But God intervenes, not because there is any necessity laid upon Him but out of sheer grace, in order to save man. Father and Son agree by covenant to act on behalf of humanity. The divine Son would become incarnate and live an historical life amongst men, fulfilling the demands of God's law according to the Covenant of Works and yet offering himself to bear the punishment of sin. He does this not as a private individual but in discharge of his public and divine office as Head of the Covenant on behalf of fallen humanity. He becomes therefore the substitute for men. And God, in accordance with the terms of his covenant with his Son, condescends to grant sinners full justification on the grounds of Christ's sacrifice. All that is demanded of men now is that they have faith in the Redeemer. They must take God at his word. And by this faith they too are bound by the Covenant of Grace and become members of Christ. But in order that they may believe, they have to be told the good news of God's grace in the Covenant, of Christ's holy life and sacrificial death on

¹⁹ *Golygiad Ysgrythyrol ar Gyfiawnhad Pechadur.*

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, 565.

their behalf. And this good news is proclaimed in the preaching of the Word.

It will be seen immediately that the Covenant Theology is a theology which emphasises God's grace. Moreover, grace is understood not as a spiritual substance which is available in a static supernatural realm. Grace is understood in terms of God's vigorous action in human history. The covenanting God is an active God. And there is in this theology too a concentration on Jesus Christ. And preaching is given a crucial role in mediating God's Word and God's actions to sinners. In a word, we are dealing here with a dramatic understanding of the Christian Faith.

For Elias, then, the drama lies in the encounter between the gracious God and the defiant sinner. The preacher has a message from God. This meant that the preacher had to be on his guard lest he should substitute for the divine message the fancies or speculations or philosophies of men. Hence Elias's interest in purity of doctrine and his unceasing endeavour to judge ideas in the light of Scripture. He realised that men are saved not by ideas, however orthodox they might be, but by the Redeemer, through faith in Him. But he realised too that unscriptural ideas could so affect preaching as to obscure a sinner's view of the Redeemer and render him deaf to the voice of God in the Bible.

His views on the significance of preaching are expounded with characteristic clarity in the memorial sermon which he preached after Ebenezer Morris (1769-1825) and other ministers in the Pwllheli Association, September 1825.²¹ The true servants of God, he says, "are to be known by the purity of their doctrine, the holiness of their conversation, the sincerity of their motives, their self-mortification, and their zeal for the glory of God." That is, in their ideas and morals they should be entirely subject to the Gospel. Gifts take a second place,

²¹ *Marwolaeth Gweision Ffyddlawn i Dduw . . .* (Bala, 1826). The sermon is summarised in *John Elias* (Banner of Truth, 1973), 406-8.

The most insignificant and the least gifted of the ministers that have been called by God are still God's servants; and the most distinguished and most gifted are but God's servants, as regards their office. They are all fellow-servants.

The most essential gifts necessary for doing the work do not lie in the preachers themselves. As he says of Ebenezer Morris and the other ministers whose work he is celebrating, "Their greatest excellence lay not in human gifts, but in the gracious presence of the Lord with them." The transcendent dimension is of the essence of preaching because, "all necessary gifts for the work of the ministry, and for the edification of the body of Christ, lie in the Head of the Church, seated on God's right hand"—a lesson that he had learnt well from the theologian whom he admired above all others, Dr. John Owen. Even his language echoes Owen's delightful treatise *On Spiritual Gifts*. This implies a high doctrine about preaching, a doctrine he expresses in another sermon of his when he states that "Christ speaks to us through his ministers, and we ought to listen to them, as though He Himself were addressing us without an intermediary."²² It is the privilege of a congregation to listen, not so much to preachers, as to Christ speaking through them. This is how he puts the matter, to quote the same sermon again,

you are called upon to listen to Him, and to us as though to Him. Sad to say, we have more listeners than He has. For every one that listens to Christ there are ten who listen to me and the least popular of preachers can be sure of having far more to listen to him than will listen to Christ. People enjoy listening to us without having ever listened to Him.

This frank statement tells us much about the trials of the most popular preacher of the day! But it tells us too of the ease with which people confuse brilliant gifts—or any gifts for that matter—with the true message of the Gospel. Elias

²² R. Hughes, *Pregethau y diweddar . . . John Elias* (Liverpool, 1849), II, 4-5.

puts the matter briefly in a sentence,—“It is impossible for us to add anything to the glory of Christ’s Gospel by any gift that we possess.” And so the preacher himself must strive to be a true servant of Christ in his pulpit for “we preach best when we speak most like Christ; when our words are less our own and more his.”

As Elias sees it, the preacher is called to do momentous work. He is God’s messenger. If he is faithful to the message entrusted to him, God will speak through him. And God will speak with the greatest seriousness of man’s dreadful plight through sin. Yet He will speak the word of grace, inviting man to turn in faith to the Saviour. When this happens, men will be transformed and a life of joy, peace and hope will be theirs. All these facets of Christian truth can be amply illustrated from Elias’s sermons. He made no bones about the human tragedy. Sin is terrible. Yet it mesmerises men.

Even if you get the finest pleasure, the greatest profit, the highest honour that is to be had in the service of sin it is but the bait on the hook which may be sweet enough for a time but turns in the end into terrible bitterness. The sweetest bait that sin has on its hooks does not keep its flavour for long; this honey will melt soon enough in thy belly, but the poisoned hook will stay there for ever unless it is extracted by grace. .²³

But the God of grace is active in human history. We can see how Elias understood the various covenants mentioned in the Bible as indications of God’s redemptive activity from these observations on the Covenant of Grace:—

This covenant was established in eternity but revealed in time after Adam’s fall...And this Covenant was revealed to many, in several ways or dispensations... The intention was to reveal Christ and the plan of salvation. Christ was revealed in Eden as the woman’s Seed bruising the serpent’s head. In the covenant with Noah as the Redeemer of the elect seed and

²³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

remnant. In the covenant with Abraham as the Blessor of all the families of the earth. In the covenant on Sinai as Prophet and Priest, foreshadowed by Moses and Aaron. In the covenant with David, as a King. But in the New Covenant He is revealed more fully and perfectly than in all the other Covenants.²⁴

This is but to proclaim that God is a loving God. He very movingly speaks of this aspect of the truth in his great sermon on "God so loved the world. . ."

It is God's love. Here is a love that is stronger than death and which will reach its subjects through every storm. Its wheels are hot fire, and its coals are fiery coals. The love of the Betrothed towards the Beloved differs from God's love as sparks contrast with the sun. The love of God is so strong a fire that many waters cannot quench it . . . It was not quenched by the robberies committed by the thief on the cross, Peter's oaths, the persecutions of Saul, nor the filth of the Woman of Samaria. Neither those people who bathed their hands in the blood of the Son of God, nor Manasseh whose murders reddened Jerusalem with the blood of the saints, could quench the love of our God."²⁵

In addressing sinners, Elias could take their sin seriously precisely because he had so firm a grip on the amazing grace of God in Christ. Consequently, he never tires of pleading with people to trust God's love, to look to Christ—and to Christ alone—for salvation. The most momentous decision of a man's life must be made with his eye on Christ. This needs to be reiterated because people who have not paid sufficient attention to Elias's sermons fail to grasp the elementary fact that, no matter what Elias's gifts as a preacher were, he would not have attracted huge congregations for over forty

²⁴ John Hughes, *Nodiadau amryw o Bregethau . . . John Elias* (Caernarfon, n.d.), 13-14.

²⁵ R. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 48.

years did he not proclaim God's grace. Elias has sometimes been accused of "preaching election" or "preaching predestination" or "preaching a narrow and bitter theology". He never did anything of the kind. He preached the Gospel. He proclaimed Christ as Saviour. He made known the riches of divine grace. The central Reformation principles "by faith alone" and "by grace alone" were so much a fabric of Elias's very being that he was quite clear in his mind that ideas and doctrines, however good or theological or godly they might be, do not save sinners. To suppose so would be to deny that Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour. We are not redeemed by adopting ideas but by faith in Christ. And Elias could be impatient with those who permitted their theology to condition their proclamation of the Gospel. As his biographers tell us, "He found it objectionable and insufferable that some should suppose that they were giving honour to God alone in the salvation of sinners by chattering obscurely about the total perdition of man through sin."²⁶ His point was that the Christian preacher is commissioned to bring a message of hope to the lost. As he himself put it in a sermon,

What now hinders the saving of old rebels? And who stands in the way of their being taken to eternal life? There is no one in heaven who wishes to do so, and no one in hell who can. There is no one in heaven who seeks to hinder, and no one in hell who could though he tried.²⁷

Some of his contemporaries veered towards that type of High Calvinism that taught that Jesus's invitation to sinners was previously conditioned by Divine Election. They went so far as to suggest that belief in Jesus Christ might after all prove unavailing unless the believer was already destined to eternal life. Elias feared and abhorred this kind of speculative talk. And rightly. It was a point of view that could not but lead to demeaning the Redeemer by making Him a mere

²⁶ Roberts and Jones, *op. cit.*, 181.

²⁷ R. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 47.

instrument for executing a preconceived policy. Moreover, it was a doctrine which put the Son and Father in opposition to one another. It came into direct conflict with such scriptures as John 6. 37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Here the unity of God's electing and Christ's invitation is clearly illustrated. High Calvinism was in constant danger of tearing apart the unity of the Divine Persons in the Trinity. Elias, on the contrary, had a firm grip on the truth that to believe in Jesus Christ is the only condition of eternal life, it being the Word of God "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3. 16). This is how he puts it,

How often I have heard people objecting and saying, 'I want to know whether I have been loved, whether I have been redeemed, before I believe. Does one not need to know these things first?' No, precious souls. You are not called to believe as elect ones or as redeemed ones. You must believe as a sinner before you can know anything. You do not need to know who has been loved nor who has been elected; only believe in Him who justifies the ungodly.²⁸

Man is personally responsible for his reaction to God's gracious invitation. This point is made clear in his correspondence with his son, John, who was tempted in 1819 towards the High Calvinistic doctrine. The father writes,

What sinner under his burden and fears was ever rejected by Christ? You need not be lost unless you choose to be—choose to denigrate and reject Christ, and choose sin on earth and hell to eternity instead of receiving Christ and submitting to Him and following Him through fire and water.²⁹

Sinners must use the means ordained by God and they will find blessing. In another letter he tells his son,

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 49

²⁹ Letter of 17 August 1819, Bangor MSS, 539, II, 15, in Welsh.

Use the means, wait upon the Lord, stretch forth your hand, even though it be withered; arise like the Prodigal although in a far country and dying of hunger,—and the Father will run to meet you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. Ask, and you will receive, yes, far more than you can ask or desire. Beware of hard thoughts about God.³⁰

Again, still on the same theme, he elaborates a little,

When God saves men, He treats them as rational beings, he does not drag them like stones, nor does he drive them like animals. He treats them as men. He shows them the evil of sin, their wretchedness and deserts, and their utter perdition of themselves. And in view of their perdition, He shows them Christ and the full salvation that is in Him, until the soul be drawn to desire Him, to choose Him, to receive Him and to shout from the heart, "found in Him".³¹

The firmness of Elias's hold on these fundamental convictions is best illustrated by the fact that he continued to adhere to them even during that alarming episode in 1814-1815, when he adopted a highly mercantile view of the Atonement which was popular amongst some contemporary High Calvinists. He argued then that the merits of Christ's sufferings precisely balanced the sins committed by the elect against God. Since Elias was such a persuasive advocate, the whole body of Calvinistic Methodists was in the greatest danger of committing itself to this unscriptural position. Only the persistence of two of the ablest theologians of the Methodists at that time, Thomas Jones of Denbigh and Richard Jones of Wern (1772?-1833), convinced the Associations that a stand needed to be

³⁰ Letter of 4 September 1819, Bangor MSS, 539, II, 16, in Welsh.

³¹ Letter from Llanfechell to his son, 29 October 1819, Bangor MSS, 539, II, 17, p. 22. This is a long and vivid letter. Only a brief portion (sadly mauled!) is reproduced by Edward Morgan in *Valuable Letters . . . of . . . John Elias* (Caernarfon, 1847), 39-40. It is reproduced in the Banner of Truth edition, pp. 204-5. Unfortunately, Morgan's edition of Elias's letters are so heavily edited as to be quite misleading.

taken against such a view of the Atonement. They insisted that the Redeemer Himself in the fulness of his divine-human Person is the propitiation—"he is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2. 2). It says much of Elias's deference for the great theological scholarship of Thomas Jones and for his humility when confronted by the evident testimony of Scripture that he without prevarication recanted what he confessed to be an error and apologised for it.³² Now, amongst the High Calvinists who had embraced the view that the Redeemer's merits exactly balanced the sins of the elect, there was a profound feeling that the Gospel message was not meant to be heard by all. The only purpose of preaching was to separate the elect from the damned. And in that way philosophical speculation obscured the evident truth of Scripture. Such a view would kill Evangelical preaching. But Elias did not waver for a moment in his conviction that Christian preachers must offer God's pardon to all. And this is the golden thread that runs through all his preaching. He was pre-eminently the preacher of grace.

The point was magnificently illustrated in that unforgettable occasion when Elias preached in the farmyard at Mathafarn. His text was, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1. 29).

The people before him were as a wheatfield under a great storm of wind. Hefty, strong, hard men were shouting for their lives. Before long he coined the phrase, 'The family is too small for the Lamb'. [He went on:-] 'What is all this travelling from North Wales to South Wales, and from South Wales to North Wales? "The family is too small for the Lamb."'

Why all the agitation these days to send missionaries to the dark millions of India, to the black pagans of

³² The controversy is most clearly described in *Tadau Methodistiaidd* II, 394-8, and in magnificent detail by Owen Thomas in *Cofiant John Jones, Talsarn*, 545-62. Edward Morgan passes over the matter lightly in his biography, *v.*, the Banner of Truth reprint, *John Elias, Life, Letters and Essays* (1973), 141. W. Evans, *History of Welsh Theology* (1900), 135-141, gives a little space to it. Elias edited the collection of Richard Jones's hymns, *Hymnau a Chaneuon Ysbrydol a Duwiol* (1835).

Africa, and to the uncivilised tribes of the South Sea Islands? "The family is too small for the Lamb." Why have you come here today [it may be asked], to attract people from their duties in the middle of their working day at a busy time like this? "The family is too small for the Lamb." People!', he said, raising his voice high, 'the feast is on the table; it has been prepared by God Himself; there is a welcome, there is a call to you all to come; I have come here today on purpose to announce that there is room for you at the table; the family is too small for the Lamb.' And then a great shouting broke out in the place.³³

No comment is necessary. We are listening to a great preacher with the greatest message of all.

4

What of the impact of Elias's preaching? That 'great shouting' at Mathafarn—the overwhelming joy of sinners invited to God's table,—is one answer to the question. Many thousands of people were brought to the point of decision and conversion by this man's preaching and, as we have seen, demonstrations of fear, of ecstasy and of joy, were common occurrences. Again and again we hear of the weeping and the ascriptions of praise that bring the preacher to a halt. But this was not all. Elias himself was insistent that conversion is something much more profound than psychological excitement. As he wrote to his son,

. . . true religion does not consist of feelings. The feelings of many people are shattered utterly under the influence of preaching, but their heart remains whole and unchanged; while others are truly transformed, their hearts shattered, their conscience made tender, hating sin and despising self, without shedding many tears . . .³⁴

³³ Owen Thomas, *op. cit.*, 852-3.

³⁴ Letter of 8 December 1819, Bangor MSS, 539, II, 18.

Elias and his colleagues, through their preaching, were the means blessed of God to transform the deepest springs of motivation in the hearts of scores of thousands of people in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. And this transformation had consequences of the greatest significance for the life of Wales in all its aspects. It meant a striking improvement in morals. Thousands of people were led to live cleaner and more upright lives. There can be no doubt that Anglesey, the area where Elias's own influence was most deeply felt, was a better place to live in in 1841, the time of Elias's death, than it was when he began his work there forty years previously. In cultural life too there were changes. To be drawn into the life of the churches meant attendance at the Sunday Schools, the society meetings and the assemblies and monthly meetings of the Methodists. Nor was this cultural life a monopoly of the Methodists. It affected all the churches. Illiterates were taught to read and ordinary people were trained in the art of self-expression. They became readers not only of their Bibles but of other books and magazines. But a growing mastery of the instruments of culture is a deployment of power. It meant the emergence of a new social pattern. The thousands who were brought to the Christian faith in these years were precisely the people who had for generations been silent and powerless in society. They were now a force to be reckoned with. The ancient moulders of social attitudes, the gentry and the parsons, were being displaced by new leaders. Such a profound change in the balance of social power was bound before long to produce political repercussions. Once the ordinary people became articulate, they desired to make their convictions known to those who held the reins of political power. There is ample evidence that in Wales, as in England, the new leaders, whose influence was rooted in their preaching and their control of discipline within the framework of their churches, were nervous about the implications of the social revolution that their own work under God had produced. The older churches found it

easier to welcome the changes and to challenge the old order on its basis. The Methodists tended to favour a conservative attitude. This was pre-eminently so of Elias. He saw himself as the reformer of the old society, purifying its morals, elevating its mind, but maintaining its essentially feudal structure. It is instructive that whereas he could insist firmly upon the parity of ministers and their equality before God, he could also in his autobiography think of himself as a "prince".³⁵ And it was not mere spite that dubbed him the "Pope of Anglesey". He just could not conceive of himself as the instrument under God's Providence for introducing a fundamental change in the nature of Welsh society. Staunch Calvinist that he was, he did not appreciate the dynamic of the Gospel as a force making for the unfolding of cultural and social and political possibilities, as did the great Calvinists of Europe in previous generations. Hence the undeniable tendency in his work as a church leader and statesman in the years after 1820 to exercise his immense influence in restrictive and even oppressive ways.

Let this be frankly admitted. We need to see Elias as he was, warts and all. Only so can we achieve a true picture of the development of Christianity in Wales in the nineteenth century. Whether or not we approve of all that he did in the sphere of public affairs, he was one of the architects of Victorian Wales. And no criticism of his actions as an ecclesiastical leader can dim the lustre of his work as a preacher. Dr. Owen Thomas asserted that the outstanding element in Elias's make-up was "a deep and solemn conviction of the divinity of the Gospel, and of the immense importance of its contents for a lost world".³⁶ No one who reads his sermons can fail to realise that Elias never wavered for a moment from this conviction. Moreover, all the evidence we have goes to show that he expounded that Gospel with

³⁵ *Marwolaeth Gweision Duw*, 13. The words are paraphrased in the summary of the sermon in *John Elias* (Banner of Truth ed.), 407; Goronwy P. Owen, *Hunangofiant*, 80.

³⁶ *Cofiant John Jones, Talsarn*, 857.

inimitable power over a period of forty years. And God blessed his work in an outstanding way to the salvation of thousands. God grant that Wales may see his like again—and soon! Let Elias have the last word in the paragraph that closes his autobiography,

If good has come of my very imperfect labour, it was God that did it. The glory is his, I was nothing. This will be seen in the day when God reveals the mysteries. If God took me as an instrument to bring any sinner, or sinners, to Christ, that has been an infinite privilege. ‘And it will be a joy to me that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.’ But if I had succeeded in bringing thousands to the Calvinistic Methodists without bringing them to Christ, it would all be empty and valueless before the throne of Christ! The work burned and the preacher suffering loss!

There we have the essential humility of the greatest of our preachers.