



Rev. Dr. David Saunders

1831- 1892

David Saunders was born on the 20th, May 1831, at Emlyn, on the banks of the River Teifi, on the borders of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, but in Cardiganshire, so the three counties have almost an equal right, to claim him as their own.

His father, a currier by trade, was no ordinary man, a tall, well-developed, and commanding in appearance, he was a good musician, and took a keen interest, in the political and social, and religions welfare of his country. His mother was one of those talented and inspired women, such women as Wales has never done justice to their memory- who take an active interest in the destiny of their country, and are sought after for their prudent counsel, sound judgment, and purity of life.

So were the mothers of the “three brothers” of Llanllyfni, of Henry Rees and “Gwilym Hiraethog;” “Ab Fychan,” “Ieuan Gwynedd,” of Dr Owen Thomas and Dr John Thomas, “Ceiriog”, “Dafydd Ionawr, “Iolo Morganwg,” &c They had faith in Christianity as the only elevating power to raise the world from sin; faith in the future of their own country and faith that they could infuse into their sons and daughters is such enthusiasm Is would make them ready to lay down their lives for the truth and their fellow men.

Wales has been blessed with some wonderful mothers, women who took prominent parts in the theological controversies of the country fifty and sixty years ago, women who were the heart and soul of the Sunday Schools and the (“seiat,” ‘a session’) and who sheltered and comforted the old Welsh giant preachers who used to pilgrimage the land to preach the Gospel History is silent, about such women, but the force of their character is manifested in those of their children who have placed themselves wholly at the disposal of their country. It was no wonder, then, that, then name of David, the son of an industrious, intelligent, and pious poor couple, should become a household name throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Commencing to Preach.

When he left school, he was apprenticed to a local carpenter, but his thirst for knowledge increased as he “grew and waxed strong in spirit.” He became an active Sunday School teacher, and was, noticeably young, a choir leader, being one of the first, in Wales who took to training choirs in the musical revival, nearly 50 years ago. His parents gave him every encouragement, and when he commenced to preach, he was placed under the care of the Rev. G. P. Evans, Swansea, and

afterwards he went to the Normal College to the Rev. Dr. Evan Davies. In 1851 he entered Trevecca College, where he made such progress that he was allowed to leave in about two years and went to Glasgow University. He remained there, however, only one year, a severe attack of typhoid fever preventing him from continuing his studies and obtaining a degree.

His First Church.

Before actually recovering from the fever, he received a call from the church at Penclawdd, Gower, to succeed the Rev. W. Williams (now of Argyle Street, Swansea, as minister. He entered on his ministration there in 1855, and soon after he took another major step. He was married to Miss Howell, the daughter of Mr. J. Howell, Pencoed, who for 40 years acted as secretary to the Glamorgan monthly meeting, and sister of Archdeacon Howell, and she proved to be everything that was wanted to him as a public man and a minister of the Church of Christ.

Rev. Saunders, Aberdare.

Before he was in Penclawdd two years he received, an, unanimous call to take charge of the newly-formed Church at Bethania, Aberdare, and in the beginning of 1857 he removed thither. In the following summer he was ordained at the Cowbridge Association. During the five years he was Aberdare he worked and studied hard, and it was while there he made a name to himself and became known throughout Wales as a preacher of the first rank. Of his preaching and his success at Aberdare the Rev. W. James, M.A., in the "Christian Standard" says:

"The main theme of his ministry was 'Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God,' the reality and philosophy of man's redemption, illustrated greatly by its analogy to the constitution and the course or nature. To those who listened to him at Aberdare, as the writer did, from 1857-62, there was nothing new in Professor Drummond's book, 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World.' All the principles enunciated in that truly clear and able book, and neatly every illustration contained therein, had been preached in Bethania pulpit, almost, before its renowned author was through the standards of an elementary school.

This was the drift of his preaching, the Kingdom of Grace governed, not by caprice, but according to law and order necessitated by the nature of man and his relation to God, and by the very nature of God and His relation to man. Inform it was quite new in substance it contained the same eternal verities and saving truths as had been preached by the great Methodist Father, the Puritans, the Reformers, and by the Apostles, and Jesus Christ Himself. The multitude thronged to hear it; in less than two years the large chapel became too small; another was built and a second Church formed, and the two thrive unto this day."

An Address on the Presentation of a Testimonial to the Rev. D. Saunders.

On His departure from This Place.

By David Williams

(Alaw Goch)

Well, Saunders is one who has character,
And Saunders earned the respect which he has,
The way he conducts himself appeals to everyone,
He will still be loved when he lies in his coffin,
The feeling in town is that they want to keep him,
In spite of that, go away he will,

Our wish is his wellbeing right up to his death –
For him, his partner, and his children.

The twists and turns of Providence are complicated,
We cannot understand them at this stage,
The way wheels work within wheels is perfect,
But there is a ceiling between heaven and earth,
One must live in the present when comparing,
And do that diligently all the time,
It is the duty of every man to make, an effort,
Whilst he dwells here on this earth.

It gives pleasure to each one of his friends.
To shout – “All success to Saunders;”
He has no one who is his enemy,
And therefore, we all join in readily.
The length of his journey in the folds of the train,
A day’s journey, is not that much,
But the telegram will bring us news of him.
Warmly, by the hour.

We hope that the move he is making,
Will bring neither worry nor affliction,
But that Providence will smile upon him always.
And that blessings will adorn his life,
We are not about to go to his funeral,
It would be foolish for us to wallow in too much hiraeth,
Should they not be happy there as a family,
Let us accept them back to our midst with full respect.

A call from Liverpool

When still young and known as “David Saunders, Aberdare,” he was sent as a delegate from South Wales to the North Wales Summer “Sassiwn” (session) in 1860, which was held at Machynlleth. The young preacher from the South was chosen to preach on the field on the great preaching day, and he was placed in a second prominent position, namely, to officiate at the afternoon service. There were giants at that assembly: the Rev David Jones, Treborth; Edward Morgan, Dyffryn; John Owen, Tynllwyn; Henry Rees; William Williams, Swansea, and other prominent preachers. But the style, the eloquence, and the freshness of thoughts that characterise the young preacher from South Wales, placed them all in the shade. “Saunders of Aberdare” was on everybody’s lips as the people came away from the “Sassiwn” and that sermon is remembered by hundreds to this day. Indeed, a prominent deacon from Liverpool said as he was coming from the service, “I’ll have that young preacher to Liverpool, be the cost that, it will be,” and there young Saunders went in 1882 after having had a second and very pressing invitation.

From that day, at the Machynlleth “Sassiwn,” Saunders has stood in the first rank as a preacher, and for 32 years he could not fill one-tenth of the calls for his services from all over Wales and the chief towns of England. His congregation in Liverpool soon grew too large for the chapel and the beautiful edifice in the Princes Road was built at a cost of about £20,000 and is considered the finest building in the city. Although Liverpool swarms with eminent preachers, yet there was never a preacher, even in Liverpool, more popular at home than David Saunders. His gift of language, rich,

full voice, and his masterly way of treating every subject in all its bearings, made the Welshmen of that city flock to hear him. To this day the church of Princes Road is one of the strongest and richest that belongs to the Calvinistic Methodist, body.

Leaving for Abercarn.

Although successful and loved by everyone, Mr. Saunders, on account of Mrs. Saunders' health, was compelled to leave Liverpool. In 1868 he accepted the charge of Lady Llanover's Church at Abercarn. Here again he was successful, the church prospered under his charge, and the pastor was beloved by all. He did the connexion a great service by being instrumental in securing the church and its endowments for the denomination. But while at Abercarn a serious bereavement fell on the family. No sooner was Mrs. Saunders convalescent than she had to nurse their dying children, and they had the melancholy experience of watching three of their offspring withers and die away one after the other. One died at Abercarn, the other two at Swansea: and only one son survives, the Rev J. M. Saunders. M.A., Penarth.

Trinity Street, Swansea.

In about five years, in 1873, Mr Saunders accepted a pressing invitation from the Church of Trinity Street, Swansea; and, although nineteen years had elapsed since his first and successful effort, he was as popular as ever among his own people, and was held in high esteem by all classes, especially those who knew him the best. When it became known about the middle of last April that he was going to Birmingham to consult a specialist a few members of his Church went to his house the night, before his departure and presented him with £50, never dreaming that that would be the last opportunity they would have of showing their admiration of his many qualities.

He was ordered by his Birmingham physician to Leamington for a complete rest. The first week he was there he caught a severe cold and was for weeks lying dangerously ill. However, he survived the attack, and about the end of June he was removed to Aberdare.

His relatives and his friends now thought that there was a decided change for the better, and the rev. gentleman took drives daily, and seemed to gain a little strength. Indeed, he was so improved that it was decided to take him to his son's home at Penarth about three weeks ago. But his old enemy was gradually destroying his strong-to all appearance, constitution, and, in spite of all medical skill and most, careful, and tender nursing, he breathed his last in the 61st, year of his age.

The Preacher.

Rev. Dr. Saunders was an accomplished musician, and was passionately fond of studying the mysteries of the sacred art. He was also a fluent and very forcible writer. He edited the "Gwladgarwr" for a considerable period when at Aberdare, and exhibited great ability, tact, and fairness in his treatment of all subjects; and his articles in the "Drysorfa" on "Baptism of Children" are among the best in the Welsh language.

But as a preacher Dr. Saunders will be remembered for many a generation and have a name in Welsh history. He possessed all that was essential for a popular preacher, a rich voice under perfect control, flow of language, earnestness, and a strong, cultivated mind, together with an impressive and commanding appearance. Besides being a theologian of the first rank, and our American cousins never did confer the D.D., on the more deserving divine, Rev. Dr. Saunders was also a philosopher and a close observer of Nature. He could treat every subject from all points and was not afraid to face all discoveries that were made in the scientific world. Dr. Saunders used to see the "good" and

the “beautiful” everywhere, and thousands of times he shouted out, “Here’s a beautiful idea, my friends,” “Dyma l chwi idea beautiful, fy mhobl.” (“Here is a beautiful idea for you, my people).

His style was of the highest type; his language and his illustrations were always in unison with the glorious truths he preached. Being a good scholar, an extensive reader, an earnest believer, he was able to bring the latest phases of Christian truths before the masses with freshness and in, a mode that, everyone could understand them.

There was something fascinating in his style and delivery, and from the moment, he would stand up in the pulpit until he sat down every eye would be fixed upon him, listening with all their might. He spoke hard sometimes, no doubt, as is shown by the correspondence, which has lately passed between him and Mr Helm, but it was only, all evidence of his deep convictions in what he believed to be the right interpretation of God’s word. He believed himself what he preached, and that made him powerful in the pulpit, his influence to be felt throughout the land, and everybody to admire him as a man who had the courage to expound and defend what he thought was right.

The Funeral

The body had been conveyed the previous evening from the residence of the Rev. J. M. Saunders, M.A., at Penarth, and deposited on the table within the deacons’ pew in Bethania Chapel, in readiness for the funeral ceremony.

A large number of people entered the chapel before the service, in order to have a last loving gaze upon the coffin of one who was so dearly beloved. The body was encased in a shell, and enclosed in a massive coffin of polished Welsh oak, with heavy furniture of brass, the breast-plate containing the simple inscription:

DAVID SAUNDERS,
Born May 20th, 1831.
Died Oct. 19th, 1892.

It was the special request of the family that no wreaths should be sent, and had it not been for this, floral tributes would undoubtedly have been received from all parts of the country. A handsome wreath however was received from his Honour Judge and Mrs. Gwilym Williams, Miskin Manor, and a similar tribute, was sent by Mrs W. Morgan, of Elm Bank, Liverpool, and of Caio. The coffin was made by Mr J. Morgan, builder, Aberdare, who also acted as undertaker.

The funeral service was held at 1.30 at Bethania Chapel, under the presidency of the Rev. W. James, the pastor. Long before the hour mentioned, however, the sacred building was crowded to excess, and many thousands had to turn away for want of room. So great was the crush that several of the appointed speakers failed to secure admission, and it was with no small difficulty that a passage was eventually made for the entrance of the principal mourners. Before the proceedings began the Rev. J. Morgan Jones, gave out several Welsh hymns, which were sung with much fervour by the assembled throng. Chief among the hymn-tunes sang was Lausanne on the words.

“Mae nghyfeillion adre n myned.”

“Friends are going home.”

The refrain, in which the singers depict the happy meeting “Where parting is no more,” was repeated over and over again with much feeling. The mourners were accommodated with seats in

the deacons' pew surrounding the coffin, conspicuous among the bereaved company being the widow, the Rev. J. M. Saunders, and Mrs Saunders' brother, the Ven. Archdeacon Howell (Llawdden). The service was introduced by the Rev. Principal Prys, of Trefecca College, while around him, with bowed heads and tear-dimmed eyes were most of the well-known leaders of Welsh Methodism.

The Rev. W. James, Aberdare, in opening the proceedings, feelingly thanked the large concourse of persons for attending that day to mourn over the grave of their departed Father in God. Dr. Saunders was to him a very Reverend Father in God, in every sense of the word; and, on his (the speaker's) behalf, on behalf of the church, and on behalf of the mourners and the relatives, he desired to thank them heartily for their presence. Among them were representative people from all parts of North Wales and if time permitted, they would all be pleased to hear a few remarks from each.

This, however, on the present occasion, was impossible. It had been announced in the newspapers that all the arrangements for the day were in his (the speaker's) hands, but he desired it to be known that so far as that meeting was concerned he had not undertaken the responsibility of arranging the programme without fully conferring with the relatives of the departed and his other immediate friends.



The Grave of Rev. Dr. Saunders & Family.

They had arranged for a united choir composed of singers from all the chapels in the district to occupy the gallery that day, to sing the hymns selected for the occasion, but that arrangement, owing to the vast crowd which had assembled, had fallen through, and, for aught he knew, the arrangements as they were, were no worse. He would only ask them, when joining in the hymns, to gaze upon the coffin before them and to raise their voices in sorrow and worship to Him who controlled all things. He regarded the late Dr. Saunders as God's gift to Wales, and Wales would for a long, long time sadly miss his genial presence and the sound of his silvery voice. Letters had been received from an exceptionally enormous number of friends, and he wished, had time permitted him, to read portions of them. Among others who had written were the Rev. Dr. John Hughes, of Carnarvon the Rev. G. Davies, of Aberystwyth; Rev. W. R. Jones, of Liverpool; the Rev. J. R. Davies, of Liverpool; Mr George Kirkley, of the Liberation Society, and others.

Addresses were, also given by the Rev's Thomas Levi, W. James, M.A., Manchester, and W. Williams Swansea. An overflow meeting was held at Calfaria Chapel.

The cortege was fully a mile long, and en route signs of deep mourning were manifested on all hands. Pretty nearly all shops in Aberdare were closed, and thousands of people lined the thoroughfares all the way from the town to the cemetery. The cemetery was reached soon after four o'clock.

The remains were reverently lowered into the grave by the deacons of Trinity Church, Swansea, after which the Rev. W. John, of Bridgend, engaged in a fervent prayer. An impressive, address, was delivered by the Rev. Griffith Ellis, M.A., of Bootle, and the solemn proceedings were brought, to a close by the singing of the resurrection hymn.

"O Bydd myrdd o rhyfeddodau
Ar doriad boreu wawr."

"O There will be a myriad of wonders.
At the break of dawn."

The refrain of which was sung over and over again by the vast throng that surrounded the vault. In the evening the Rev. Principal T. C. Edwards, M.A., D.D., Bala College, preached to a large congregation at Bethania Chapel; while a service was also held at Calfaria Chapel, where the pulpit was occupied by the Rev. R. Thomas (C.), Landore.