

Jessie Penn-Lewis – Author and Speaker

Excerpts taken from *Jessie Penn-Lewis: A Memoir*, by Mary N. Garrard.

Jessie Penn-Lewis (1861-1927) was a Welsh evangelical speaker and author of a number of Christian evangelical works. She was born in Victoria Terrace, Neath, South Wales in 1861. Her father was a mining engineer and Methodist minister. Jessie was nurtured in the "lap of Calvinistic Methodism," as she put it. Surrounded by love and a large library, she ventured into a life of learning and activity which always seemed far beyond the capability of her persistently frail body. Strong-willed and independent, she walked at the age of nine months, and by the age of four could read the Bible freely, without having been taught to read.

At the age of eighteen, Jessie married William Penn-Lewis. She was converted to Christ eighteen months later, and set about to learn to follow God. She wrote: "After I had been married some eighteen months, I began to feel very ill at ease about the Lord's return. I knew I was not prepared to meet Him..." Thus, she began to seek Him. And as the Lord is ever true to His word, not long after... she "found the peace that every restless soul needs, in the Savior." At the age of thirty-one, she was baptized with the Spirit, and her simple motto became, "Keep free to follow the will of God." God gave her remarkable insight into the Scriptures, and it became obvious that He had fashioned her to be a teacher.

When she was nineteen, she was frail and learned she had tuberculosis. Though initially, the medical opinion gave her "six months" to live, she later said that God had other plans. But she was miraculously healed. So it was, as a frail servant of Jehovah Ropheka that she was enabled to endure and accomplish labors beyond all-natural power and resources. Indeed! Numerous were the times throughout her life when the fulfillment of the calling upon her defied the physical condition of her body. So vivid was this reality, that later in life, on one occasion, when in a terribly weakened state, her physician responded to the questions and concerns of those near in this way. I cannot say how it will go, as Mrs. Penn-Lewis was "a law unto herself."

Jessie was involved in the 1904-1905 Welsh Revival, one of the largest Christian revivals ever to break out, although the revival was abruptly shortened with the mental and physical collapse of one of the leaders, Ewel Roberts. Her ministry took her to Sweden, Russia, Finland, India, Canada, and the United States. Her life became linked to the spiritual giants of her generation: F. B. Meyer, Andrew Murray, D. L. Moody.

Jessie developed a lasting fellowship with F. B. Meyer. Referring to him as her "old friend," he was chosen to preside over the service when her husband was called home on March 24th, 1925. A letter to her from Oswald Chambers (Nov. 2, 1903) states, "Your 'Cross of Calvary' is pre-eminently of God. The splendid treasure of pain, your pain, has merged into the greatness of God's power. Your book teaches clearly and grandly what the Spirit witnesses to in the Bible and in our hearts, viz: that 'the way of God' flatly contradicts common sense, and by utmost despair the Holy Ghost leads to resurrection triumph. The breakdown of the natural virtues seems to be the point wherein most regenerated lives are cast into despair. Your book will help these to

understand that this despair must end in death to the natural goodness and self, and be raised by the power of God into inconceivably glorious power and peace and liberty of life..."

Jessie founded *The Overcomer*, a serious journal on the pursuit of the deeper Christian life. She was a weekly contributor to *The Life of Faith*, for three years (Nov. 1904 to the end of 1908), and to *The Christian*, for two years during that same time. She collaborated with Evan Roberts on what has become the premier and classic work on spiritual warfare, *War on the Saints*, which describes the work of demons on Christians. Jessie was close to Evan Roberts and there is some controversy associated with her influence over him. After his mental breakdown cut the revival short, he stayed with Jessie and her husband in their home for a couple of years, but he never fully recovered. Ultimately, Jessie declared some of phenomena of the Welsh Revival to be the work of Satan.

While touring to the United States, Jessie was privileged to speak at the Moody Bible Institute Workers Conference (Sept. 1900). Reserved, as she was, there was no question of her being embarrassed when the President, R.A. Torrey introduced her as "one of the most gifted speakers the world has ever known." On that same tour, she visited and spoke at the Gospel Tabernacle, sharing tea with Mr. and Mrs. Simpson. This was followed by addresses in the church of D. M. Stearns, Germantown Philadelphia. Concerning the booklet on the "Message of the Cross" that was circulated in the millions in India, D. M. Stearns remarked, "It is God's telegraphic dispatch to a dying world."

Three times during the years 1926-27, Jessie was brought near to the gates of death. And three times, owing to the prayers of others and her own indomitable faith and courage "for the work's sake" she was brought back as a miracle. The attacks left her weak in body, though buoyant in spirit. Those present for her last moments shed no tears as she entered into glory, and remarked, the Presence of the Lord in the room was something beyond the realm of "faith," - it was almost "sight" in its reality.

For many years Jessie addressed great audiences at vast conventions of Christians. Finally, after one such series of talks she arrived home obviously ill. Her strength waned rapidly and she slipped into the presence of Christ in 1927 at the age of sixty-six.

Few women in modern times have left so profound an impression on their generation, and few have so boldly and biblically stated the value of their gender. Jessie Penn-Lewis was the embodiment of Women's Liberation in its best and noblest sense.

As her earthly tent was laid to rest, around the open grave they sang the song *There is a fountain filled with blood*, adding to the chorus some of the last words spoken by Mrs. Penn-Lewis:

I do believe I now receive the life He offers me,
and standing on Christ's finished work,
I claim the victory.

A Spiritual Autobiography

by Jessie Penn-Lewis: The beginning of "Leading of the Lord"

Written for The Christian in 1903

I was brought up in the very heart of the religious life of Wales, for my grandfather was a Welsh divine, well known throughout the Principality in his day; and my father's house was a rendezvous for the ministers as they passed hither and thither on their Master's work. My childhood's memories gather round their visits and the great meetings of the Sunday-schools, when often I sat as a tiny child in the midst of the grave elders in the "big pew," listening with intense interest to the "howl" of the minister.

"The mercy of the Lord is...unto children's children; but as it is often with children brought up in the midst of religious surroundings, the true inward change of heart did not come until I had married and moved away to England. Then it occurred without the aid of any human instrument, but the day-New Year's Day-and hour are imprinted on my mind.

Only a deep, inward desire to know that I was a child of God; a taking down of my (too little read) Bible from the shelf; a turning over the leaves, and the eye falling on the words, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6); again, a casual tum of the sacred pages, and the words, "He that believeth hath eternal life" (John 6:47).

A quick facing out whether I did believe that God had laid my sins upon the Lamb of God on the Cross; a pause of wonderment that it really said that I had eternal life if I simply believed God's Word; a quick cry of "Lord, I do believe" - and one more soul had passed from death to life (John 5:24), a trophy of the grace of God, and the love of Him Who died. The Spirit of God instantly bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God (Romans 8:16), and deep peace filled my soul.

The new life bore fruit in that I sought to conquer my besetting sins, whereas hitherto I had found myself at their mercy, as I feebly attempted to restrain them. But my attempts still ended in abject failure, and the succeeding few months were a record of bitter repentance, and many tears over sins I could not conquer. At this point, we removed to Richmond, Surrey, and found our way to Holy Trinity Church. The first sermon I heard from Rev. Evan H. Hopkins was an opening of Heaven to my soul. I learned the secret of victory, and it was not long before I proved the power of God to deliver from the bondage of sin through the precious blood of Christ.

Under the Spirit-lit teaching of Mr. Hopkins, and the earnest, loving help of his noble wife, I learned the joy of full surrender and the possibilities of a Spirit-filled life (Ephesians 5:18). But active service for Christ seemed far away from me, for from childhood my health had been frail, and now winter after winter was spent in increasing suffering from bronchial and lung attacks. It seemed as if my life was slowly ebbing away. Nevertheless, in 1890, with apparently only a brief span of life before me, I ventured to take the hon. secretaryship of the Richmond Y.W.C.A. Institute-"If only for six months," I said, for my whole heart was drawn out in service for the King.

Gradually, I learned to draw upon the Lord for strength for His work, so that in spite of continued ill-health and suffering, I worked, and organized, and labored incessantly. But after a time, I became conscious that the spiritual results were not equivalent to the labor of the work. I began to question whether I knew the fullness of the Spirit. Without doubt I had received Him, and had "entered into rest" as concerned my own life and fellowship with God (Hebrews 4:10); but when I compared the small results of my service with the fruit given to the apostles at Pentecost, I could not but own that I did not know the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His power.

"My life is not my own. I can do nothing else but be obedient to the heavenly vision since God has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise. Here am I, raised from the grave to be His instrument! Here am I to be spent, every breath, for the God who gives me breath. Our home is not our own, it is God's. We have nothing, we glory in being slaves of Jesus Christ, my dear one and I."