

Luther Munday *A Chronicle of Friendships* (F.A. Stokes, New York, 1907), chapter 1

Deeply impressed in my memory is another friend, the Rev. A. B. Evans. He lived in the upper floor of a slum off the Strand. Originally a Welsh dissenting minister, he came into the English Church and became Rector of St Mary-le-Strand. Subsequently, through the Bishop of London, he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He was four feet eight inches high, and carried his tongue outside his mouth without seeming ludicrous. His stooping posture gave him the impression of being a little hump-backed. His wonderful sermons were preached to empty pews. I remember a congregation of five, one of whom was Mr Gladstone, another Lord Salisbury. It impressed me strangely to see a man, so little known and so frail in body, capable of drawing together and attracting these giant minds of the Victorian era, whose many differences in thought were as one under the spell of my little friend's personality. Gladstone and Salisbury were often there. They always bowed to each other, quite ceremoniously, but I never remember seeing them walk away together.

Dr Evans became my intimate friend, and when, one night after our simple meal, I found he had never entered a theatre in his life, I told him that as theatres paid Church tithes, he had better try one. He accepted my invitation, and we went to the Adelphi. Will Terriss and Jessie Milward were then at their height in the old Adelphi days. Tears ran down the little man's cheeks. His simple nature seemed jealous of this power and influence on the stage. He never made comment nor wished me good night, simply saying when we parted, "I have wasted sixty-five years." Here is a poem by an unknown author. He read it from the pulpit in fine voice and with such old-world dignity. I can see now this little Welsh dissenter who had lived off the Strand, but was never of the world; see Gladstone also, with his eagle eye and his hand to his ear, his lips silently moving, as he followed the reading of these words :—

*I sat alone with my conscience,
In a place where time had ceased,
And we talked of a former living
In the land where the land increased.
And I felt I should have to answer
The question if put to me,
And to face the answer and question
Throughout an eternity.*

*The ghosts of forgotten actions
Came floating before my sight.
And things that I thought were dead things
Were alive with a terrible might.
And the vision of all my past life
Was an awful thing to face.
Alone with my conscience sitting
In that solemnly silent place.*

*And I thought of a far-off warning
Of a sorrow that was to be mine,
In a land that then was the future,
But now is the present time.
And I thought of my former thinking
Of the Judgment Day to be.
But sitting alone with my conscience
Seemed judgment enough for me.*

*And I wondered if there was a future,
To this land beyond the grave;
But no one gave me an answer
And no one came to save.
Then I felt that the future was present.
And the present would never go by.
For it was but the thought of my past life
Gone into Eternity.*

*Then I woke from my timely warning,
And the vision passed away.
And I knew that the far-off warning
Was a warning of yesterday.
And I pray that I may not forget it,
In this land before the grave.
That I may not cry in the future,
And no one come to save.*

*And so I have learned my lesson,
Which I ought to have known before,
And which though I learnt it dreaming,
I hope to forget no more.
And I know of the future judgment,
How dreadful soever it be,
That to sit alone with my conscience,
Will be judgment enough for me.*

Dr Evans died in 1878. I was only twenty-one then, but I am glad that these memories vividly belong to me to-day. If you will go to St Mary-le-Strand, you can read this memorial on the South Wall:—

To the glory of God, and in memory of Alfred Bowen Evans, D.D., Priest, for seventeen years Rector of the Parish of St Mary-le-Strand, who, with quaint sallies of native genius, adorned the graver studies of the Divine, and the fervid eloquence of a thoughtful preacher. Having greatly beautified the House of the Lord, that he might the more hallow the Lord of the House, fell asleep in Christ Jesus, Whom he devotedly loved, followed, served, and preached, on the sixth of November, 1878.