

THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS
OF THE 18TH CENTURY

THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS
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J.C. RYLE

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THE
CHRISTIAN LEADERS
of
THE LAST CENTURY;
or
ENGLAND A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

In this new edition (2022) spelling and text have been slightly edited. Chapters 15 and 16 have been added.

John Charles Ryle (1816–1900) was the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool. He was a strong supporter of the evangelical school and a critic of Ritualism. He was a writer, pastor and an evangelical preacher.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.
— 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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PREFACE

The volume now in the reader's hands requires a few prefatory sentences of explanation. I should be sorry if there was any mistake as to its nature and intention.

It consists of a series of biographical papers, contributed to a well-known and most valuable monthly periodical during the years 1866 and 1867.¹ My object in drawing up these papers was to bring before the public in a comprehensive form the lives, characters and work of the leading ministers by whose agency God was pleased to revive Christianity in England a hundred years ago. I had long felt that these great men were not sufficiently known and their merit in consequence not sufficiently recognized. I thought that the Church and the world ought to know something more than they seem to know about such men as Whitefield, Wesley, Romaine, Rowlands, Grimshaw, Berridge, Venn, Toplady, Hervey, Walker and Fletcher. For twenty years I waited anxiously for some worthy account of these mighty spiritual heroes. At last I became weary of waiting and resolved to take the pen in my own hand and do what I could in the pages of a periodical. These papers, in compliance with the wishes of friends, are now brought together in a portable form.

How far my attempt has been successful, I must now leave the public to judge. To literary merits the volume can lay no claim. Its chapters were written from month to month in the midst of many ministerial engagements, under a pressure which none can understand but those who write for periodicals. To expect such a volume to be a model of finished composition would be absurd. I only lay claim to a tolerable degree of accuracy about historical facts. I have been careful to make no statement for which I could not find some authority.

The reader will soon discover that I am an enthusiastic admirer of the men whose pictures I have sketched in this volume. I confess it honestly. I am a thorough enthusiast about them. I believe firmly that, except Luther and his Continental contemporaries and our own martyred Reformers, the world has seen no such men since the days of the apostles. I believe there have been none who have preached so much clear scriptural truth, none who have lived such lives, none who have shown such courage in Christ's service, none who have suffered so much for the truth, none who have done so much good. If anyone can name better men, he knows more than I do.

¹ The Family Treasury.

I now send forth this volume with an earnest prayer that God may pardon all its defects, use it for his own glory and raise up in his Church men like those who are here described. Surely, when we look at the state of England, we may well say, "Where is the Lord God of Whitefield and of Rowlands, of Grimshaw and of Venn? O Lord, revive your work!"

J.C. Ryle.

Stradbroke Vicarage, August 10, 1868.

P.S. — I think it right to say that the chief substance of the biography of Whitefield in this volume was originally delivered as a lecture in London in 1852. It now appears remolded and enlarged. The other ten biographies were prepared expressly for the *Family Treasury*.

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1 ENGLAND A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONDITION OF ENGLAND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Importance of the history of the Eighteenth Century — Political and financial position of England — Low state of religion both in Churches and Chapels — Testimonies on the subject — Defects of bishops and clergy — Poverty of the printed theology — Wretched condition of the country as to education, morals and popular literature — The "Good Old Times" a mere myth.

The subject I propose to handle in this volume is partly historical and partly biographical. If any reader expects from the title a fictitious tale or something partly drawn from my imagination, I fear he will be disappointed. Such writing is not in my province and I have no leisure for it if it was. Facts, naked facts and the stern realities of life, absorb all the time that I can spare for the press.

I trust, however, that with most readers the subject I have chosen is one that needs no apology. The man who feels no interest in the history and biography of his own country is surely a poor patriot and a worse philosopher.

"Patriot" he cannot be called. True patriotism will make an Englishman care for everything that concerns England. A true patriot will like to know something about everyone who has left his mark on English character, from the Venerable Bede down to Hugh Stowell, from Alfred the Great down to Pounds, the originator of Ragged Schools.

"Philosopher" he certainly is not. What is philosophy but history teaching by examples? To know the steps by which England has reached her present position is essential to a right understanding both of our national privileges and our national dangers. To know the men whom God raised up to do his work in days gone by, will guide us in looking about for standard-bearers in our own days and days to come.

I venture to think that there is no period of English history which is so thoroughly instructive to a Christian as the middle of last century. It is the period of which we are feeling the influence at this very day. It is the period with which our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were immediately connected. It is a period, not least, from which we may draw most useful lessons for our own times.

Let me begin by trying to describe the actual condition of England a hundred years ago. A few simple facts will suffice to make this plain.

The reader will remember that I am not going to speak of our *political* condition. I might easily tell him that, in the days of Sir Robert Walpole, the Duke of Newcastle and the elder Pitt, the position of

England was very different from what it is now. Great statesmen and orators there were among us, no doubt. But our standing among the nations of the earth was comparatively poor, weak and low. Our voice among the nations of the earth carried far less weight than it has since obtained. The foundation of our Indian Empire had hardly been laid. Our Australian possessions were a part of the world only just discovered but not colonized. At home there was a strong party in the country which still longed for the restoration of the Stuarts. In 1745 the Pretender and a Highland army marched from Scotland to invade England and got as far as Derby. Corruption, jobbing and mismanagement in high places were the rule and purity the exception. Civil and religious disabilities still abounded. The Test and Corporation Acts were still unrepealed. To be a Dissenter was to be regarded as only one degree better than being seditious and a rebel. Rotten boroughs flourished. Bribery among all classes was open, unblushing and profuse. Such was England politically a hundred years ago.

The reader will remember, furthermore, that I am not going to speak of our condition in a *financial and economical* point of view. Our vast cotton, silk and linen manufactures had hardly begun to exist. Our enormous mineral treasures of coal and iron were scarcely touched. We had no steam-boats, no locomotive engines, no railways, no gas, no electric telegraph, no penny post, no scientific farming, no macadamized roads, no free-trade, no sanitary arrangements and no police deserving the name. Let any Englishman imagine, if he can, his country without any of the things that I have just mentioned, and he will have some faint idea of the economic and financial condition of England a hundred years ago.

But I leave these things to the political economists and historians of this world. Interesting as they are, no doubt, they form no part of the subject that I want to dwell upon. I wish to treat that subject as a minister of Christ's gospel. It is the *religious and moral* condition of England a hundred years ago to which I shall confine my attention. Here is the point to which I wish to direct the reader's eye.

The state of this country in a religious and moral point of view in the middle of last century was so painfully unsatisfactory that it is difficult to convey any adequate idea of it. English people of the present day, who have never been led to inquire into the subject, can have no conception of the darkness that prevailed. From the year 1700 till about the era of the French Revolution, England seemed barren of all that is really good. How such a state of things can have arisen in a land of free Bibles and professing Protestantism is almost past comprehension. Christianity seemed to lie as one dead, insomuch

that you might have said "she is dead." Morality, however much exalted in pulpits, was thoroughly trampled underfoot in the streets. There was darkness in high places and darkness in low places — darkness in the court, the camp, the Parliament and the bar — darkness in country and darkness in town — darkness among rich and darkness among poor — a gross, thick, religious and moral darkness — a darkness that might be felt.

Does anyone ask what the churches were doing a hundred years ago? The answer is soon given. The Church of England existed in those days, with her admirable articles, her time-honored liturgy, her parochial system, her Sunday services and her ten thousand clergy. The Nonconformist body existed, with its hardly won liberty and its free pulpit. But one account unhappily may be given of both parties. They existed but they could hardly be said to have lived. They did nothing; they were sound asleep. The curse of the Uniformity Act seemed to rest on the Church of England. The blight of ease and freedom from persecution seemed to rest upon the Dissenters. Natural theology, without a single distinctive doctrine of Christianity, cold morality or barren orthodoxy, formed the staple teaching both in church and chapel. Sermons everywhere were little better than miserable moral essays, utterly devoid of anything likely to awaken, convert or save souls. Both parties seemed at last agreed on one point and that was to let the devil alone and to do nothing for hearts and souls. And as for the weighty truths for which Hooper and Latimer had gone to the stake and Baxter and scores of Puritans had gone to jail, they seemed clean forgotten and laid on the shelf.

When such was the state of things in churches and chapels, it can surprise no one to learn that the land was deluged with infidelity and skepticism. The prince of this world made good use of his opportunity. His agents were active and zealous in promulgating every kind of strange and blasphemous opinion. Collins and Tindal denounced Christianity as priestcraft. Whiston pronounced the miracles of the Bible to be grand impositions. Woolston declared them to be allegories. Arianism and Socinianism were openly taught by Clark and Priestly, and became fashionable among the intellectual part of the community. Of the utter incapacity of the pulpit to stem the progress of all this flood of evil, one single fact will give us some idea. The celebrated lawyer, Blackstone, had the curiosity, early in the reign of George III, to go from church to church and hear every clergyman of note in London. He says that he did not hear a single discourse which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero and that it would have been impossible for him to discover, from what he heard,

whether the preacher were a follower of Confucius, of Mohammed or of Christ!

Evidence about this painful subject is, unhappily, only too abundant. My difficulty is not so much to discover witnesses, as to select them. This was the period at which Archbishop Seeker said, in one of his charges, "In this we cannot be mistaken, that an open and professed disregard of religion is become, through a variety of unhappy causes, the distinguishing character of the age. Such are the dissoluteness and contempt of principle in the higher part of the world and the profligacy, intemperance and fearlessness of committing crimes in the lower part, as must, if the torrent of impiety stop not, become absolutely fatal. Christianity is ridiculed and railed at with very little reserve; and the teachers of it without any at all." This was the period when Bishop Butler, in his preface to the *Analogy*, used the following remarkable words: "It has come to be taken for granted that Christianity is no longer a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly it is treated as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all persons of discernment and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject for mirth and ridicule." Nor were such complaints as these confined to Churchmen. Dr. Watts declares that in his day "there was a general decay of vital religion in the hearts and lives of men and that it was a general matter of mournful observation among all who lay the cause of God to heart." Dr. Guyse, another most respectable Non-conformist, says, "The religion of nature makes up the darling topic of our age; and the religion of Jesus is valued only for the sake of that and only so far as it carries on the light of nature and is a bare improvement of that kind of light. All that is distinctively Christian, or that is peculiar to Christ, everything concerning him that has not its apparent foundation in natural light, or that goes beyond its principles, is waived and banished and despised." Testimony like this might easily be multiplied tenfold. But I spare the reader. Enough probably has been adduced to prove that when I speak of the moral and religious condition of England at the beginning of the eighteenth century as painfully unsatisfactory, I do not use the language of exaggeration.

What were the *bishops* of those days? Some of them were undoubtedly men of powerful intellect and learning and of unblamable lives. But the best of them, like Seeker and Butler and Gibson and Lowth and Horn, seemed unable to do more than deplore the existence of evils which they saw but knew not how to remedy. Others, like Lavington and Warburton, fulminated fierce charges against enthusiasm and fanaticism and appeared afraid of England becoming too religious!

The majority of the bishops, to say the truth, were mere *men of the world*. They were *unfit* for their position. The prevailing tone of the Episcopal body may be estimated by the fact, that Archbishop Cornwallis gave balls and routs at Lambeth Palace until the king himself interfered by letter and requested him to desist.¹ Let me also add, that when the occupants of the Episcopal bench were troubled by the rapid spread of Whitefield's influence, it was gravely suggested in high quarters that the best way to stop his influence was to make him a bishop.

What were the *parochial clergy* of those days? The vast majority of them were sunk in worldliness and neither knew nor cared anything about their profession. They neither did good themselves, nor liked anyone else to do it for them. They hunted, they shot, they farmed, they swore, they drank, they gambled. They seemed determined to know everything except Jesus Christ and him crucified. When they assembled it was generally to toast "Church and King," and to build one another up in earthly-mindedness, prejudice, ignorance and formality. When they retired to their own homes, it was to do as little and preach as seldom as possible. And when they did preach, their sermons were so unspeakably and indescribably bad, that it is comforting to reflect they were generally preached to empty benches.

What sort of *theological literature* was a hundred years ago

¹ The king's letter on this occasion is so curious, that I give it in its entirety, as I find it in that interesting though ill-arranged book, "*The Life and Times of Lady Huntingdon*." The letter was evidently written in consequence of an interview which Lady Huntingdon had with the king. A critical reader will remember that the king was probably more familiar with the German than the English language.

"My good Lord Prelate, — I could not delay giving you the notification of the grief and concern with which my breast was affected at receiving authentic information that routs have made their way into your palace. At the same time, I must signify to you my sentiments on this subject, which hold these levities and vain dissipations as utterly inexpedient, if not unlawful, to pass in a residence for many centuries devoted to divine studies, religious retirement, and the extensive exercise of charity and benevolence; I add, in a place where so many of your predecessors have led their lives in such sanctity as has thrown luster on the pure religion they professed and adorned. From the dissatisfaction with which you must perceive I behold these improprieties, not to speak in harsher terms, and on still more pious principles, I trust you will suppress them immediately; so that I may not have occasion to show any further marks of my displeasure, or to interpose in a different manner. May God take your grace into his almighty protection! — I remain, my Lord Primate, your gracious friend, G.R."

bequeathed to us? The poorest and weakest in the English language. This is the age to which we owe such divinity as that of the *Whole Duty of Man* and the sermons of Tillotson and Blair. Inquire at any old bookseller's shop and you will find there is no theology so unsaleable as the sermons published about the middle and latter part of last century.

What sort of *education* had the lower orders a hundred years ago? In the greater part of parishes and especially in rural districts, they had no education at all. Nearly all our rural schools have been built since 1800. So extreme was the ignorance that a Methodist preacher in Somersetshire was charged before the magistrates with swearing, because in preaching he quoted the text, "He that believes not shall be damned!" While, not to be behind Somersetshire, Yorkshire furnished a constable who brought Charles Wesley before the magistrates as a favorer of the Pretender, because in public prayer he asked the Lord to "bring back his banished ones!" To cap all, the vice-chancellor of Oxford actually expelled six students from the University because "they held Methodist tenets and took on them to pray, read and expound Scripture in private houses." To swear extempore, it was remarked by some, brought an Oxford student into no trouble; but to pray extempore was an offence not to be borne!

What were the *morals* of a hundred years ago? It may suffice to say that dueling, adultery, fornication, gambling, swearing, Sabbath-breaking and drunkenness were hardly regarded as vices at all. They were the fashionable practices of people in the highest ranks of society and no one was thought the worse of for indulging in them. The best evidence of this point is to be found in Hogarth's pictures.

What was the *popular literature* of a hundred years ago? I pass over the fact that Bolingbroke and Gibbon and Hume, the historian, were all deeply dyed with skepticism. I speak of the light reading which was most in vogue. Turn to the pages of Fielding, Smollett, Swift and Sterne and you have the answer. The cleverness of these writers is undeniable; but the indecency of many of their writings is so glaring and gross, that few people now-a-days would like to allow their works to be seen on their drawing-room table.

My picture, I fear, is a very dark and gloomy one. I wish it were in my power to throw a little more light into it. But facts are stubborn things and especially facts about *literature*. The best literature of a hundred years ago is to be found in the moral writings of Addison, Johnson and Steele. But the effects of such literature on the general public, it may be feared, was infinitesimally small. In fact, I believe that Johnson and the essayists had no more influence on the religion and

morality of the masses than the broom of the renowned Mrs. Partington had on the waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

To sum up all and bring this part of my subject to a conclusion, I ask my readers to remember that the good works with which everyone is now familiar did not exist a hundred years ago. Wilberforce had not yet attacked the slave trade. Howard had not yet reformed prisons. Raikes had not established Sunday schools. We had no Bible Societies, no ragged schools, no city missions, no pastoral aid societies, no missions to the heathen. The spirit of slumber was over the land. In a religious and moral point of view, England was sound asleep.

I cannot help remarking, as I draw this chapter to a conclusion, that we ought to be more thankful for the times in which we live. I fear we are far too apt to look at the evils we see around us and to forget how much worse things were a hundred years ago. I have no faith, for my part and I boldly avow it, in those "good old times" of which some delight to speak. I regard them as a mere fable and a myth. I believe that our own times are the best times that England has ever seen. I do not say this boastfully. I know we have many things to deplore; but I do say that we might be worse. I do say that we were much worse a hundred years ago. The general standard of religion and morality is undoubtedly far higher. At all events, in 1868, we are awake. We see and feel evils to which, a hundred years ago, men were insensible. We struggle to be free from these evils; we desire to amend. This is a vast improvement. With all our many faults we are not sound asleep. On every side there is stir, activity, movement, progress and not stagnation. Bad as we are, we confess our badness; weak as we are, we acknowledge our failings; feeble as our efforts are, we strive to amend; little as we do for Christ, we do try to do something. Let us thank God for this! Things might be worse. Comparing our own days with the middle of last century, we have reason to thank God and take courage. England is in a better state than it was a hundred years ago.

2 RIVIVAL IN ENGLAND IN THE 18TH CENTUARY

The agency by which Christianity was revived in England in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Improvement of England since middle of Eighteenth Century an undeniable fact — Agents in effecting the change a few isolated and humble clergymen — Preaching the chief instrument they employed — The manner of their preaching — The substance of their preaching.

That a great change for the better has come over England in the last hundred years is a fact which I suppose no well-informed person would ever attempt to deny. You might as well attempt to deny that there was a Protestant Reformation in the days of Luther, a Long Parliament in the time of Cromwell or a French republic at the end of the last century. There has been a vast change for the better. Both in religion and morality the country has gone through a complete revolution. People neither think nor talk nor act as they did in 1750. It is a great fact, which the children of this world cannot deny, however they may attempt to explain it. They might as well try to persuade us that high-water and low-water at London Bridge are one and the same thing.

But by what agency was this great change effected? To whom are we indebted for the immense improvement in religion and morality which undoubtedly has come over the land? Who, in a word, were the instruments that God employed in bringing about the great English Reformation of the eighteenth century?

This is the one point that I wish to examine generally in the present chapter. The names and biographies of the principal agents I shall reserve for future chapters.

The government of the country can lay no claim to the credit of the change. Morality cannot be called into being by penal enactments and statutes. People were never yet made religious by Acts of Parliament. At any rate, the Parliaments and administrations of last century did as little for religion and morality as any that ever existed in England.

Nor yet did the change come from the Church of England, as a body. The leaders of that venerable communion were *utterly unequal* to the times. Left to herself, the Church of England would probably have died of dignity and sunk at her anchors.

Nor yet did the change come from the Dissenters. Content with their hardly-won triumphs, that worthy body of men seemed to *rest* upon their oars. In the plenary enjoyment of their rights of conscience, they forgot the great vital principles of their forefathers and their own

duties and responsibilities.

Who, then, were the reformers of the last century? To whom are we indebted, under God, for the change which took place?

The men who wrought deliverance for us, a hundred years ago, were *a few individuals*, most of them clergymen of the Established Church, whose hearts God touched about the same time in various parts of the country. They were not wealthy or highly connected. They had neither money to buy adherents, nor family influence to command attention and respect. They were not put forward by any Church, party, society or institution. They were simply men whom God stirred up and brought out to do his work, without previous concert, scheme or plan. They did his work in the old apostolic way by becoming the evangelists of their day. They taught one set of truths. They taught them in the same way, with fire, reality, earnestness, as men fully convinced of what they taught. They taught them in the same spirit, always loving, compassionate and, like Paul, even weeping, but always bold, unflinching and not fearing the face of man. And they taught them on the same plan, always acting on the aggressive; not waiting for sinners to come to them, but going after and seeking sinners; not sitting idle till sinners offered to repent, but assaulting the high places of ungodliness like men storming a breach and giving sinners no rest so long as they stuck to their sins.

The movement of these gallant evangelists shook England from one end to another. At first people in high places affected to despise them. The men of letters sneered at them as fanatics; the wits cut jokes and invented smart names for them; the Church shut her doors on them; the Dissenters turned the cold shoulder on them; the ignorant mob persecuted them. But the movement of these few evangelists went on and made itself felt in every part of the land. Many were aroused and awakened to think about religion; many were shamed out of their sins; many were restrained and frightened at their own ungodliness; many were gathered together and induced to profess a decided hearty religion; many were converted; many who affected to dislike the movement were secretly provoked to emulation. The little sapling became a strong tree; the little rill became a deep, broad stream; the little spark became a steady burning flame. A candle was lighted, of which we are now enjoying the benefit. The feeling of all classes in the land about religion and morality gradually assumed a totally different complexion. And all this, under God, was effected by a few unpatronized, unpaid adventurers! When God takes a work in hand, nothing can stop it. When God is for us, none can be against us.

The *instrumentality* by which the spiritual reformers of the last century carried on their operations was of the simplest description. It was neither more nor less than the old apostolic weapon of *preaching*. The sword which St. Paul wielded with such mighty effect, when he assaulted the strongholds of heathenism eighteen hundred years ago, was the same sword by which they won their victories. To say, as some have done, that they neglected education and schools, is totally incorrect. Wherever they gathered congregations, they cared for the children. To say, as others have done, that they neglected the sacraments, is simply false. Those who make that assertion only expose their entire ignorance of the religious history of England a hundred years ago. It would be easy to name men among the leading reformers of the last century whose communicants might be reckoned by hundreds and who honored the Lord's Supper more than forty-nine out of fifty clergymen in their day. But beyond doubt preaching was their favorite weapon. They wisely went back to first principles and took up apostolic plans. They held, with St. Paul, that a minister's first work is "to preach the gospel."

They preached *everywhere*. If the pulpit of a parish church was open to them, they gladly availed themselves of it. If it could not be obtained, they were equally ready to preach in a barn. No place came amiss to them. In the field or by the road-side, on the village-green or in a market-place, in lanes or in alleys, in cellars or in garrets, on a tub or on a table, on a bench or on a horse-block, wherever hearers could be gathered, the spiritual reformers of the last century were ready to speak to them about their souls. They were instant in season and out of season in doing the fisherman's work and compassed sea and land in carrying forward their Father's business. Now, all this was a new thing. Can we wonder that it produced a great effect?

They preached *simply*. They rightly concluded that the very first qualification to be aimed at in a sermon is to be understood. They saw clearly that thousands of able and well-composed sermons are utterly useless, because they are above the heads of the hearers. They strove to come down to the level of the people and to speak what the poor could understand. To attain this they were not ashamed to crucify their style and to sacrifice their reputation for learning. To attain this they used illustrations and anecdotes in abundance and, like their divine Master, borrowed lessons from every object in nature. They carried out the maxim of Augustine, — "A wooden key is not so beautiful as a golden one, but if it can open the door when the golden one cannot, it is far more useful." They revived the style of sermons in which Luther and Latimer used to be so eminently successful. In short,

they saw the truth of what the great German reformer meant when he said, "No one can be a good preacher to the people who is not willing to preach in a manner that seems childish and vulgar to some." Now, all this again was quite new a hundred years ago.

They preached *fervently and directly*. They cast aside that dull, cold, heavy, lifeless mode of delivery, which had long made sermons a very proverb for dullness. They proclaimed the words of faith with faith and the story of life with life. They spoke with fiery zeal, like men who were thoroughly persuaded that what they said was true and that it was of the utmost importance to your eternal interest to hear it. They spoke like men who had got a message from God to you and must deliver it, and must have your attention while they delivered it. They threw heart and soul and feeling into their sermons and sent their hearers home convinced, at any rate, that the preacher was sincere and wished them well. They believed that you must *speak from the heart* if you wish to speak *to the heart* and that there must be unmistakable faith and conviction within the pulpit if there is to be faith and conviction among the pews. All this, I repeat, was a thing that had become almost obsolete a hundred years ago. Can we wonder that it took people by storm and produced an immense effect?

But what was the *substance and subject-matter* of the preaching which produced such wonderful effect a hundred years ago?

I will not insult my readers' common sense by only saying that it was "simple, earnest, fervent, real, genial, brave, life-like," and so forth; I would have it understood that *it was eminently doctrinal, positive, dogmatical and distinct*. The strongholds of the last century's sins would never have been cast down by mere earnestness and negative teaching. The trumpets which blew down the walls of Jericho were trumpets which gave no uncertain sound. The English evangelists of last century were not men of an uncertain creed. But what was it that they proclaimed? A little information on this point may not be without use.

For one thing, then, the spiritual reformers of the last century taught constantly *the sufficiency and supremacy of Holy Scripture*. The Bible, whole and un mutilated, was their sole rule of faith and practice. They accepted all its statements without question or dispute. They knew nothing of any part of Scripture being uninspired. They never allowed that man has any "verifying faculty" within him, by which Scripture statements may be weighed, rejected or received. They never flinched from asserting that there can be no error in the Word of God; and that when we cannot understand or reconcile some part of its contents, the fault is in the interpreter and not in the text. In all

their preaching they were eminently men of one book. To that book they were content to pin their faith and by it to stand or fall. This was one grand characteristic of their preaching. They honored, they loved, they revered the Bible.

Furthermore, the reformers of the last century *taught constantly the total corruption of human nature*. They knew nothing of the modern notion that Christ is in every man and that all possess something good within, which they have only to stir up and use in order to be saved. They never flattered men and women in this fashion. They told them plainly that they were dead and must be made alive again; that they were guilty, lost, helpless and hopeless, and in imminent danger of eternal ruin. Strange and paradoxical as it may seem to some, their first step towards making men good was to show them that they were utterly bad; and their primary argument in persuading men to do something for their souls was to convince them that they could do nothing at all.

Furthermore, the reformers of the last century taught constantly that *Christ's death upon the cross was the only satisfaction for man's sin*; and that, when Christ died, he died as our substitute — "the just for the unjust." This, in fact, was the cardinal point in almost all their sermons. They never taught the modern doctrine that Christ's death was only a great example of self-sacrifice. They saw in it something far higher, greater, deeper than this. They saw in it the payment of man's mighty debt to God. They loved Christ's person; they rejoiced in Christ's promises; they urged men to walk after Christ's example. But the one subject, above all others, concerning Christ, which they delighted to dwell on, was the atoning blood which Christ shed for us on the cross.

Furthermore, the reformers of the last century *taught constantly the great doctrine of justification by faith*. They told men that faith was the one thing needful in order to obtain an interest in Christ's work for their souls; that before we believe, we are dead and have no interest in Christ; and that the moment we do believe, we live and have a plenary title to all Christ's benefits. Justification by virtue of church membership — justification without believing or trusting — were notions to which they gave no countenance. Everything, if you will believe and the moment you believe; nothing, if you do not believe, — was the very marrow of their preaching.

Furthermore, the reformers of the last century *taught constantly the universal necessity of heart conversion and a new creation by the Holy Spirit*. They proclaimed everywhere to the crowds whom they addressed, "Ye must be born again." Sonship to God by baptism — son-

ship to God while we do the will of the devil — such sonship they never admitted. The regeneration which they preached was no dormant, torpid, motionless thing. It was something that could be seen, discerned and known by its effects.

Furthermore, the reformers of the last century taught constantly *the inseparable connection between true faith and personal holiness*. They never allowed for a moment that any church membership or religious profession was the least proof of a man being a true Christian if he lived an ungodly life. A true Christian, they maintained, must always be known by his fruits; and these fruits must be plainly manifest and unmistakable in all the relations of life. “No fruits, no grace,” was the unvarying tenor of their preaching.

Finally, the reformers of the last century taught constantly, as doctrines both equally true, *God's eternal hatred against sin and God's love towards sinners*. They knew nothing of a “love lower than hell,” and a heaven where holy and unholy are all at length to find admission. Both about heaven and hell they used the utmost plainness of speech. They never shrunk from declaring, in plainest terms, the certainty of God's judgment and of wrath to come, if men persisted in impenitence and unbelief; and yet they never ceased to magnify the riches of God's kindness and compassion and to entreat all sinners to repent and turn to God before it was too late.

Such were the main truths which the English evangelists of last century were constantly preaching. These were the principal doctrines which they were always proclaiming, whether in town or in country, whether in church or in the open air, whether among rich or among poor. These were the doctrines by which they turned England upside down, made ploughmen and colliers weep till their dirty faces were seamed with tears, arrested the attention of peers and philosophers, stormed the strongholds of Satan, plucked thousands like brands from the burning and altered the character of the age. Call them simple and elementary doctrines if you will. Say, if you please, that you see nothing grand, striking, new, peculiar about this list of truths. But the fact is undeniable that God blessed these truths to the reformation of England a hundred years ago. What God has blessed it ill becomes man to despise.

3 GEORGE WHITEFIELD AND HIS MINISTRY

CHAPTER 1

Whitefield's birth-place and parentage — Educated at Gloucester Grammar School — Enters Pembroke College, Oxford — Season of spiritual conflict — Books which were made useful to him — Ordained by Bishop Benson — First sermon — Preaches in London — Curate of Dummer, Hants — Goes to America — Returns in a year — Preaches in the open air — Is excluded from most London pulpits — Extent of his labors for thirty-one years — Dies at Newbury Port, America, in 1770 — Interesting circumstances of his death.

Who were the men that revived religion in England a hundred years ago? What were their names, that we may do them honor? Where were they born? How were they educated? What are the leading facts in their lives? What was their special department of labor? To these questions I wish to supply some answers in the present and future chapters.

I pity the man who takes no interest in such inquiries. The instruments that God employs to do his work in the world deserve a close inspection. The man who did not care to look at the rams' horns that blew down Jericho, the hammer and nail that slew Sisera, the lamps and trumpets of Gideon, the sling and stone of David, might fairly be set down as a cold and heartless person. I trust that all who read this volume will like to know something about the English evangelists of the eighteenth century.

The first and foremost whom I will name is the well-known George Whitefield. Though not the first in order, if we look at the date of his birth, I place him first in the order of merit, without any hesitation. Of all the spiritual heroes of a hundred years ago none saw so soon as Whitefield what the times demanded and none were so forward in the great work of spiritual aggression. I should think I committed an act of injustice if I placed any name before his.

Whitefield was born at Gloucester in the year 1714. That venerable county-town, which was his birth-place, is connected with more than one name which ought to be dear to every lover of Protestant truth. Tyndal, one of the first and ablest translators of the English Bible, was a Gloucestershire man. Hooper, one of the greatest and best of our English reformers, was Bishop of Gloucester and was burned at the stake for Christ's truth, within view of his own cathedral, in Queen Mary's reign. In the next century Miles Smith, Bishop of Gloucester, was one of the first to protest against the Romanizing proceedings of Laud, who was then Dean of Gloucester. In fact, he carried his Protestant feeling so far that, when Laud moved the communion-table in the

cathedral to the east end and placed it for the first time "altar-wise," in 1616, Bishop Smith was so much offended that he refused to enter the walls of the cathedral from that day till his death. Places like Gloucester, we need not doubt, have a rich entailed inheritance of many prayers. The city where Hooper preached and prayed and where the zealous Miles Smith protested, was the place where the greatest preacher of the gospel England has ever seen was born.

Like many other famous men, Whitefield was of humble origin and had no rich or noble connections to help him forward in the world. His mother kept the Bell Inn at Gloucester and appears not to have prospered in business; at any rate, she never seems to have been able to do anything for Whitefield's advancement in life. The inn itself is still standing and is reputed to be the birth-place, not only of our greatest English preacher, but also of a well-known English prelate — Henry Philpot, Bishop of Exeter.

Whitefield's early life, according to his own account, was anything but religious; though, like many boys, he had occasional prickings of conscience and spasmodic fits of devout feeling. But habits and general tastes are the only true test of young people's characters. He confesses that he was "addicted to lying, filthy talking and foolish jesting," and that he was a "Sabbath-breaker, a theatre-goer, a card-player and a romance-reader." All this, he says, went on till he was fifteen years old.

Poor as he was, his residence at Gloucester procured him the advantage of a good education at the Free Grammar School of that city. Here he was a day-scholar until he was fifteen. Nothing is known of his progress there. He can hardly, however, have been quite idle, or else he would not have been ready to enter an University afterwards at the age of eighteen. His letters, moreover, show an acquaintance with Latin, in the shape of frequent quotations, which is seldom acquired if not picked up at school. The only known fact about his schooldays is this curious one, that even then he was remarkable for his good elocution and memory, and was selected to recite speeches before the Corporation of Gloucester at their annual visitation of the Grammar School.

At the age of fifteen Whitefield appears to have left school and to have given up Latin and Greek for a season. In all probability, his mother's straitened circumstances made it absolutely necessary for him to do something to assist her in business and to get his own living. He began, therefore, to help her in the daily work of the Bell Inn. "At length," he says, "I put on my blue apron, washed cups, cleaned rooms and, in one word, became a professed common drawer for nigh a year and a half."

This state of things, however, did not last long. His mother's business at the Bell did not flourish and she finally retired from it altogether. An old school-fellow revived in his mind the idea of going to Oxford and he went back to the Grammar School and renewed his studies. Friends were raised up who made interest for him at Pembroke College, Oxford, where the Grammar School of Gloucester held two exhibitions. And at length, after several providential circumstances had smoothed the way, he entered Oxford as a servitor at Pembroke at the age of eighteen.¹

Whitefield's residence at Oxford was the great turning-point in his life. For two or three years before he went to the University his journal tells us that he had not been without religious convictions. But from the time of his entering Pembroke College these convictions fast ripened into decided Christianity. He diligently attended all means of grace within his reach. He spent his leisure time in visiting the city prison, reading to the prisoners and trying to do good. He became acquainted with the famous John Wesley and his brother Charles, and a little band of like-minded young men, including the well-known author of *Theron and Aspasio*, James Hervey. These were the devoted party to whom the name *Methodists* was first applied, on account of their strict *method of living*. At one time he seems to have greedily devoured such books as *Thomas à Kempis*, and *Castanuzza's Spiritual Combat*, and to have been in danger of becoming a semi-papist, an ascetic, or a mystic, and of placing the whole of religion in self-denial. He says in his Journal, "I always chose the worst sort of food. I fasted twice a week. My apparel was mean. I thought it unbecoming a penitent to have his hair powdered. I wore woollen gloves, a patched gown, and dirty shoes; and though I was convinced that the kingdom of God did not consist in food and drink, yet I resolutely persisted in these voluntary acts of self-denial, because I found in them great promotion of the spiritual life." Out of all this darkness he was gradually delivered, partly by the advice of one or two experienced Christians, and partly by reading such books as Scougal's *Life of God in the Heart of Man*, Law's *Serious Call*, Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, Alleine's *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners*, and Matthew Henry's *Commentary*.

"Above all," he says, "my mind being now more opened and enlarged, I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books and praying over, if possible, every line and

¹ Happening to be at Oxford in June 1865, I went to Pembroke College, and asked whether anyone knew the rooms which Whitefield occupied when he was at Oxford. The porter informed me that nothing whatever was known about them. The rooms which the famous Dr. Johnson occupied at Pembroke are still pointed out. Johnson left Oxford just before Whitefield went up.

word. This proved food indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light and power from above. I got more true knowledge from reading the book of God in one month than I could ever have acquired from all the writings of men." Once taught to understand the glorious liberty of Christ's gospel, Whitefield never turned again to asceticism, legalism, mysticism or strange views of Christian perfection. The experience received by bitter conflict was most valuable to him. The doctrines of free grace, once thoroughly grasped, took deep root in his heart and became, as it were, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Of all the little band of Oxford Methodists, none seem to have got hold so soon of clear views of Christ's gospel as he did and none kept it so unwaveringly to the end.

At the early age of twenty-two Whitefield was admitted to holy orders by Bishop Benson of Gloucester, on Trinity Sunday, 1736. His ordination was not of his own seeking. The bishop heard of his character from Lady Selwyn and others, sent for him, gave him five guineas to buy books and offered to ordain him, though only twenty-two years old, whenever he wished. This unexpected offer came to him when he was full of scruples about his own fitness for the ministry. It cut the knot and brought him to the point of decision. "I began to think," he says, "that if I held out longer I should fight against God."

Whitefield's first sermon was preached in the very town where he was born, at the church of St. Mary-le-Crypt, Gloucester. His own description of it is the best account that can be given:

"Last Sunday, in the afternoon, I preached my first sermon in the church of St. Mary-le-Crypt, where I was baptized and also first received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Curiosity, as you may easily guess, drew a large congregation together upon this occasion. The sight at first a little awed me. But I was comforted with a heartfelt sense of the divine presence and soon found the unspeakable advantage of having been accustomed to public speaking when a boy at school and of exhorting the prisoners and poor people at their private houses while at the university. By these means I was kept from being daunted overmuch. As I proceeded I perceived the fire kindled, till at last, though so young and amidst a crowd of those who knew me in my childish days, I trust I was enabled to speak with some degree of gospel authority. Some few mocked, but most seemed for the present struck; and I have since heard that a complaint was made to the bishop that I drove fifteen mad the first sermon! The worthy prelate wished that the madness might not be forgotten before next Sunday."

Almost immediately after his ordination, Whitefield went to Oxford and took his degree as Bachelor of Arts. He then commenced his regular ministerial life by undertaking temporary duty at the Tower

Chapel, London, for two months. While engaged there he preached continually in many London churches; and among others, in the parish churches of Islington, Bishopsgate, St. Dunstan's, St. Margaret's, Westminster and Bow, Cheapside. From the very first he obtained a degree of popularity such as no preacher, before or since, has probably ever reached. Whether on week-days or Sundays, wherever he preached, the churches were crowded and an immense sensation was produced. The plain truth is, that a really eloquent, extempore preacher, preaching the pure gospel with most uncommon gifts of voice and manner, was at that time an entire novelty in London. The congregations were taken by surprise and carried by storm.

From London he removed for two months to Dummer, a little rural parish in Hampshire, near Basingstoke. This was a totally new sphere of action and he seemed like a man buried alive among poor illiterate people. But he was soon reconciled to it and thought afterwards that he reaped much profit by conversing with the poor. From Dummer he accepted an invitation, which had been much pressed on him by the Wesleys, to visit the colony of Georgia in North America and assist in the care of an Orphan House which had been set up near Savannah for the children of colonists. After preaching for a few months in Gloucestershire, and especially at Bristol and Stonehouse, he sailed for America in the latter part of 1737, and continued there about a year. The affairs of this Orphan House, it may be remarked, occupied much of his attention from this period of his life till he died. Though well-meant, it seems to have been a design of very questionable wisdom, and certainly entailed on Whitefield a world of anxiety and responsibility to the end of his days.

Whitefield returned from Georgia at the latter part of the year 1738, partly to obtain priest's orders, which were conferred on him by his old friend Bishop Benson, and partly on business connected with the Orphan House. He soon, however, discovered that his position was no longer what it was before he sailed for Georgia. The bulk of the clergy were no longer favorable to him and regarded him with suspicion as an enthusiast and a fanatic. They were especially scandalized by his preaching the doctrine of regeneration or the new birth, as a thing which many baptized persons greatly needed! The number of pulpits to which he had access rapidly diminished.

Churchwardens, who had no eyes for drunkenness and impurity, were filled with intense indignation about what they called "breaches of order." Bishops who could tolerate Arianism, Socinianism and Deism, were filled with indignation at a man who declared fully the atonement of Christ and the work of the Holy Ghost, and began to denounce him openly. In short, from this period of his life, Whitefield's

field of usefulness within the Church of England narrowed rapidly on every side.

The step which at this juncture gave a turn to the whole current of Whitefield's ministry was his adoption of the system of open-air preaching. Seeing that thousands everywhere would attend no place of worship, spent their Sundays in idleness or sin and were not to be reached by sermons within walls, he resolved, in the spirit of holy aggression, to go out after them "into the highways and hedges," on his Master's principle and "compel them to come in." His first attempt to do this was among the colliers at Kingswood near Bristol, in February 1739. After much prayer he one day went to Hannam Mount and standing upon a hill began to preach to about a hundred colliers upon Matt. 5:1-3. The thing soon became known. The number of hearers rapidly increased, till the congregation amounted to many thousands. His own account of the behavior of these neglected colliers, who had never been in a church in their lives, is deeply affecting: — "Having," he writes to a friend, "no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend to publicans and came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected was the sight of the white gutters made by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks as they came out of their coal-pits. Hundreds of them were soon brought under deep conviction, which, as the event proved, happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion. The change was visible to all, though many chose to impute it to anything rather than the finger of God. As the scene was quite new, it often occasioned many inward conflicts. Sometimes, when twenty thousand people were before me, I had not in my own apprehension a word to say either to God or them. But I was never totally deserted and frequently (for to deny it would be lying against God) was so assisted that I knew by happy experience what our Lord meant by saying, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' The open firmament above me, the prospect of the adjacent fields, with the sight of thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback and some in the trees, and at times all affected and in tears, was almost too much for, and quite overcame me."

Two months after this Whitefield began the practice of open-air preaching in London, on April 27, 1739. The circumstances under which this happened were curious. He had gone to Islington to preach for the vicar, his friend Mr. Stonehouse. In the midst of the prayer the churchwardens came to him and demanded his license for preaching in the diocese of London. Whitefield, of course, had not got this license any more than any clergyman not regularly officiating in the diocese has at this day. The upshot of the matter was, that being forbidden by

the churchwardens to preach in the pulpit, he went outside after the communion-service, and preached in the churchyard. "And," he says, "God was pleased so to assist me in preaching and so wonderfully to affect the hearers, that I believe we could have gone singing hymns to prison. Let not the adversaries say, I have thrust myself out of their synagogues. No; they have thrust me out."

From that day forward he became a constant field-preacher, whenever weather and the season of the year made it possible. Two days afterwards, on Sunday, April 29, he records: — "I preached in Moorfields to an exceeding great multitude. Being weakened by my morning's preaching, I refreshed myself in the afternoon by a little sleep and at five went and preached at Kennington Common, about two miles from London, when no less than thirty thousand people were supposed to be present." Henceforth, wherever there were large open spaces round London, wherever there were large bands of idle, godless, Sabbath-breaking people gathered together, in Hackney Fields, Mary-le-bonne Fields, May Fair, Smithfield, Blackheath, Moorfields and Kennington Common, there went Whitefield and lifted up his voice for Christ.¹ The gospel so proclaimed was listened to and greedily received by hundreds who never dreamed of going to a place of worship. The cause of pure religion was advanced and souls were plucked from the hand of Satan, like brands from the burning. But it was going much too fast for the Church of those days. The clergy, with a few honorable exceptions, refused entirely to countenance this strange preacher. In the true spirit of the dog in the manger, they neither liked to go after the semi-heathen masses of population themselves, nor liked anyone else to do the work for them. The consequence was, that the ministrations of Whitefield in the pulpits of the Church of England from this time almost entirely ceased. He loved the Church in which he had been ordained; he gloried in her Articles; he used her Prayer-book with pleasure. But the Church did not love him and so lost the use of his services. The plain truth is, that the Church of England of that day was not ready for a man like Whitefield. The Church was too much asleep to understand him and was vexed at a man who would not keep still and let the devil alone.

The facts of Whitefield's history from this period to the day of his death are almost entirely of one complexion. One year was just like another; and to attempt to follow him would be only going repeatedly over the same ground. From 1739 to the year of his death, 1770, a

¹ The reader will remember that all this happened a hundred years ago, when London was comparatively a small place. Most of the open places where Whitefield preached are now covered with buildings. Kennington Oval and Blackheath alone remain open at this day.

period of thirty-one years, his life was one uniform employment. He was eminently a man of one thing and always about his Master's business. From Sunday mornings to Saturday nights, from the 1st of January to the 31st of December, except when laid aside by illness, he was almost incessantly preaching Christ and going about the world entreating men to repent and come to Christ and be saved. There was hardly a considerable town in England, Scotland or Wales, that he did not visit as an evangelist. When churches were opened to him he gladly preached in churches; when only chapels could be obtained, he cheerfully preached in chapels. When churches and chapels alike were closed or were too small to contain his hearers, he was ready and willing to preach in the open air. For thirty-one years he labored in this way, always proclaiming the same glorious gospel and always, as far as man's eye can judge, with immense effect. In one single Whitsuntide week, after preaching in Moorfields, he received one thousand letters from people under spiritual concern and admitted to the Lord's Table three hundred and fifty persons. In the thirty-four years of his ministry it is reckoned that he preached publicly eighteen thousand times.

His journeyings were prodigious, when the roads and conveyances of his time are considered. He was familiar with "perils in the wilderness and perils in the seas," if ever man was in modern times. He visited Scotland fourteen times and was nowhere more acceptable or useful than he was in that Bible-loving country. He crossed the Atlantic seven times, backward and forward, in miserable slow sailing ships and arrested the attention of thousands in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. He went over to Ireland twice and on one occasion was almost murdered by an ignorant Popish mob in Dublin. As to England and Wales, he traversed every county in them, from the Isle of Wight to Berwick-on-Tweed and from the Land's End to the North Foreland.

His regular ministerial work in London for the winter season, when field-preaching was necessarily suspended, was something prodigious. His weekly engagements at the Tabernacle in Tottenham Court Road, which was built for him when the pulpits of the Established Church were closed, comprised the following work: — Every Sunday morning he administered the Lord's Supper to several hundred communicants at half-past six. After this he read prayers and preached both morning and afternoon. Then he preached again in the evening at half-past five and concluded by addressing a large society of widows, married people, young men and spinsters, all sitting separately in the area of the Tabernacle, with exhortations suitable to their respective stations. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings, he preached regularly at six. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thurs-

day and Saturday evenings, he delivered lectures. This, it will be observed, made thirteen sermons a week! And all this time he was carrying on a large correspondence with people in almost every part of the world.

That any human frame could so long endure the labors that Whitefield went through does indeed seem wonderful. That his life was not cut short by violence, to which he was frequently exposed, is no less wonderful. But he was immortal till his work was done. He died at last very suddenly at Newbury Port, in North America, on Sunday, September the 29th, 1770, at the comparatively early age of fifty-six. He was once married to a widow named James, of Abergavenny, who died before him. If we may judge from the little mention made of his wife in his letters, the marriage does not seem to have contributed much to his happiness. He left no children, but he left a name far better than that of sons and daughters. Never perhaps was there a man of whom it could be so truly said that he spent and was spent for Christ than George Whitefield.

The circumstances and particulars of this great evangelist's end are so deeply interesting, that I shall make no excuse for dwelling on them. It was an end in striking harmony with the tenor of his life. As he had lived for more than thirty years, so he died, preaching to the very last. He literally almost died in harness. "Sudden death," he had often said, "is sudden glory. Whether right or not, I cannot help wishing that I may go off in the same manner. To me it would be worse than death to live to be nursed and to see friends weeping about me." He had the desire of his heart granted. He was cut down in a single night by a spasmodic fit of asthma, almost before his friends knew that he was ill.

On the morning of Saturday the 29th of September, the day before he died, Whitefield set out on horseback from Portsmouth in New Hampshire, in order to fulfil an engagement to preach at Newbury Port on Sunday. On the way, unfortunately, he was earnestly importuned to preach at a place called Exeter and though feeling very ill, he had not the heart to refuse. A friend remarked before he preached that he looked more uneasy than usual and said to him, "Sir, you are more fit to go to bed than to preach." To this Whitefield replied: "True, sir;" and then turning aside, he clasped his hands together and looking up, said: "Lord Jesus, I am weary in your work, but not of your work. If I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for you once more in the fields, seal your truth and come home and die." He then went and preached to a very great multitude in the fields from the text 2 Cor.

13:5,¹ for the space of nearly two hours. It was his last sermon and a fitting conclusion to his whole career.

An eye-witness has given the following striking account of this closing scene of Whitefield's life:

"He rose from his seat and stood erect. His appearance alone was a powerful sermon. The thinness of his visage, the paleness of his countenance, the evident struggling of the heavenly spark in a decayed body for utterance, were all deeply interesting; the spirit was willing, but the flesh was dying. In this situation he remained several minutes, unable to speak. He then said: 'I will wait for the gracious assistance of God, for he will, I am certain, assist me once more to speak in his name.' He then delivered perhaps one of his best sermons. The latter part contained the following passage: 'I go; I go to a rest prepared: my sun has given light to many, but now it is about to set — no, to rise to the zenith of immortal glory. I have outlived many on earth, but they cannot outlive me in heaven. Many shall outlive me on earth and live when this body is no more, but there — oh, thought divine! — I shall be in a world where time, age, sickness and sorrow are unknown. My body fails, but my spirit expands. How willingly would I live for ever to preach Christ. But I die to be with him. How brief — comparatively brief — has been my life compared to the vast labors which I see before me yet to be accomplished. But if I leave now, while so few care about heavenly things, the God of peace will surely visit you.'"

After the sermon was over, Whitefield dined with a friend and then rode on to Newbury Port, though greatly fatigued. On arriving there he supped early and retired to bed. Tradition says, that as he went upstairs, with a lighted candle in his hand, he could not resist the inclination to turn round at the head of the stair and speak to the friends who were assembled to meet him. As he spoke the fire kindled within him and before he could conclude, the candle which he held in his hand had actually burned down to the socket. He retired to his bedroom, to come out no more alive. A violent fit of spasmodic asthma seized him soon after he got into bed and before six o'clock the next morning the great preacher was dead. If ever man was ready for his change, Whitefield was that man. When his time came, he had nothing to do but to die. Where he died there he was buried, in a vault beneath the pulpit of the church where he had engaged to preach. His sepulcher is shown to this very day and nothing makes the little town where he died so famous as the fact that it contains the bones of George Whitefield.

Such are the leading facts in the life of the prince of English evangelists of a hundred years ago. His personal character, the real extent of his usefulness and some account of his style of preaching, are subjects which I must reserve for another chapter.

¹ "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

CHAPTER 2

Estimate of good that Whitefield did — Testimonies to his direct usefulness — Indirect good that he did — Peculiar character of his preaching — Witnesses to his real power as a preacher — Analysis of his seventy-five published sermons — Simplicity, directness, power of description, earnestness, pathos, action, voice and fluency, his leading excellences — Inner life, humility, love to Christ, laboriousness, self-denial, disinterestedness, cheerfulness, catholicity — Specimen of his preaching.

George Whitefield, in my judgment, was so entirely chief and first among the English Reformers of the last century, that I make no apology for offering some further information about him. The real amount of good he did, the peculiar character of his preaching, the private character of the man, are all points that deserve consideration. They are points, I may add, about which there is a vast amount of misconception.

This misconception perhaps is unavoidable and ought not to surprise us. The materials for forming a correct opinion about such a man as Whitefield are necessarily very scanty. He wrote no book for the million of world-wide fame, like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. He headed no crusade against an apostate Church, with a nation at his back and princes on his side, like Martin Luther. He founded no religious denomination, which pinned its faith on his writings and carefully embalmed his best acts and words, like John Wesley. There are Lutherans and Wesleyans in the present day, but there are no Whitefieldites. No! The great evangelist of last century was a simple, guileless man, who lived for one thing only and that was to preach Christ. If he did that, he cared for nothing else. The records of such a man are large and full in heaven, I have no doubt. But they are few and scanty upon earth.

We must not forget, beside this, that the many in every age see nothing in a man like Whitefield but fanaticism and enthusiasm. They abhor everything like "zeal" in religion. They dislike everyone who turns the world upside down and departs from old traditional ways and will not let the devil alone. Such persons, no doubt, would tell us that the ministry of Whitefield only produced temporary excitement, that his preaching was common-place rant and that his character had nothing about it to be specially admired. It may be feared that eighteen hundred years ago they would have said much the same of St. Paul.

The question, What good did Whitefield do? is one which I answer without the least hesitation. I believe that the direct good which he did

to immortal souls was enormous. I will go further, — I believe it is incalculable. Credible witnesses in England, Scotland and America, have placed on record their conviction that he was the means of converting thousands of people. Many, wherever he preached, were not merely pleased, excited and arrested, but positively turned from sin and made thorough servants of God. "Numbering the people," I do not forget, is at all times an objectionable practice. God alone can read hearts and discern the wheat from the tares. Many, no doubt, in days of religious excitement, are set down as converted who are not converted at all. But I wish my readers to understand that my high estimate of Whitefield's usefulness is based on a solid foundation. I ask them to mark well what Whitefield's cotemporaries thought of the value of his labors.

Franklin, the well-known American philosopher, was a coldblooded, calculating man, a Quaker by profession and not likely to form too high an estimate of any minister's work. Yet even he confessed that "it was wonderful to see the change soon made by his preaching in the manners of the inhabitants of Philadelphia. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious." Franklin himself, it may be remarked, was the leading printer of religious works at Philadelphia; and his readiness to print Whitefield's sermons and journals shows his judgment of the hold that he had on the American mind.

Maclaurin, Willison and Macculloch, were Scotch ministers whose names are well known north of the Tweed and the two former of whom deservedly rank high as theological writers. All these have repeatedly testified that Whitefield was made an instrument of doing immense good in Scotland. Willison in particular says, "that God honored him with surprising success among sinners of all ranks and persuasions."

Old Henry Venn, of Huddersfield and Yelling, was a man of strong, good sense, as well as of great grace. His opinion was, that "if the greatness, extent, success and disinterestedness of a man's labors can give him distinction among the children of Christ, then we are warranted to affirm that scarce anyone has equaled Mr. Whitefield." Again he says: "He was abundantly successful in his vast labors. The seals of his ministry, from first to last, I am persuaded, were more than could be credited could the number be fixed. This is certain, his amazing popularity was only from his usefulness; for he no sooner opened his mouth as a preacher, than God commanded an extraordinary blessing upon his word."

John Newton was a shrewd man, as well as an eminent minister of the gospel. His testimony is: "That which finished Mr. Whitefield's

character as a shining light and is now his crown of rejoicing, was the singular success which the Lord was pleased to give him in winning souls. It seemed as if he never preached in vain. Perhaps there is hardly a place in all the extensive compass of his labors where some may not yet be found who thankfully acknowledge him as their spiritual father.”

John Wesley did not agree with Whitefield on several theological points of no small importance. But when he preached his funeral sermon, he said: “Have we read or heard of any person who called so many thousands, so many myriads of sinners to repentance? Above all, have we read or heard of anyone who has been the blessed instrument of bringing so many sinners from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God?”

Valuable as these testimonies undoubtedly are, there is one point which they leave totally untouched. That point is the quantity of *indirect good* that Whitefield did. Great as the direct effects of his labors were, I believe firmly that the indirect effects were even greater. His ministry was made a blessing to thousands who never perhaps either saw or heard him.

He was among the first in the eighteenth century who revived attention to the old truths which produced the Protestant Reformation. His constant assertion of the doctrines taught by the Reformers, his repeated reference to the Articles and Homilies and the divinity of the best English theologians, obliged many to think and roused them to examine their own principles. If the whole truth was known, I believe it would prove that the rise and progress of the Evangelical body in the Church of England received a mighty impulse from George Whitefield.

But this is not the only indirect good that Whitefield did in his day. He was among the first to show the right way to meet the attacks of infidels and sceptics on Christianity. He saw clearly that the most powerful weapon against such men is not cold, metaphysical reasoning and dry critical disquisition, but preaching the whole gospel — living the whole gospel — and spreading the whole gospel. It was not the writings of Leland and the younger Sherlock and Waterland and Leslie, that rolled back the flood of infidelity one half so much as the preaching of Whitefield and his companions. They were the men who were the true champions of Christianity. Infidels are seldom shaken by mere abstract reasoning. The surest arguments against them are gospel truth and gospel life.

Above all, he was the very first Englishman who seems to have thoroughly understood what Dr. Chalmers aptly called the *aggressive* system. He was the first to see that Christ's ministers must do the