

**George Whitefield**

**M.A., Field Preacher**

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**by James Paterson Gledstone**

**Quinta Press**

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# George Whitefield

M.A., Field-Preacher

By JAMES  
PATERSON GLEDSTONE

*Every one hath his proper gift.  
FIELD-PREACHING is my plan;  
In this I am carried as on eagles' wings;  
God makes way for me everywhere'*

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STOUGHTON  27  
PATERNOSTER ROW 1900



¶

MY WIFE,

AND

TO MY DAUGHTER

MAY,

MY FELLOW-HELPERS

IN MAKING THIS BOOK



## PREFACE

THE favourable reception which was given to my 'Life and Travels of George Whitefield' published in 1871, now long out of print,<sup>1</sup> and the need that was felt in certain quarters for a briefer life of the great field-preacher, which nevertheless should be full, though without excess of detail, have led me to prepare this book. The main idea is the same in both books, viz.: 'To reveal a great heart, stirred with the purest emotion, ever desiring absolute perfection in goodness and unintermittingly seeking it, resolved to leave nothing undone by which others might become partakers with itself of the great salvation, and impatient of all impediments, whether ecclesiastical or social, that threatened the consummation of its hopes.'

I. The greatness of Whitefield's labours is not easily realised, and not even a three-volume life could outline it. One month's labours are recorded in this brief sentence—'he preached to ten thousand persons every day for twenty-eight days.' That fact will bear a great deal of analysing. The far-reaching influence of his preaching can only be imagined by remembering that his vast congregations were often gathered together in thinly populated districts—*e.g.* Haworth on the Yorkshire moors, Cambuslang the Scotch village, the backwoods of the American settlements—persons coming long distances, at great cost of time and trouble, to hear him. He said of his forest-preaching—'I am hunting after poor sinners in these unchristianised wilds. People are willing to hear, and I am willing to preach.' He mounted his horse, and rode to a point where he and they could come into contact.

II. It will be noticed that, although Calvinism is generally supposed to have a deadening influence upon the hearts of its disciples, Whitefield

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<sup>1</sup> See extracts from some reviews at the end of this volume.

was always aggressive and in advance of his brethren in the adoption of new methods of doing good. He led the way in field-preaching, in the employment of laymen as preachers, in organising the new Welsh converts into a General Association of Methodists, and he seems also to have been the first to prepare a hymn-book for his congregation at the Tabernacle. He was a pathfinder. His zeal, courage, and faith kept him foremost.

III. Some suggestion may be found in this life as to the relation of evangelistic to pastoral work. Whitefield was frequently invited to labour in given districts; and, in the main, with very satisfactory results. It is true that his work was fiercely assailed, and that he passed through a storm of obloquy, but it is also true that the storm abated towards the close of his life, and that his opponents and he came nearer together. They had been stirred by his contagious zeal, and both he and they had mellowed in charity. In multitudes of instances he went uninvited, and his work, done on the racecourse, in the field, or in the market-place, just left its results for the settled pastor to gather; which was perhaps the easiest method.

IV. The ethical value of his work was individualistic during his life; the social and political appeared afterwards. He worked for the units; the units in their aggregation must work for the body politic. It were as idle and unjust to blame him for not personally inaugurating large reforms as to blame the Apostle Paul for not procuring the franchise for Roman Christians. He was in the line of progress, and his labours continue in new forms of usefulness. He aimed at making new men, the new men must make the new State. And no doubt the social and political and international success of Christianity would come sooner and be greater were Christians to labour more zealously for personal conversions. To get a man a new home is a good thing; to get him a new heart is better. 'This ought ye to do, and not to leave the other undone.'

V. No careful student of his life will conclude that he had no formative influence because he was neither a constructive theologian nor the founder of a sect. He was more and better than either of these. He was the means of calling multitudes from death unto life; and then they formed themselves into societies and churches as they saw best. In the coming days of Church union it may appear that the



greatest heart of the evangelical movement was far before his time, when, as a young man of twenty-seven, he said:—'I am persuaded there is no such form of Church government prescribed in the book of God as excludes a toleration of all other forms whatsoever.' 'O that the power of religion may revive! Nothing but that can break down the partition wall of bigotry.' Or, in other words, nothing but that can unite Christians as such. Is not that the ideal of Christian fellowship toward which all the churches are moving? As regards sectarianism Whitefield was a centrifugal force, as regards true Christian union he was centripetal. He lived for the larger idea as it is to be realised and embodied by love.

VI. The secret of Whitefield's marvellous influence has been and always will be a problem of absorbing interest. It cannot be given on the page of a book, but might perhaps be discovered by one who should reverently, prayerfully, and sympathetically travel with him day by day through his mighty labours for the salvation of souls, and watch with him in his hours and days of prayer. A rapid reading of this or of any other book will not discover it. Imagination, sympathy, fellowship, and imitation must be employed. He was a mystic. His was a 'life hid with Christ in God,' pouring itself out in loving service through an organism perfectly adapted to the work of preaching. As his oratorical genius was in full bloom as soon as he began to preach, so also was he wholly consecrated to the will of God and filled with the Spirit from the time of his new birth. The outward demonstration never exceeded the inward reality, hence there never was a halt, never a break, never a decline. 'He went from strength to strength, until he appeared before God in Zion.'

As we read the fierce and scornful language in which he was assailed from so many quarters, and notice, on the other side, the multitudes of all classes, including crowds of the aristocracy, some of them Christians of the warmest devotion, who came to hear him, it suggests the inquiry whether, by all the means used, the English people, rich and poor, but especially the titled, are as deeply and as widely influenced by the gospel now as they were a hundred and fifty years ago. If the intensity of the hatred and opposition directed against him accurately indicated the enormous influence which he wielded, as it certainly did, is the prevalent indifference of today to the preaching

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of the gospel the measure of the feebleness that is neglected? One thing is certain: the whole Church of God needs a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit; and thankful shall we be, if it be soon given.

Let me add a word of sincere thanks to my friend the Rev. G.A. Suttle, the Minister of Tottenham Court Chapel, for many valuable services given to me in the preparation of this book; to Mr Robson and Mr Casstine, of the Homes for Little Boys, Swanley, for the pains they took to obtain the beautiful photograph (p. 300) of a medallion of Whitefield in my possession; to Mr J. Thomson, of Grosvenor Street, W., for the excellent reproduction of a very rare full-length portrait of Whitefield when he was twenty-nine years of age, painted by Francis Kyte; and to Mrs Bellows, of Cheltenham, for procuring me an etching of the Bell Inn, Gloucester, as it was in Whitefield's time.

J.P.G,

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# CHAPTER 1

1714–1735

## HIS PARENTAGE AND CHILDHOOD—AT OXFORD—AMONG THE METHODISTS—HIS CONVERSION

**T**HE Rev. Samuel Whitefield, a clergyman of the Church of England, who first held a living in Wiltshire, and afterwards one at Rockhampton, in Gloucestershire, was the great-grandfather of George Whitefield. Samuel Whitefield had five daughters—two of whom were married to clergymen—and two sons, one of whom, named after his father, succeeded to the living at Rockhampton. The other son, Andrew, described as ‘a private gentleman,’ had a family of fourteen children, the eldest of whom was Thomas. Thomas was established as a wine-merchant in Bristol, where he married Elizabeth Edwards, of that city; afterwards they removed to Gloucester to keep the Bell Inn, now the Bell Hotel. They had seven children—one daughter and six sons; their youngest, George, was born in the Bell Inn on December 16th, O.S. (December 27th, N.S.), 1714. Some time about Christmas, 1716, the father died, and his fair-haired little boy was left without one remembrance of him. The mother had a tender, faithful heart, commendable prudence, a great desire for the welfare of her children, and much willingness to deny herself for their sakes. George always held her in reverent affection. With the fondness of a mother for her last-born, she used to tell him that, even when he was an infant, she always expected more comfort from him than from any other of her children.

Only one event of Whitefield's early childhood is on record. When he was about four years of age he had the measles, and through the ignorance or neglect of his nurse the disease left one of his eyes—dark blue they were, and lively—with a squint, which, however, is said not to have marred the extreme sweetness of his countenance, nor diminished the charm of his glance. That defective eye obtained for him in later years among scoffers and railers the nickname of 'Dr Squintum.'

Circumstances were not very favourable to the formation of a noble character in the boy. He says that he 'soon gave pregnant proofs of an impudent temper.' He fell into some of the worst of juvenile sins; occasionally he transgressed in a more marked way. As Augustine deceived his tutor, masters, and parents with falsehoods, so that he might get off to shows and plays, and also committed thefts from his parents' cellar and table, so Whitefield stained his childhood with lying, evil-speaking, and petty thefts, which he perpetrated on his mother by taking money out of her pocket before she was up; this he thought, at the time, was no theft at all. He also says that he spent much money 'in plays, and in the common entertainments of the age.' Playing at cards and reading romances were his 'heart's delight.' Sabbath-breaking was a common sin, and he generally behaved irreverently at public worship, when he was present. As might be expected, he was fond of playing wild, roguish tricks, such as running into the Dissenting meeting-house, and shouting the name of the learned and devoted minister—'Old Cole! old Cole! old Cole!' Being asked, one day, by one of Cole's congregation, of what business he meant to be, he replied, 'A minister. but I would take good care never to tell stories in the pulpit like the old Cole.' A wild, merry lad he was, with no restraint upon him, excepting a wise regulation of his mother, by which he was not allowed to take any part in the business, although he did sometimes sell odd quantities over the counter and wrongfully keep the money; overflowing with animal spirits, which often led him into mischief, in the execution of which his power of concealment so signally failed him that he was always detected. 'It would be endless,' he says, 'to recount the sins and offences of my younger days.' But why he should, in later years, have classed his 'roguish tricks' with graver faults is not clear. They may really have

been worse than simple fun, or his conscience may have become morbidly sensitive and intolerant, even of play, probably the latter. But there were other forces working in his impetuous, fiery spirit. Good thoughts struggled with sinful ones; conscience failed not to rebuke him for his faults, and smite him with heavy blows. A grotesque caricature of a saint sprung out of the contention. He would not be bad, neither would he be thoroughly good. He compromised; he tried to blend light and darkness; he feared God, and loved sin. Some of the money stolen from his mother was devoted to higher ends than buying tarts and fruits—it was given to the poor! His thefts were not confined to raids upon his mother's pocket and till, but extended to property outside the Bell Inn; but then he stole books—afterwards restored fourfold—and they were books of devotion! The Bible was not unknown to him, any more than a romance; but it was as much the book of his curses as of his prayers. His quick temper—he was hasty tempered to the last—sought expression for itself in the imprecatory Psalms, as well as in vulgar cursing. The burden of the 118th Psalm was familiar to him; and once, when he had been teased by some persons who took a constant pleasure in exasperating him, he immediately retired to his room, and, kneeling down, with many tears, prayed the whole Psalm over, finding relief to his feelings in the terrible refrain of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth verses—'But in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them.' Church might be a place for irreverence, and the service a thing to be mocked at; yet he was always fond of being a clergyman, and frequently imitated the minister's reading prayers.

All the man can be traced in the boy—delight in the emotional and exciting, a ready power of appropriating and applying to himself and to his enemies the words of Scripture, fondness for using his elocution, and aptness of imitation. And a strange contrast, as well as resemblance, is there between the man and the boy, when they are placed side by side in St Mary de Crypt, Gloucester. In the church where the infant was baptised and the boy often mocked, the deacon of twenty-one preached his first sermon to a crowded audience.

When he was ten years old his mother married a second time, her husband being Mr Longden, an ironmonger of Gloucester, Whitefield says that it was 'an unhappy match as for temporals, but God overruled

it for good. It set my brethren upon thinking more than otherwise they would have done, and made an uncommon impression upon my own heart in particular.'

At the age of twelve he was placed at the school of St Mary de Crypt, 'the last grammar school,' he says, 'I ever went to from which we may suppose that he had tried not a few schools before. The last school changed him not a whit in his earliest characteristics. Plays still fascinated him; and, if he did not read them in school, when he was there—and it is very probable that he did—he spent whole days away from school studying them, and preparing to act them. His enthusiasm for acting spread to his school-fellows; and the master, either because he sympathised with his scholars' tastes, or thought it useless to resist them, not only composed plays for the school, but had a theatrical entertainment for the corporation on their annual visitation, young Whitefield being, on one occasion, dressed in girls' clothes to act before them. The annual oration before these visitors was also commonly entrusted to the boy from 'the Bell'; and his good memory and fine elocution won him much notice. A lively school must St Mary de Crypt have been while this vivacious scholar sat on its benches—the master writing plays, the boys learning them, and the worthy city aldermen seeing them acted.

Whitefield has given an opinion upon his education. He says:—

I cannot but observe, with much concern of mind, how this training up of youth has a natural tendency to debauch the mind, to raise ill passions, and to stuff the memory with things as contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ as light to darkness, heaven to hell. However, though the first thing I had to repent of was my education in general, yet I must always acknowledge that my particular thanks are due to my master for the great pains he took with me and his other scholars in teaching us to write and speak correctly.

The future saint and preacher was still indicated amid all this mirth. Part of the money received for his good acting and reciting was spent upon *Ken's Manual for Winchester Scholars*, a book which had affected him much when his brother used to read it in his mother's troubles, and which, for some time after he bought it, 'was of great use to his soul.'

Before he was fifteen he longed to be free even from the mild discipline of his last grammar school; and by pressing his mother



with the sage argument that, since she could not send him to the University, and as more learning might spoil him for a tradesman, it would be best for him to halt at his present attainments, he got his own way on all points but one—he must go to school every day for a writing lesson. Adverse circumstances soon compelled the discontinuance of the solitary lesson, and the lad of fifteen had to take-on his part, apparently, with some little regret, but with commendable industry—to the dress and work of a common drawer in his mother’s inn. She who had hitherto been so jealous over her son’s associations must have been hard pressed with poverty before consenting to such a step. Nor was the boy unaffected by the family misfortune. His honour prompted him to be of use, and to shun the greater contempt of being a burden, by enduring the lesser shame of wearing a blue apron and washing mops and cleaning rooms. His religious tendencies were strengthened by frequent reading of the Bible at the close of his day’s work; indeed, he would sit up to read it. Sometimes the care of the whole house came upon him; but still he found time to compose two or three sermons, one of which he dedicated to his elder brother. The first lessons of experience were being wrought into the heart of a quick learner, whose waywardness was receiving its first stern rebuke. The work of the inn made him long for school again, but his sense of filial duty never suffered him to be idle, even in a calling which he disliked. The sight of the boys going to school often cut him to the heart; and to a companion, who frequently came entreating him to go to Oxford, his general answer was, ‘I wish I could.’

A year later his mother was obliged to leave the inn; then a married brother, ‘who had been bred up to the business,’ took it; and to him George became an assistant. The brothers agreed well enough. Not so the brother-in-law and sister-in-law. For three weeks together George would not speak a word to her. He was wretched, and much to blame; and at length, thinking that his absence would make all things easy, and being advised so by his mother and brother, he went to Bristol to see one of his brothers. This, hethinks, was God’s way of ‘forcing him out of the public business, and calling him from drawing wine for drunkards to draw water out of the wells of salvation for the refreshment of His spiritual Israel.’

At Bristol he experienced the first of those rapturous feelings with which, a few years later, his soul became absolutely penetrated and possessed, then refined and gloriously illuminated, and in which it was finally sacrificed to God his Saviour. From the first it was no weakness of his to feel with half his heart: 'with all thy soul and mind and strength' was to him an easy condition of religious feeling and activity. He now had much sensible devotion, and was filled with 'unspeakable raptures,' sometimes 'carried out beyond himself.' He longed after the sacrament; he pondered the *Imitation of Christ*, and delighted in it; he was all impatience to hear the church bell calling him to worship; his former employment dissatisfied him, and he often wrote to his mother, telling her he would never return to it. Yet with all his fervour his heart knew not 'the peace of God which passeth all understanding;' something secretly whispered, 'this will not last;' and it is not from this time that he dates his conversion. He admits that God was in the tumult of devotion, but not as he afterwards knew Him—the God of peace and rest and love.

Two short months sufficed to end the spiritual fever. Probably it would have left him had he continued at Bristol, but its decline he ascribes to his return home. Once among his old associations his delight in churchgoing and in prayer ceased; the only remnant of good he retained was his resolution not to live in the inn, and no doubt his firmness on this point was mainly due to his antipathy to his sister-in-law and to his love for his mother, who, with true motherly affection, welcomed him to the best she could give him—her own fare and a bed upon the floor. His old love for play-reading revived again; his vanity made him more careful to 'adorn his body than deck and beautify his soul'; his former school-fellows, whom he had done his share in misleading, now did theirs in misleading him.

'But God,' he says, speaking in harmony with those Calvinistic views which he afterwards adopted, 'whose gifts and callings are without repentance, would let nothing pluck me out of His hands, though I was continually doing despite to the Spirit of grace. He saw me with pity and compassion, when lying in my blood. He passed by me; He said unto me, "Live," and even gave me some foresight of His providing for me. One morning, as I was reading a play to my sister, said I, "Sister, God intends something for me that we know not of.