

# M E M O I R S

OF THE

# L I F E

OF THE REVEREND

GEORGE WHITEFIELD, MA

Late CHAPLAIN to the Right Honourable  
THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON:

IN WHICH

Every Circumstance worthy of Notice, both in his  
private and public Character, is recorded.

Faithfully selected from his Original PAPERS,  
JOURNALS, and LETTERS.

ILLUSTRATED BY

A Variety of interesting and entertaining  
ANECDOTES, from the best Authorities.

To which are added

A particular ACCOUNT of his DEATH and FUNERAL;  
and Extracts from the SERMONS, which were  
preached on that Occasion.

COMPILED

the Rev. JOHN GILLIES, DD

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*Yea doubtless I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the  
knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: For whom I have suffered  
the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I might  
win Christ. Philippians 3:8.*

*And I will very gladly spend, and be spent for you. 2 Corinthians 12:15.  
For he that winneth souls is wise. Proverbs 11:30.*

*And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament,  
and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever  
and ever. Daniel 12:3.*

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Whitefield

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TO  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON,  
THESE MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE OF  
THE REV. MR WHITEFIELD,  
ARE MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

by

HER LADYSHIP'S

MOST OBEDIENT,

AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

JOHN GILLIES.



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**MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE**

**OF THE**

**Rev. Mr GEORGE WHITEFIELD**

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**CHAPTER I.**

*From his Birth, to his going to the University of Oxford,  
Anno 1732.*

**T**HIS eminent and pious servant of *Christ*, Mr *George Whitefield*, was born at *Gloucester*, on the sixteenth day of *December*, OS<sup>1</sup> 1714. His father, *Thomas Whitefield*, nephew of the Rev. Mr *Samuel Whitefield* of *Rockhampton*, in *Gloucestershire*,<sup>2</sup> was first bred to the employment of a wine

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<sup>1</sup> OS refers to Old Style, Julian Calender, dates. Great Britain adopted the Gregorian Calender in 1752, when the day after 2 September 1752, became 14 September. Whitefield was therefore born on 27 December 1714 according to the present day calender [*ed.*]

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Mr *Samuel Whitefield*, great-grand father of *George*, was born in *Wantage* in *Berkshire*, and was rector of *North Ledyard* in *Wiltshire*. He removed afterwards to *Rockhampton*. He had five daughters, two of whom were married to clergymen, Mr *Perkins* and Mr *Lovingham*. And two sons, *Samuel*, who succeeded his father in the cure of *Rockhampton*, and died without issue; and *Andrew*, who was a private gentleman, and lived retired upon his estate. *Andrew* had fourteen children, of whom *Thomas* was the eldest, the father of Mr *George Whitefield*.

merchant in Bristol; but afterwards kept an Inn of *Gloucester*. In *Bristol* he married Mistress *Elizabeth Edwards*, who was related to the *Blackwells* and the *Dimours* of that city; by whom he had six sons and one daughter.<sup>3</sup> Of these, *George* was the youngest, who being bereaved of his father, when only two years old, was regarded by his mother with a peculiar tenderness, and educated with more than ordinary care.

He was early under religious impressions; but the bent of his nature, and the general course of his younger years, as himself acknowledges<sup>4</sup> with expressions of shame and self-condemnation, was of a very different kind.

Between the years of twelve and fifteen, he made a good progress in the *Latin* Classics, at the public school: and his eloquence began to appear, even at that early period, in the speeches which he delivered at the annual visitations. It is probable the applause he received on these occasions, contributed to his fondness for theatrical amusements: From whence it has been insinuated that he learned his oratory upon the stage. This, however, seems to have no other foundation, than his acting a part sometimes with his fellow-scholars; particularly, in certain dramatic performances prepared for them by their master: For that he was more indebted as an orator to nature, than to art of any kind, must be evident to all persons of discernment who were acquainted with him. Such could not fail to observe, that his eloquence was in a great measure the effect of his genius, and proceeded chiefly from that peculiar assemblage of extraordinary talents with which GOD had endowed him.

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<sup>3</sup> *Elizabeth*, the daughter, was twice reputably married at *Bristol*. *John*, his son, lies interred with the family in *St Mary Decrypt* Church in *Gloucester*. *Joseph* died an instant. *Andrew* settled in trade at *Bristol*, and died in the twenty-eighth year of his age. *James* was captain of a ship, and died suddenly at *Bath*. *Thomas* and *Richard* are still living. The father died *December* 1716. The mother continued a widow seven years, and was then married to *Mr Longden*, an ironmonger in *Gloucester*, by whom she had no issue. She died *December* 1751, in the seventy-first year of her age.

<sup>4</sup> See the two first parts of his *Life* at the beginning. Confessions of a like nature, are to be found in the *Writings* of *St Augustine*.

Notwithstanding this, it appears from his conduct, that he either had not yet discovered where his talents lay, or could not find means to qualify himself for entering into any profession where they might be properly exercised: for when he was about fifteen years of age, he declined the pursuit of learning, and talked of getting an education that would better fit him for business. During this period, he still continued to reside with his mother; and as her circumstances were not then so easy as before, he did not scruple to assist her in the business of the tavern. But the prevailing bent of his genius began now strongly to discover itself; for even in this unfavourable situation he composed several sermons, one of which he dedicated to his eldest brother: And after having visited him at *Bristol*, he came home with a resolution to abandon his present employment, and to turn his thoughts a different way.

After this, being for some time disengaged from every pursuit, and but poorly supported out of his mother's scanty subsistence, he was in no small danger of being utterly ruined by the influence of his former companions: but it pleased GOD to break the snare, by filling him with an abhorrence of their evil deeds.

About this time, the impressions of religion began again to recover their influence in his breast: And when he was seventeen years of age he received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He now became more and more watchful, both over his heart and conversation. He was frequently employed in fasting and prayer; spent much of his time in reading books of devotion; attended public worship twice every day; and so deeply was he engaged in these exercises, that his thoughts were constantly set on the great things of religion.



## CHAPTER II

*From the Time of his going to the University of Oxford, to his embarking for Georgia, Anno 1737.*

WHEN Mr *Whitefield* arrived at eighteen, he was sent to the university of *Oxford*, where he was again exposed to the society of the wicked: But remembering his former danger and deliverance, by the grace of GOD, he resisted all their solicitations, and cultivated an acquaintance with the Methodists, as the only persons that seemed to preserve a sense of religion, through the whole of their department.

It would be going beyond our purpose to give an account of the rise of Methodism: For this, the reader is referred to the Rev. Mr *John Wesley's* first Journal. But it may not be improper to notice the spirit of the age, when it first appeared. At that time, serious and practical Christianity in *England* was in a very low condition; scriptural, experimental religion, (which in the last century used to be the subject of the sermons and writings of the clergy) was become quite unfashionable; and the only thing insisted on was a defence of the out-works of Christianity against the objections of infidels. What was the consequence? The writings of infidels multiplied every day, and infidelity made a rapid progress among persons of every rank, not because they were reasoned into it by the force of argument, but because they were kept strangers to *Christ* and the power of the Gospel. We have a most affecting description of this, by Bishop *Butler*, whom none will suspect of exaggerating the fact:<sup>1</sup> "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious; and accordingly they treat it, as if in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule; as it were by way of reprisals, for it's having so long

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to his *Analogy*, *May* 1736.

interrupted the pleasures, of the world." Such was the state of religion in *England*, and *Scotland* was greedily swallowing down the poison, when it pleased GOD to raise up the Methodists, as instruments to revive his work in the midst of abounding impiety, and to bring multitudes who had scarcely a form of godliness, to experience its quickening and renewing power.

Happy was it for Mr *Whitefield*, that there was a Society of Methodists, at that time, in *Oxford*; but especially that he became acquainted with the Rev. Mr *Charles Wesley*, by whom he was treated with particular kindness. Such benefit did he receive under his ministry, that he always accounted him his spiritual father. And Mr *Wesley*'s reciprocal affection for him, stands recorded in the verses at the beginning of Mr *Whitefield*'s second and third Journals.

Like the other Methodists, Mr *Whitefield* now began to live by rule, and to improve every moment of his time to the best advantage. He received the communion every sabbath, visited the sick, and the jail prisoners, and read to the poor. For daring to be thus singularly religious, he soon incurred the displeasure of his fellow- students, and felt the effects of it in their unkind behaviour. In the mean time, he was greatly distressed with melancholy thoughts, which were augmented by excessive bodily austerities. And at last, by reading, and perhaps misunderstanding some mystic writers, he was driven to imagine, that the best method he could take, was to shut himself up in his study, till he had perfectly mortified his own will, and was enabled to do good without any mixture of corrupt motives. He likewise imagined, that he must relinquish external duties, and public worship, and lastly, (which was no small trial and affliction to him) that he must deny himself the pleasure of conversing with his religious friends. In this pitiable state of mind, Mr *Charles Wesley* found him one day, when he went to see him; apprised him of his danger, if he persisted in that way of life, and recommended to him his brother as a person of greater experience; who readily gave him, from time to time, his friendly advice. Soon