

1 Robert Philip

2 The Life and Times of George Whitefield

3 Chapter 1

4
5 “Whitefield’s Early Life, Education, and Ordination”

6
7 “I was born in Gloucestershire, in the month of December, 1714. My
8 father and mother kept the Bell Inn.” In this unassuming manner
9 Whitefield commences a brief memoir of himself. It will not,
10 however, be uninteresting to add some particulars respecting his
11 family. His great-grandfather, the Rev. Samuel Whitefield, born at
12 Wantage, in Berkshire, was rector of North Ledyard, in Wiltshire,
13 and afterwards of Rockhampton. In the latter charge he was
14 succeeded by his son, Samuel, who died without issue. Two of his
15 daughters were married to clergymen. Andrew, Whitefield's
16 grandfather, was a private gentleman, and lived retired upon his
17 estate. He had fourteen children ; Thomas, the eldest, was the father
18 of the Rev. George Whitefield. Mr. Thomas Whitefield was bred to
19 the business of a wine merchant, in Bristol, but afterwards kept an
20 inn in the city of Gloucester. While in Bristol he married Miss
21 Elizabeth Edwards, a lady related to the families of Blackwell and
22 Dinmour, of that city. He had six sons, of whom George was the
23 youngest, and one daughter.

24

25 Concerning his father and mother, Whitefield writes : "The former
26 died when I was two years old ; the latter is now alive, (she died in
27 December, 1751, in the 71st year of her age,) and has often told me
28 how she endured fourteen weeks' sickness, after she brought me into
29 the world ; but was used to say, even when I was an infant, that she
30 expected more comfort from me than from any other of her children.
31 This, with the circumstance of my being born in an inn, has been
32 often of service to me, in exciting my endeavours to make good my
33 mother's expectations, and so follow the example of my dear
34 Saviour, who was born in a manger belonging to an inn."

35

36 This amiable solicitude to realize his mother's "expectations," is the
37 more worthy of notice, because, whatever she was as a mother, she
38 was not distinguished as a Christian. This seems more than implied
39 in the following lamentation, extracted from one of his letters :
40 "Why is my honoured mother so solicitous about a few paltry things,
41 that will quickly perish ? Why will she not come and see her
42 youngest son, who will endeavour to be a Joseph to her, before she
43 dies ?" Such was his suspense in regard to the spiritual state of his
44 parent ; and yet he gratefully owns the salutary influence of her
45 maternal hopes upon his mind, and, while afar off on the Atlantic,
46 commemorates her tenderness : "My mother was very careful of my
47 education, and always kept me, in my tender years, (for which I
48 never can sufficiently thank her,) from intermeddling in the least
49 with the tavern business." (This paragraph was written on board the

50 Elizabeth, during the voyage to Philadelphia.) Now these
51 acknowledgments were penned during the heat of his zeal and the
52 height of his popularity, at a period when recent converts are prone
53 to speak with harshness of their unconverted relatives, and to sink
54 the child in the champion towards them. This is so common, and, to
55 say nothing of its cruelty, so unwise, that I could not record this
56 pleasing exception, without holding it up to general imitation. "The
57 servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all, —apt
58 to teach, —patient ; in meekness instructing those that oppose
59 themselves ; if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the
60 acknowledging of the truth."

61

62 Whitefield's humiliating recollections of his own early and inveterate
63 opposition to "the truth," contributed no doubt, to moderate his
64 natural impatience towards others. The following is his own
65 narrative of that period.

66

67 "My infant years must necessarily not be mentioned ; yet I can
68 remember such early stirrings of corruption in my heart, as
69 abundantly convince me that I was conceived and born in sin ; that
70 in me dwelleth no good thing by nature ; and that if God had not
71 freely prevented me by his grace, I must have been for ever banished
72 from his presence. I was so brutish as to hate instruction, and used,
73 purposely, to shun all opportunities of receiving it. I soon gave
74 pregnant proofs of an impudent temper. Lying, filthy talking, and

75 foolish jesting, I was much addicted to, even when very young.
76 Sometimes I used to curse, if not swear. Stealing from my mother I
77 thought no theft at all, and used to make no scruple of taking money
78 out of her pockets before she was up. I have frequently betrayed my
79 trust, and have more than once spent money I took in the house, in
80 buying fruit, tarts, &c. to satisfy my sensual appetite. Numbers of
81 sabbaths have I broken, and generally used to behave myself very
82 irreverently in God's sanctuary. Much money have I spent in plays,
83 and in the common amusements of the age. Cards, and reading
84 romances, were my heart's delight. Often have I joined with others in
85 playing roguish tricks ; but was generally, if not always, happily
86 detected. For this I have often since, and do now, bless and praise
87 God."

88

89 This enumeration of youthful vices and follies is certainly minute,
90 and, in one sense, gratuitous, but when the spirit and design of the
91 confessions are duly weighed, no man will venture to laugh at them
92 except those who regard sin as a " light matter." Every candid mind
93 must be conscious of seeing itself in young Whitefield, "as in a glass
94 ;" and every spiritual mind will not fail to deplore these early
95 exhibitions of depravity, nor to mark this modern exemplification of
96 an ancient truth, "Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my
97 youth." (Job xiii. 26.) Were these acknowledgments written in the
98 spirit, or for the same purpose, as Rousseau's unblushing
99 "Confessions," I should despise myself, as well as insult the public,

100 were I inclined to transcribe them. Were they even calculated to
101 suggest the bare idea of uncommon sins, I should not have hesitated
102 to merge the particulars in some general charge of corruption ; but,
103 besides carrying their antidote along with them, in their penitential
104 tone and spirit, they are but too common, however melancholy.
105 Bishop Lavington, indeed, affects great horror and disgust at them,
106 and compares them with the confessions of "the wild and fanatical
107 Theresa," in his treatise "On the Enthusiasm of Methodists and
108 Papists,"— a book, to which his own description of Whitefield's
109 confessions is far more applicable : "so ludicrous, filthy, and
110 shameless, as quite defiles paper, and is shocking to decency and
111 modesty." Such a "perfect Jakes" of ribaldry never issued from the
112 episcopal bench ; and yet it found an editor in the vicar of
113 Manaccan, in 1820 !

114

115 I shall have occasion, more than once, to refer to both the bishop and
116 the vicar. In the meantime, I cannot but allow Whitefield to speak
117 for himself on the subject of his early life : "It would be endless to
118 recount the sins and offences of my younger days. 'They are more in
119 number than the hairs of my head.' My heart would fail me at the
120 remembrance of them, was I not assured that my Redeemer liveth to
121 make intercession for me ! However the young man in the gospel
122 might boast, that he had 'kept the commandments from his youth
123 up,' with shame and confusion of face I confess that I have broken
124 them all from my youth. Whatever foreseen fitness for salvation

125 others may talk of and glory in, I disclaim any such thing. If I trace
126 myself from my cradle to my manhood, I can see nothing in me but a
127 fitness to be damned. ‘I speak the truth in Christ ; I lie not !’ If the
128 Almighty had not prevented me by his grace, and wrought most
129 powerfully on my soul— quickening me by his free Spirit when
130 dead in trespasses and sins, I had now either been sitting in darkness
131 and in the shadow of death, —or condemned, as the due reward of
132 my crimes, to be for ever lifting up my eyes in torments. But such
133 was the free grace of God to me, that though corruption worked so
134 strongly in my soul, and produced such early and bitter fruits, —yet
135 I can recollect, very early, movings of the blessed Spirit upon my
136 heart. I had, early, some convictions of sin. Once, I remember, when
137 some persons (as they frequently did) made it their business to tease
138 me, I immediately retired to my room, and kneeling down, with
139 many tears, prayed over the 118th Psalm.” It appears from the
140 narrative, that, on this occasion, the mind of young Whitefield
141 fastened chiefly upon the words, “In the name of the Lord will I
142 destroy them.” This, of course, he applied to his teasing enemies,
143 who had “compassed him about like bees,” a coincidence likely to
144 be noticed by an irritated boy, of quick perceptions. Even men are
145 but too prone, when injured, to appropriate the Messiah's weapons to
146 their own warfare ; —as if revenge could be sanctified by the use of
147 sacred language. But what is pitiable in the boy, is contemptible in
148 the man. This happened when Whitefield was only ten years old, but
149 the following hint will account for the facility with which he turned

150 to a psalm suited to his purpose. “I was always fond of being a
151 clergyman, and used frequently to imitate the minister's reading
152 prayers, &c.” Such being his favourite habit at the time, he was sure
153 to be familiar with the imprecatory psalms, of which so many occur
154 in the book of Common Prayer.

155

156 We have seen that he was addicted to petty thefts. The manner in
157 which he seems to have reconciled his conscience to them, is not
158 peculiar to boys. “Part of the money I used to steal from my mother I
159 gave to the poor, and some books I privately took from others (for
160 which I have since restored fourfold) I remember were books of
161 devotion.”

162

163 “When I was about twelve, I was placed at a school, called St. Mary
164 De Crypt, in Gloucester—the last grammar school I ever went to.
165 Having a good elocution and memory, I was remarked for making
166 speeches before the corporation, at their annual visitation. During the
167 time of my being at school, I was very fond of reading plays, and
168 have kept from school for days together, to prepare myself for acting
169 them. My master, seeing how mine and my schoolfellows' vein ran,
170 composed something of this kind for us himself, and caused me to
171 dress myself in girls' clothes, (which I had often done,) to act a part
172 before the corporation.” Thus he contracted that taste for theatrical
173 amusements, which gave rise to the well-known insinuation, that he
174 learned his peculiar style of oratory upon the stage. This, however, is

175 not the fact ; his acting was confined to the boards of St. Mary De
176 Crypt, and to his own chamber. But his fondness for this species of
177 amusement was not left at school. When seventeen years of age, he
178 was not weaned from this folly. Even while at college he says, “I
179 was not fully satisfied of the sin of reading plays, until God, upon a
180 fast day, was pleased to convince me. Taking a play, to read a
181 passage out of it to a friend, God struck my heart with such power,
182 that I was obliged to lay it down again.”

183

184 How deeply he deplored the cause and consequences of this habit,
185 appears from the following remarks. “I cannot but observe here, with
186 much concern of mind, how this way of training up youth has a
187 natural tendency to debauch the mind, to raise ill passions, and to
188 stuff the memory with things as contrary to the gospel of Christ, as
189 darkness to light—hell to heaven.” This fatal “tendency” was but too
190 fully exemplified when at school. “I got acquainted with such a set
191 of debauched, abandoned, atheistical youths, that if God, by his free,
192 unmerited, and special grace, had not delivered me out of their
193 hands, I should have sat in the scorners' chair, and made a mock at
194 sin. By keeping company with them, my thoughts of religion grew
195 more and more like theirs. I went to public service only to make
196 sport, and walk about. I took pleasure in their lewd conversation. I
197 began to reason as they did, and to ask, why God had given me
198 passions, and not permitted me to gratify them ? In short, I soon
199 made great proficiency in the school of the devil. I affected to look

200 rakish, and was in a fair way of being as infamous as the worst of
201 them.” This, not oratory, was what young Whitefield learned from
202 plays and acting. He fell into sins, of which he says,—”their dismal
203 effects I have felt and groaned under ever since.”

204

205 Of course, this progress in vice was gradual. During his first two
206 years at school, he bought, and read with much attention, Ken's
207 Manual for Winchester Scholars, a book commended to him by the
208 use made of it by his mother in her afflictions. He was also a diligent
209 scholar, and for some time made considerable progress in the Latin
210 classics. But the amusements which alienated his heart from virtue,
211 gradually impaired his taste for education. “Before I was fifteen,
212 having, as I thought, made sufficient progress in the classics, and, at
213 the bottom, longing to be set at liberty from the confinement of a
214 school, I one day told my mother,—that since her circumstances
215 would not permit her to give me a University education, more
216 learning, I thought, would spoil me for a tradesman, and therefore I
217 judged it best not to learn Latin any longer. She at first refused to
218 consent, but my corruptions soon got the better of her good nature.
219 Hereupon for some time I went to learn to write only. But my
220 mother's circumstances being much on the decline ; and, being
221 tractable that way, I began to assist her occasionally in the public-
222 house, till at length I put on my blue apron and my snuffers—
223 washed mops—cleaned rooms, and in one word, became professed
224 and common drawer for nigh a year and a half.”

225

226 Thus he exchanged the confinement of a school for the
227 imprisonment of an inn ; and, as might be expected in such a place,
228 he was twice or thrice intoxicated. It does not appear, however, that
229 he was addicted to drinking.—"He who was with David when he
230 was 'following the ewes big with young,' was with me here. For,
231 notwithstanding I was thus employed in a common inn, and had
232 sometimes the care of the whole house upon my hands, yet I
233 composed two or three sermons, and dedicated one of them, in
234 particular, to my elder brother. One time, I remember, I was much
235 pressed to self-examination, but found myself very unwilling to look
236 into my heart. Frequently I read the Bible, while sitting up at night.
237 Seeing the boys go by to school, has often cut me to the heart. And a
238 dear youth would often come, entreating me, whilst serving at the
239 bar, to go to Oxford. My general answer was,—I wish I could."

240

241 "After I had continued about a year in servile employment, my
242 mother was obliged to leave the inn. My brother, who had been bred
243 up for the business, married ; whereupon all was made over to him ;
244 and I being accustomed to the house, it was agreed that I should
245 continue there as an assistant. But God's thoughts were not as our
246 thoughts. By his good providence it happened that my sister-in-law
247 and I could by no means agree ; and, at length, the resentment grew
248 to such a height, that my proud heart would scarce suffer me to
249 speak to her for three weeks together. But, notwithstanding I was

250 much to blame, yet I used to retire and weep before the Lord, as
251 Hagar when flying from Sarah, little thinking that God, by this
252 means, was forcing me out of the public business, and calling me
253 from drawing wine for drunkards, to draw water from the wells of
254 salvation for the refreshment of his spiritual Israel. After continuing
255 for a long time under this burden of mind, I at length resolved
256 (thinking my absence would make all things easy) to go away.
257 Accordingly, by the advice of my brother and consent of my mother,
258 I went to see my elder brother, then settled in Bristol.”

259

260 During a residence of two months in Bristol, Whitefield experienced
261 some awakenings of conscience. Once, in St. John's church, he was
262 so affected by the sermon, that he resolved to prepare himself for the
263 sacrament, and decided against returning to the inn. This latter
264 resolution he communicated by letter to his mother ; and the former
265 was so strong, that, during his stay in Bristol, reading Thomas à
266 Kempis was his chief delight. “And I was always impatient till the
267 bell rung to call me to tread the courts of the Lord's house. But in the
268 midst of these illuminations, something surely whispered,—this
269 would not last. And, indeed, it so happened. For (oh that I could
270 write it in tears of blood !) when I left Bristol and returned to
271 Gloucester, I changed my devotion with my place. Alas, all my
272 fervour went off. I had no inclination to go to church, or draw nigh
273 to God. In short, my heart was far from him. However, I had so
274 much religion left, as to persist in my resolution not to live in the inn

275 ; and, therefore, my mother gave me leave, though she had but a
276 little income, to have a bed on the ground, and live at her house, till
277 Providence should point out a place for me.

278

279 "Having now, as I thought, nothing to do, it was a proper season for
280 Satan to tempt me. Much of my time I spent in reading plays, and in
281 sauntering from place to place. I was careful to adorn my body, but
282 took little pains to deck and beautify my soul. Evil communications
283 with my old school fellows, soon corrupted my good manners. By
284 seeing their evil practices, the sense of the divine presence I had
285 vouchsafed unto me, insensibly wore off my mind. But God would
286 let nothing pluck me out of his hands, though I was continually
287 doing despite to the Spirit of grace. He even gave me some foresight
288 of his providing for me. One morning as I was reading a play to my
289 sister, said I, 'Sister, God intends something for me, which we know
290 not of.' As I have been diligent in business, I believe many would
291 gladly have me for an apprentice, but every way seems to be barred
292 up, so that I think God will provide for me some way or other, that
293 we cannot apprehend.'

294

295 "Having thus lived with my mother for some considerable time, a
296 young student, who was once my schoolfellow, and then a servitor
297 of Pembroke College, Oxford, came to pay my mother a visit.
298 Amongst other conversation, he told her, how he had discharged all
299 college expenses that quarter, and saved a penny. Upon that, my

300 mother immediately cried out, 'This will do for my son !' Then
301 turning to me, she said, 'Will you go to Oxford, George ?' I replied,
302 'With all my heart.' Whereupon, having the same friends that this
303 young student had, my mother, without delay, waited on them. They
304 promised their interest, to get me a servitor's place in the same
305 college. She then applied to my old master who much approved of
306 my coming to school again. In about a week, I went and re-entered
307 myself ; and being grown much in stature, my master addressed me
308 thus : 'I see, George, you are advanced in stature, but your better
309 part must needs have gone backward.' This made me blush. He set
310 me something to translate into Latin, and though I had made no
311 application to my classics for so long a time, yet I had but one
312 inconsiderable fault in my exercises. This, I believe, somewhat
313 surprised my master.

314

315 "Being re-settled at school, I spared no pains to go forward in my
316 book. I learned much faster than I did before." But, whilst thus
317 assiduously preparing himself for college, it does not appear that he
318 began to study, with an express view to the ministry ; if however,
319 this was his object at the time, and if he never, altogether,
320 relinquished the design, which the composition of sermons betrayed,
321 then the following events furnish a melancholy insight, not only into
322 the presumption of his own heart, but into the prevailing maxims of
323 that age—upon the subject of the Christian ministry. These must
324 have been low and lax in the extreme, if they allowed such a young

325 man to anticipate office in the church. He was, indeed, diligent in
326 studying the classics, but he was, at the same time, living in the
327 indulgence of secret and open profligacy. "I got acquainted with a
328 set of debauched, abandoned, and atheistical youths—I took pleasure
329 in their lewd conversation—I affected to look rakish, and was in a
330 fair way of being as infamous as the worst of them." It is hardly
331 possible to conceive that, while in this state, he should have
332 contemplated the ministry as his object ; and yet there is reason to
333 fear that the tone of public feeling, at the time, was such as to
334 impose little check upon the morals of ministerial candidates. Even
335 now holy character is not indispensable, either in college halls, or at
336 national altars ; and then, as we shall see, it was still less so. Certain
337 it is, that Whitefield's reformation was neither suggested nor
338 enforced, in the first instance, by any thing moral or religious which
339 the general practice of the church insisted upon. Whatever the letter
340 of her requirements calls for in candidates, the spirit of them was, in
341 a great measure, evaporated in that age.

342
343 I have already said that Whitefield is silent upon the subject of his
344 express design in preparing himself for the University ; but, there
345 being no evidence that he ever contemplated any other profession
346 than the ministerial, and it being the only one for which he had
347 evinced the shadow of a partiality, or was likely to succeed in, under
348 his circumstances,—we must conclude, that he had it in view from
349 the beginning. Such, in all probability, being the fact, it might be

350 expected, that the bare idea of becoming a minister would, of itself,
351 have imposed a restraint upon his passions ;—but neither its own
352 solemnity, nor the tone of ecclesiastical feeling at the time, had any
353 moral influence upon him. "I went," he says, "to public service only
354 to make sport and walk about." At this time he was nearly seventeen
355 years of age, a period of life when he must have been capable of
356 understanding what is expected from a clergyman. And yet, nothing
357 which he saw or heard on this subject seems to have suggested the
358 necessity of reformation. "God stopped me when running on in a full
359 career of vice. For, just as I was upon the brink of ruin, He gave me
360 such a distaste of their (his companions') principles and practices,
361 that I discovered them to my master, who soon put a stop to their
362 proceedings."

363

364 I have been the more minute in recording this event, because without
365 clear and correct ideas of the prevailing tone of public and
366 ecclesiastical feeling, at the time, no fair estimate can be formed of
367 the spirit in which Methodism originated at Oxford.

368

369 The breaking up of that vicious combination which existed in the
370 school of St. Mary de Crypt produced an important change in the
371 morals of Whitefield. "Being thus delivered out of the snare of the
372 devil, I began to be more and more serious, and felt God at different
373 times working powerfully and convincingly upon my soul." This
374 improvement of character was so evident, that his friends did not fail

375 to welcome it. It was, however, but external at first. "One day as I
376 was coming down-stairs, and overheard my friends speaking well of
377 me, God deeply convicted me of hypocrisy." This timely discovery
378 fixed his attention upon the state of his heart, and gave to his
379 reformation a more religious character.

380

381 "Being now near the seventeenth year of my age, I was resolved to
382 prepare myself for the holy sacrament ; which I received on
383 Christmas day. I began now to be more watchful over my thoughts,
384 words, and actions. I kept the following Lent, fasting Wednesday
385 and Friday, thirty-six hours together. My evenings, when I had done
386 waiting upon my mother, were generally spent in acts of devotion,
387 reading Drelincourt 'Upon Death,' and other practical books, and I
388 constantly went to public worship twice a day. Being now upper
389 boy, I made some reformation amongst my schoolfellows. I was
390 very diligent in reading and learning the classics, and in studying my
391 Greek Testament ; but I was not yet convinced of the absolute
392 unlawfulness of playing at cards, and of reading and seeing plays,
393 though I began to have some scruples about it. Near this time, I
394 dreamed that I was to see God on mount Sinai, but was afraid to
395 meet him. This made a great impression upon me, and a
396 gentlewoman to whom I told it, said, "George, this is a call from
397 God."

398

399 Whatever may be thought of the dream, or of the interpretation, such
400 hints have more frequently determined the character and pursuits of
401 young men, than more rational means. There is, to a susceptible
402 mind, a peculiar fascination in these mysterious oracles ; and, after
403 all that has been said of their folly and fallacy, they continue to
404 govern the choice of many, and are still followed as leading stars,—
405 whilst sober advice is regarded as a dull finger-post on the road of
406 life. In the present instance the imaginary omens were not useless. "I
407 grew more serious after my dream, but yet hypocrisy crept into
408 every action. As once I affected to look more rakish, I now strove to
409 look more grave than I really was. However, an uncommon concern
410 and alteration was visible in my behaviour, and I often used to find
411 fault with the lightness of others. One night as I was going on an
412 errand for my mother, an unaccountable but very strong impression
413 was made upon my heart, that I should preach quickly. When I came
414 home, I innocently told my mother what had befallen me, but she
415 (like Joseph's parents, when he told them his dream) turned short
416 upon me, crying out, 'What does the boy mean ? Prithee, hold thy
417 tongue !'

418

419 "For a twelvemonth I went on in a round of duties, receiving the
420 sacrament monthly, fasting frequently, attending constantly on
421 public worship, and praying, often more than twice a day, in private.
422 One of my brothers used to tell me, he feared this would not hold
423 long, and that I should forget all when I went to Oxford. This caution

424 did me much service ; for it set me on praying for perseverance.
425 Being now near eighteen years old, it was judged proper for me to
426 go to the University. God had sweetly prepared my way. The friends
427 before applied to, recommended me to the master of Pembroke
428 College. Another friend took up ten pounds upon bond (which I have
429 since repaid) to defray the first expense of entering ; and the master,
430 contrary to all expectation, admitted me servitor immediately.”

431

432 When Whitefield entered the University of Oxford, that seat of
433 learning had not shaken off the moral lethargy which followed the
434 ejection of the 2000 nonconformists. The Bartholomew Bushel,
435 under which those burning and shining lights were placed, proved an
436 extinguisher to the zeal of the luminaries that struck into the orbit of
437 uniformity. Those of them who retained their light lost their heat.
438 During the seventy years, which had elapsed since the expulsion of
439 the nonconformists, the Isis had been changing into a Dead sea, upon
440 the banks of which the tree of life shriveled into a tree of mere
441 human knowledge ; and, in the adjacent halls, the doctrines of the
442 Reformation were superseded, in a great measure, by high church
443 principles. Even irreligion and infidelity were so prevalent at both
444 Universities, that when the statue of the age was chiselled by that
445 moral Phidias, BUTLER, they seem to have furnished the model. “It
446 is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons,
447 that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is
448 now at length discovered to be fictitious ; and, accordingly, they

449 treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all
450 people of discernment ; and nothing remained but to set it up as a
451 principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals
452 for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world." Bishop
453 Butler's Analogy.

454

455 So much was this the character of the after-dinner conversations at
456 Oxford, that the recent change from gross ribaldry to decorum, used
457 to be appealed to with triumph, by Coleridge, and other modern
458 advocates—a fact, which betrays the former state of things. Even the
459 defenses of Christianity, which issued from the University press
460 during that age, betray the fatal secret : that they were as much
461 wanted for the gownsmen, as for the public. Bishop Butler says of
462 this state of things, "It is come, I know not how" ; but he might have
463 known soon, if he had studied the "analogy" between it and the
464 discipline of the colleges. What else could be expected from a nation
465 or a university, after seeing the brightest ornaments of the church
466 sacrificed to rites and ceremonies ; after seeing talents, learning, and
467 piety reckoned "as the small dust in the balance," when weighed
468 against robes and forms ? After witnessing diocesan and state
469 patronage withdrawn, and exchanged for penalties on such grounds,
470 it was not likely that Christianity would be better treated by the
471 nation, than its faithful ministers were by the government. From that
472 time, down to the year 1734, when Whitefield entered Pembroke

473 College, the motto of the University might have been, "We care less
474 for character than for conformity."

475

476 "A dissolution of all bonds ensued ;
477 The curbs invented for the mulish mouth
478 Of headstrong youth were broken ; bolts and bars
479 Grew rusty by disuse ; and massy gates
480 Forgot their office, opening with a touch ;
481 Till gowns at length are found mere masquerade ;
482 The tasseled cap, and the spruce band, a jest,
483 A mockery of the world !" —Cowper.

484

485 Such Whitefield found the general character of the Oxford students
486 to be. "I was quickly solicited to join in their excess of riot, by
487 several who lay in the same room. Once in particular, it being cold,
488 my limbs were so benumbed by sitting alone in my study, because I
489 would not go out amongst them, that I could scarce sleep all night. I
490 had no sooner received the sacrament publicly on a week day, at St.
491 Mary's, but I was set up as a mark for all the polite students, that
492 knew me, to shoot at ; for though there is a sacrament at the
493 beginning of every term, at which all, especially the seniors, are by
494 statute obliged to be present ; yet, so dreadfully has that once faithful
495 city played the harlot, that very few masters, no graduates, (but the
496 methodists,) attended upon it."

497

498 I quote the latter part of this extract, not to deplore the falling off in
499 attendance, as Whitefield does : the sacrament was
500
501 "More honoured in the breach, than the observance"
502
503 of the statute, by such men ; but the breach illustrates both the state
504 of discipline and of religion at the time. There were, however, some
505 lilies among the rank thorns of Oxford. Of these solitary exceptions,
506 the Wesleys and their associates were the most exemplary. This little
507 band had then existed during five years, and were called, in derision,
508 methodists. Their regular habits and rigid virtue, were proverbial
509 throughout the University and the city. They were the friends of the
510 poor, and the patrons of the serious. But, with all these excellences
511 of character, the Wesleys united much enthusiasm, and an almost
512 incredible degree of ignorance in regard to the gospel. Their avowed
513 object, in all their voluntary privations and zealous efforts, was, to
514 save their souls, and to live wholly to the glory of God : a noble
515 enterprise, certainly ; but undertaken by them from erroneous
516 motives, and upon wrong principles. For any relief which their
517 consciences seem to have obtained from the death of the Son of God,
518 and the free salvation proclaimed in virtue of it, the gospel might
519 have been altogether untrue or unknown ; so grossly ignorant were
520 the whole band at one time. And yet, at this period, Mr. John Wesley
521 was a fellow of Lincoln College, and teaching others. Nine years

522 before, he had been ordained by Dr. Potter, who was afterwards
523 archbishop of Canterbury.

524

525 This fact reveals one of two things : either, that the young men were
526 very inattentive to the theological lectures delivered from the
527 divinity chair, or that the lectures themselves were very unscriptural.
528 Perhaps the fault lay partly on both sides ; for it is highly probable,
529 that such young men would underrate the cold, systematic lectures of
530 a professor. I am led to form this opinion, because the celebrated
531 mystic, William Law, was, at the time, their oracle. They imitated
532 his ascetic habits, and imbibed his spirit of quietism. He had said to
533 John Wesley, who was likely to circulate the notion, "You would
534 have a philosophical religion, but there can be no such thing.
535 Religion is the most simple thing : it is only, We love Him because
536 he first loved us." Such indefinite maxims assimilated, but too
537 readily, with the mystic temper of the persons they were addressed
538 to ; and silent contemplation, in solitude, being the very spirit of
539 Law's system, Wesley and his associates were not likely to relish
540 argumentative theology, however excellent.

541

542 The following account of their devotional habits, will illustrate the
543 true character of their religious sentiments, at the time of
544 Whitefield's arrival from Gloucester, "They interrogate themselves
545 whether they have been simple and recollected ; whether they have
546 prayed with fervour, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and on Saturday

547 noon ; if they have used a collect at nine, twelve, and three o'clock ;
548 duly meditated on Sunday, from three to four, on Thomas à Kempis ;
549 or mused on Wednesday and Friday, from twelve to one, on the
550 Passion.” Thus were they monks in almost every thing except the
551 name.

552

553 It was necessary to delineate thus minutely the original character of
554 methodism, that its natural influence upon the susceptible mind of
555 Whitefield may be anticipated. Suffering and smarting, as he did,
556 from vicious indulgence, and now seriously bent upon the ministry,
557 he was not likely to associate with the profligate or the profane in the
558 University. He did not. “God gave me grace to withstand, when they
559 solicited me to join in their excess of riot. When they perceived they
560 could not prevail, they let me alone, as a singular, odd fellow.” He
561 did not, however, join himself to the methodists at once. “The young
562 men, so called, were then much talked of at Oxford. I heard of and
563 loved them before I came to the University ; and so strenuously
564 defended them, when I heard them reviled by the students, that they
565 began to think that I also, in time, should be one of them. For above
566 a twelvemonth, my soul longed to be acquainted with some of them,
567 and I was strongly pressed to follow their good example, when I saw
568 them go through a ridiculing crowd, to receive the holy eucharist at
569 St. Mary's.”

570

571 How much he was prepared to enter into their peculiar spirit when
572 he did join them, will appear also from the following hint. "Before I
573 went to the University, I met with Mr. Law's 'Serious Call to Devout
574 Life,' but had not money to purchase it. Soon after my coming up to
575 the University, seeing a small edition of it in a friend's hand, I soon
576 procured it. God worked powerfully upon my soul by that excellent
577 treatise." Thus, like two drops of water, they were quite prepared to
578 unite whenever they came in contact. And this soon occurred. "It
579 happened that a poor woman, in one of the workhouses, had
580 attempted to cut her throat, but was happily prevented. Upon hearing
581 of this, and knowing that the two Mr. Wesleys were ready to every
582 good work, I sent a poor aged apple-woman of our college, to inform
583 Mr. Charles Wesley of it ; charging her not to discover who sent her.
584 She went ; but, contrary to my orders, told my name. He having
585 heard of my coming to the castle, and to a parish church sacrament,
586 and having met me frequently walking by myself, followed the
587 woman when she was gone away, and sent an invitation to me by
588 her, to come to breakfast with him the next morning. I thankfully
589 embraced the opportunity. My soul, at that time, was athirst for some
590 spiritual friends to lift up my hands when hung down, and to
591 strengthen my feeble knees. He soon discovered it, and, like a wise
592 winner of souls, made all his discourses tend that way. And when he
593 put into my hands Professor Frank's 'Treatise against the Fear of
594 Man,' and 'The Country Parson's Advice to his Parishioners,' I took
595 my leave.

596

597 "In a short time he let me have another book, entitled, 'The Life of
598 God in the Soul of Man' ; and though I had fasted, watched, and
599 prayed, and received the sacrament so long, yet I never knew what
600 true religion was, till God sent me that excellent treatise, by the
601 hands of my never-to-be-forgotten friend. At my first reading it, I
602 wondered what the author meant by saying that some falsely placed
603 religion in going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in
604 the duties of the closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to
605 give alms to their poor neighbours.' Alas ! thought I, if this be not
606 religion, what is ? God soon showed me ; for in reading a few lines
607 further, that 'true religion was a union of the soul with God, and
608 Christ formed within us,' a ray of divine light was instantaneously
609 darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I
610 know that I must be a new creature."

611

612 This was an important era in Whitefield's experience ; and, if he had
613 been left to the guidance of the book that suggested the necessity of
614 regeneration, his feet might soon have stood upon the Rock of ages.
615 He was now in the right track to Calvary ; and, with his anxiety to
616 "be born again," would have held on, until he had discovered that,
617 "to as many as received Him, Christ gave power to become the sons
618 of God ; even to them that believe on his name." But, unhappily,
619 Whitefield was not left to follow out his own convictions : Charles
620 Wesley —"ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to

621 establish his own righteousness”—interfered with the young convert,
622 and inoculated him with the virus of legality and quietism. Before
623 Whitefield had time to acquire from the gospel the relief which his
624 heavy-laden conscience longed for, he was introduced to the
625 methodists ; from kind motives on the part of his zealous friend, no
626 doubt ; but unhappily for himself. The intimacy well nigh proved
627 fatal to his life, and to his reason.

628

629 “From time to time, Mr. Wesley permitted me to come unto him, and
630 instructed me as I was able to bear it. By degrees he introduced me
631 to the rest of his Christian brethren. I now began, like them, to live
632 by rule, and to pick up every fragment of my time, that not a
633 moment of it might be lost. Like them, having no weekly sacrament
634 (although the Rubrick required it) at our own college, I received
635 every Sunday at Christ-Church. I joined with them in keeping the
636 stations, by fasting Wednesdays and Fridays, and left no means
637 unused which I thought would lead me nearer to Jesus Christ. By
638 degrees I began to leave off eating fruits and such like, and gave the
639 money I usually spent in that way to the poor. Afterward I always
640 chose the worst sort of food, though my place furnished me with
641 variety. My apparel was mean. I thought it unbecoming a penitent to
642 have his hair powdered. I wore woolen gloves, a patched gown, and
643 dirty shoes ; and though I was then convinced that the kingdom of
644 God did not consist in meats and drinks, yet I resolutely persisted in
645 these voluntary acts of self- denial, because I found them great

646 promoters of the spiritual life. It was now suggested to me, that Jesus
647 Christ was amongst the wild beasts when he was tempted, and that I
648 ought to follow his example ; and being willing, as I thought, to
649 imitate Jesus Christ, after supper I went into Christ-Church walk,
650 near our college, and continued in silent prayer nearly two hours ;
651 sometimes lying flat on my face, sometimes kneeling upon my
652 knees. The night being stormy, it gave me awful thoughts of the day
653 of judgment. The next night I repeated the same exercise at the same
654 place. Soon after this, the holy season of Lent came on, which our
655 friends kept very strictly ; eating no flesh during the six weeks,
656 except on Saturdays and Sundays. I abstained frequently on
657 Saturdays also, and ate nothing on the other days (except Sunday)
658 but sage-tea without sugar, and coarse bread. I constantly walked out
659 in the cold mornings, till part of one of my hands was quite black.
660 This, with my continued abstinence, and inward conflicts, at length
661 so emaciated my body, that, at Passion-week, finding I could scarce
662 creep up stairs, I was obliged to inform my kind tutor of my
663 condition, who immediately sent for a physician to me.”

664

665 While it is impossible to read this catalogue of extravagances,
666 without pitying the wretched sufferer and his superstitious friends, it
667 is equally impossible to refrain from smiling and frowning,
668 alternately, at the gross absurdities of quietism, and the foolish
669 requirements of the Rubrick. Many of both are equal outrages upon
670 common sense ; to say nothing of their being unscriptural. But these

671 were not the only baneful effects of Whitefield's intimacy with the
672 methodists. "The course of my studies I soon entirely changed :
673 whereas, before, I was busied in studying the dry sciences, and
674 books that went no farther than the surface, I now resolved to read
675 only such as entered into the heart of religion. Meeting with
676 Castanza's 'Spiritual Combat,' in which he says, that 'he that is
677 employed in mortifying his will, was as well employed as though he
678 was converting the Indians,' Satan so imposed upon my
679 understanding, that he persuaded me to shut myself up in my study,
680 till I could do good with a single eye ; lest in endeavouring to save
681 others, I should, at last, by pride and self-complacence, lose myself.
682 When Castanza advised to talk but little, Satan said, I must not talk
683 at all ; so that I, who used to be the most forward in exhorting my
684 companions, have sat whole nights without speaking at all. Again,
685 when Castanza advised to endeavour after a silent recollection, and
686 waiting upon God, Satan told me, I must leave all forms, and not use
687 my voice in prayer at all." These habits soon affected his college
688 exercises also. "Whenever I endeavoured to compose my theme, I
689 had no power to write a word, nor so much as to tell my Christian
690 friends of my inability to do it. All power of meditating, or even
691 thinking, was taken from me. My memory quite failed me. And I
692 could fancy myself to be like nothing so much as a man locked up in
693 iron armour."
694

695 Having twice neglected to produce the weekly theme, his tutor called
696 him into the common room, after fining him, and kindly inquired
697 whether any calamity had befallen him, or what was the reason of
698 his neglect ? "I burst into tears, and assured him, that it was not out
699 of contempt of authority, but that I could not act otherwise. Then, at
700 length, he said, he believed I could not ; and, when he left me, told a
701 friend (as he very well might) that he took me to be really mad. This
702 friend, hearing what had happened from my tutor, came to me,
703 urging the command in Scripture, 'to be subject to the higher
704 powers.' I answered, Yes; but I had a new revelation. Lord, what is
705 man ! "

706

707 During the progress of this direful malady, the Wesleys were not
708 wanting, either in attention or tenderness, to their unhappy friend ;
709 and if, like Job's friends, they were miserable comforters, still, their
710 motives claim the highest respect. They would have brought him "
711 water from the well of Bethlehem" at any expense ; but, like Hagar
712 weeping over her fainting child in the wilderness, their own eyes
713 were not then opened to see that well. It is only bare justice to make
714 this acknowledgment. I have exposed and censured, freely, the
715 ignorance, mysticism, and superstition of the Wesleys ; I have
716 deplored, in strong terms, the intimacy which Whitefield formed
717 with the Oxford methodists ; and traced to their maxims and habits,
718 as the direct cause, a great part of his extravagances ; but, in all this,
719 I have been actuated by no prejudice against his friends, nor do my

720 remarks upon methodism embrace the system as it now exists : they
721 are, hitherto, entirely confined to its character at Oxford. Then, its
722 influence, according to Mr. John Wesley's own acknowledgment,
723 was that "of leading him into the desert to be tempted and humbled,
724 and shown what was in his heart." Even Dr. Coke says of him, it is
725 certain that he was then very little acquainted with true experimental
726 religion. This is very obvious from the advice which he gave to
727 Whitefield, when his case was so pitiable, that Charles Wesley was
728 afraid to prescribe. "He advised me to resume all my externals,
729 though not to depend on them in the least." Now, however wise the
730 latter clause of this rule may be, the former part is pitiable : "all"
731 Whitefield's "externals" included many of the very habits which had
732 unhinged his mind, and ruined his health. He did, however, "resume
733 " them, and the result was, "a fit of sickness which continued during
734 seven weeks." His tutor seems to have been the only person about
735 him who acted wisely. Charles Wesley referred him to chapters in à
736 Kempis : 'John, to the maxims of quietism.' "My tutor lent me
737 books, gave me money, visited me, and furnished me with a
738 physician : in short, he behaved in all respects like a father."

739

740 The reader must not suppose, however, that Whitefield himself
741 arraigns the imprudence of his young friends ; or that he contrasts, as
742 I have ventured to do, their measures with those of his tutor : no,
743 indeed ; he records both with equal gratitude, and uniformly
744 pronounces benedictions upon the authors. Even when he became

745 the opponent of John Wesley, on the subject of "free grace," and
746 might have pointed his arguments by an appeal to the early errors of
747 his rival, he does not so much as hint at them, but prefaces his letter
748 by declaring, "Was nature to speak, I had rather die than write
749 against you." I, however, have no such scruples on this head : but,
750 while I shall avoid doing injustice to the Wesleys, I shall canvass as
751 freely their influence upon Whitefield, as that of any other persons
752 with whom he came in contact. The formation of his character must
753 be shown, without regard to the light in which it may exhibit the
754 forces that determined it.

755

756 The seven weeks of sickness, already mentioned, Whitefield calls, "a
757 glorious visitation." "The blessed Spirit was all this time purifying
758 my soul. All my former gross, notorious, and even my heart sins
759 also, were now set home upon me ; of which I wrote down some
760 remembrances immediately, and confessed them before God
761 morning and evening." This exercise, although more humiliating and
762 mortifying than even his fasts and austerities, was infinitely more
763 useful. While they led him only to Castanza and à Kempis—this led
764 him directly to the gospel,
765 and to the throne of grace. Unable to sustain such views of the evil
766 of sin, and having failed, in all his former efforts, to remove a sense
767 of guilt by a series of observances, he was now shut up to the faith.
768 "Though weak, I often spent two hours in my evening retirements,
769 and prayed over my Greek Testament, and Bishop Hall's most

770 excellent 'Contemplations.' While thus engaged in searching the
771 Scriptures, he discovered the true grounds of a sinner's hope and
772 justification. The testimony of God concerning his Son became
773 "power unto salvation." " I found and felt in myself, that I was
774 delivered from the burden that had so heavily oppressed me. The
775 spirit of mourning was taken from me, and I knew what it was truly
776 to rejoice in God my Saviour. For some time I could not avoid
777 singing psalms wherever I was ; but my joy became gradually more
778 settled. Thus were the days of my mourning ended : after a long
779 night of desertion and temptation, the star, which I had seen at a
780 distance before, began to appear again : the day-star arose in my
781 heart."

782

783 Such is the history of Whitefield's conversion : in this manner was
784 he rescued from the malignant snares of the devil, and from the blind
785 guidance of friends who were unconsciously strengthening these
786 snares, and unintentionally enabling the arch-deceiver to keep this
787 brand in the burning. This, I am aware, is strong language ; and, by
788 many, will be considered unwarrantable : but, as Whitefield will
789 ever be a grand object of attention in the church of Christ ; and as
790 myriads, yet unborn, will study his character or hear of his
791 conversion ; it shall not be my fault, if that conversion is
792 misunderstood by posterity, or any thing gathered from it in behalf
793 of such methodism as he was led into then.

794

795 I duly appreciate the benevolence, the zeal, and the sincerity of the
796 Wesleys ; but, in this instance, and at that time, those virtues rank no
797 higher in them, than the same virtues in Mahomedans or Hindoos
798 ;—amount to no more at Oxford than they would at Mecca or
799 Benares. Now if, instead of the Wesleys, the same number of
800 Wahabees had been about Whitefield, inculcating their simplified
801 Islamism; who would have ascribed to them, or to it, any usefulness
802 ? Both would have been arraigned, as diverting him from the gospel
803 of Christ ; nor would the sincerity of the Wahabees, or the self-
804 denying character of their habits, have shielded either from severe
805 reprehension. The only apology that any one would have thought of
806 offering for them, would have been, "I wot that through ignorance ye
807 did it." In like manner I am quite ready to say of the Wesleys, "I bear
808 them record, that they had a zeal of God ; but not according to
809 knowledge :” a fact, which neutralizes their Oxford piety into well-
810 meant superstition. Such explanations are wanted, now that
811 devotion apart from faith, and penitential feeling apart from the
812 knowledge of "the truth," are often hailed as conversion to God. This
813 is a sore evil under the sun ; and one not easily touched, without
814 seeming to slight symptoms of piety. I must, however, attempt to
815 unmask this plausible "form of godliness," whatever suspicions my
816 freedom may awaken.

817

818 Whitefield, in the simplicity of his heart, calls the events of this
819 period " the dealings of God" with him, and records them as the

820 gradual steps by which he was led to believe in Christ for
821 righteousness. And, so far as they were made instrumental in
822 discovering to him his own weakness, and in weaning him from sin
823 and vanity, they were "the dealings of God ;" but, so far as his
824 maxims and habits were superstitious and unscriptural, God must not
825 be identified with them, nor even implicated in the least. All the
826 hand He had in this part of the transaction was, that he made these
827 austerities and superstitions their own punishment, and prevented
828 them from ruining an ignorant young man. So far as their own
829 natural influence went, it increased the spirit of bondage, and
830 diverted the sinner from God's appointed remedy. We have seen
831 from Whitefield's own acknowledgments, and Wesley's too, that the
832 further such measures were pursued, the further the methodists were
833 from solid relief. Now, it cannot be supposed for a moment, that
834 God's dealings with the soul divert it from the Saviour ; nor that
835 anything is the work of His Spirit on the heart, which leads to
836 absurdities and extravagance. And if this be granted, then a great
837 part of those things in the experience of Whitefield, which strike the
838 mind so forcibly, lose all their importance, except as facts. As
839 feelings, motives, or maxims in religion, they have no weight ; but
840 were, while they continued, the actual rivals of faith and evangelical
841 repentance. For any thing, therefore, which appears to the contrary,
842 his conversion would not have been less genuine, if he had never
843 gone through the exercise of mind produced by these causes. The
844 horror, the depression, the despair, which preceded his being born

845 again, were neither elementary nor necessary parts of regeneration.
846 Humanly speaking, a clear exhibition of the plan of salvation, if
847 presented to him when he entered Oxford, would have relieved his
848 mind at once, and introduced him into the liberty of the sons of God.
849 He was not, indeed, so fully prepared to prize the gospel then, as
850 when he did believe it with the heart ; but, although less humble, less
851 in earnest, at the time of his arrival, even then he was awakened to a
852 sense of his guilt and danger. Now, the question is, would not the
853 gospel itself, if it had been preached to him at this time, have
854 effected a change of heart ? Would not the glad tidings of a finished
855 salvation, addressed to him, as he was, have melted, humbled, and
856 converted him, without the preliminary process he went through ?
857 The only thing valuable in that process is, the humbling effect of it ;
858 but if the same kind and degree of humility would result from
859 believing the gospel, then, faith in Christ ought to be the first step
860 pressed upon an awakened sinner.

861

862 I have been induced to throw out these hints, because so many
863 persons imagine that they have no warrant for believing in Christ,
864 until they experience such convictions, and possess such feelings, as
865 converts like Whitefield did. The consequence is, that they live on,
866 looking for what they call "a day of power," which shall qualify
867 them for the exercise of faith. This false and fatal maxim must not be
868 allowed to shelter itself in the example of Whitefield ; and that it
869 may not entrench itself there, I have felt it my duty to expose the true

870 character of his preliminary experience. It was useful ; but how ?
871 Not by its own direct influence ; that was injurious in every sense ;
872 but its usefulness in humbling, and in emptying him of self-
873 dependence, arose from its being overruled for good by the Spirit of
874 God. This being the fact, let no one quote Whitefield's experience in
875 proof of the necessity of going through such a process of awakening
876 as he underwent. The gospel itself is "power unto salvation to every
877 one that believeth ;" and nothing is religion, which precedes the
878 belief of it, except such exercises as naturally lead to faith.

879

880 Although I have grouped, into one view, the mental aberrations and
881 bodily sufferings of Whitefield whilst at Oxford, there were, during
882 the period it embraces, calm and lucid intervals, in which he
883 combined with his studies, efforts to do good in the city. Like his
884 friends, he was the friend of the poor ; but not without giving
885 offence to his superiors.

886

887 "I incurred the displeasure of the master of the college, who
888 frequently chided, and once threatened to expel me, if I ever visited
889 the poor again. Being surprised by this treatment, and overawed by
890 his authority, I spake unadvisedly with my lips, and said, if it
891 displeased him, I would not. My conscience soon smote me for this
892 sinful compliance. I immediately repented, and visited the poor the
893 first opportunity, and told my companions, if ever I was called to a
894 stake for Christ's sake, I would serve my tongue as Archbishop

895 Cranmer served his hand,—make that burn first.” Nor were his
896 efforts confined to private houses : he constantly visited the town
897 gaol to read and pray with, the prisoners. One instance of this is too
898 remarkable to be passed over.

899

900 “As I was walking along, I met with a poor woman whose husband
901 was then in bocardo, Oxford town gaol. Seeing her much
902 discomposed, I inquired the cause. She told me, that not being able
903 to bear the crying of her children, and having nothing to relieve
904 them, she had been to drown herself; but was mercifully prevented ;
905 and said, she was coming to my room to inform me of it. I gave her
906 some immediate relief, and desired her to meet me at the prison with
907 her husband in the afternoon. She came ; and there God visited them
908 both by his free grace. She was powerfully quickened; and when I
909 had done reading, he came to me like the trembling jailer, and
910 grasping my hand, cried out, ‘I am upon the brink of hell ! ‘ From
911 this time forward both of them grew in grace. God, by his
912 providence, soon delivered him from his confinement. Though
913 notorious offenders against God and one another before, yet now
914 they became helps meet for each other in the great work of their
915 salvation.”

916

917 In the same spirit he also exerted himself on behalf of his relations
918 and friends at Gloucester. His discovery of the necessity of
919 regeneration, like Melancthon’s discovery of the truth, led him to

920 imagine, that no one could resist the evidence which convinced his
921 own mind. “Upon this, like the woman of Samaria when Christ
922 revealed himself to her at the well, I had no rest in my soul, till I
923 wrote letters to my relations, telling them there was such a thing as
924 the new birth. I imagined they would have gladly received it ; but
925 alas ! my words seemed to them as idle tales. They thought I was
926 going beside myself.”

927

928 I have not been able to obtain any of the letters on this subject,
929 which he addressed to his own family ; but the following extract
930 from one to a friend, will be a sufficient specimen of their character.

931

932 “Lest you should imagine that true religion consists in any thing
933 besides an entire renewal of our nature into the image of God, I have
934 sent you a book entitled, “The Life of God in the Soul of Man,”
935 written by a young, but an eminent Christian which will inform you
936 what true religion is, and how you may attain it ; as, likewise, how
937 wretchedly most people err in their sentiments about it, who suppose
938 it to be nothing else (as he tells us, page 3) but a mere model of
939 outward performances ; without ever considering, that all our corrupt
940 passions must be subdued, and a complex habit of virtues—such as
941 meekness, lowliness, faith, hope, and the love of God and of man—
942 be implanted in their room, before we can have the least title to enter
943 into the kingdom of God. Our divine Master having expressly told
944 us, that unless we “renounce ourselves, and take up our cross daily,

945 we cannot be his disciples." And again, "unless we have the spirit of
946 Christ, we are none of his."

947

948 This advice met, we are informed, "with a cold reception," and was
949 an ungrateful subject to his friend at first; and yet, even while it was
950 so, such were his own confused notions of religion, that he urges his
951 friend to receive "the holy communion" frequently ; assuring him
952 that "nothing so much bedwarfs us in religion, as staying away from
953 the heavenly banquet." As if a man who had no relish for the
954 doctrine of regeneration, could have any religion !

955

956 Having thus noticed the line of conduct which, notwithstanding all
957 his crude notions, he pursued at Oxford,—I proceed now to record
958 the means by which he was supported during his stay at the
959 University. It will be recollected that his chief dependence was upon
960 the emoluments of servitorship.

961

962 "Soon after my acceptance I went and resided, and found my having
963 been used to a public-house was now of service to me. For, many of
964 the servitors being sick, at my first coming up, by my diligent and
965 steady attendance, I ingratiated myself into the gentlemen's favour
966 so far, that many who had it in their power chose me to be their
967 servitor. This much lessened my expense ; and, indeed, God was so
968 gracious, that with the profits of my place, and some little presents
969 made me by my kind tutor, for almost the first three years I did not

970 put all my relations together to above £24 expense." When he joined
971 himself to the methodists, the profits of his place were, as might be
972 expected, diminished : a number " took away their pay from me ;"
973 but other sources of supply were soon opened for him. Some of the
974 methodists having left Oxford about this time, and being solicitous
975 to keep up the society, wrote to Sir John Philips of London,
976 commending Whitefield to his patronage, "as a proper person" to
977 stay and encourage their friends in fighting the good fight of faith.
978 "Accordingly he immediately offered me an annuity of twenty
979 pounds. To show his disinterestedness, he has promised me that,
980 whether I continue here or not ; and if I resolve to stay at Oxon, he'll
981 give me thirty pounds a year. If that will not do, I may have more."
982 In this manner was he provided for, when his original resources
983 failed.

984

985 The state of his health, however, compelled him to quit, for a time,
986 his "sweet retirement" at Oxford. So long as he could, he resisted all
987 the persuasions of his tutor and physician, and all the invitations of
988 his mother to visit Gloucester. Their urgency at length prevailed, and
989 he returned home. " My friends were surprised to see me look and
990 behave so cheerfully, after the many reports they had heard
991 concerning me."

992

993 "However, I soon found myself to be as a sheep sent forth amongst
994 wolves in sheep's clothing ; for they immediately endeavoured to

995 dissuade me from a constant use of the means of grace; especially
996 from weekly abstinence, and receiving the blessed sacrament. But
997 God enabled me to resist them, steadfast in the faith; and, by keeping
998 close to him in his holy ordinances, I was made to triumph over all.”

999

1000 “Being unaccustomed for some time to live without spiritual
1001 companions, and finding none that would heartily join me—no, not
1002 one—I watched unto prayer all the day long ; beseeching God to
1003 raise me some religious associates in his own way and time. ‘I will
1004 endeavour either to find or make a friend’ had been my resolution
1005 now for some time, and therefore after importunate prayer one day, I
1006 resolved to go to the house of one Mrs. W—, to whom I had
1007 formerly read plays, Spectators, Pope’s Homer, and such-like trifling
1008 books ; hoping the alteration she now would find in my sentiments,
1009 might, under God, influence her soul. God was pleased to bless the
1010 visit with the desired effect : she received the word gladly : she
1011 wanted to be taught the way of God more perfectly, and soon
1012 became a fool for Christ’s sake.’ Not long after, God made me
1013 instrumental to awaken several young persons, who soon formed
1014 themselves into a little society, and had quickly the honour of being
1015 despised at Gloucester, as we had been before them at Oxford. Thus,
1016 all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution.”

1017

1018 As his efforts and usefulness, during the period of this visit to
1019 Gloucester, may be viewed as the dawn of his future zeal and

1020 success, it will be proper, before enumerating more instances, to
1021 record, distinctly, the manner in which he prepared himself for doing
1022 good to others.

1023

1024 “My mind being now more open and enlarged, I began to read the
1025 holy Scriptures upon my knees; laying aside all other books, and
1026 praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat
1027 indeed, and drink indeed, to my soul. I daily received fresh life,
1028 light, and power from above. I got more true knowledge from
1029 reading the book of God, in one month, than I could ever have
1030 acquired from all the writings of men. In one word, I found it
1031 profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction ; every way
1032 sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished for
1033 every good work and word. About this time God was pleased to
1034 enlighten my soul, and bring me into the knowledge of his free
1035 grace—and the necessity of being justified in His sight by faith only.
1036 This was more extraordinary, because my friends at Oxford had
1037 rather inclined to the mystic divinity. Burkitt’s and Henry’s
1038 Expositions were of admirable use, to lead me into this and all other
1039 gospel truths. It is the good old doctrine of the church of England ; it
1040 is what the holy martyrs, in Queen Mary’s time, sealed with their
1041 blood.” To these habits of reading, Whitefield added much secret
1042 prayer. “Oh, what sweet communion had I daily vouchsafed with
1043 God in prayer after my coming to Gloucester ! How often have I
1044 been carried out beyond myself, when meditating in the fields ! How

1045 assuredly I felt that Christ dwelt in me and I in Him, and how daily
1046 did I walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and was edified and
1047 refreshed in the multitude of peace !”

1048

1049 Such were Whitefield’s private habits while attempting to be useful
1050 in public. His zeal and success will now be understood.

1051

1052 “I always observed that as my inward strength increased, so my
1053 outward sphere of action increased proportionably. In a short time,
1054 therefore, I began to read to some poor people twice or thrice a
1055 week. I likewise visited two other little societies besides my own.
1056 Occasionally as business and opportunity permitted, I generally
1057 visited one or two sick persons every day ; and though silver and
1058 gold I had little of my own, yet in imitation of my Lord’s disciples,
1059 who entreated in behalf of the fainting multitude, I used to pray unto
1060 Him ; and he, from time to time, inclined several that were rich in
1061 this world, to give me money ; so that I generally had a little stock
1062 for the poor always in my hand. One of the poor, whom I visited in
1063 this manner, was called effectually by God at the eleventh hour : she
1064 was a woman above threescore years old ; and I really believe, died
1065 in the true faith of Jesus Christ.”

1066

1067 “At my first coming to Gloucester, being used to visit the prisoners
1068 at Oxford, I prayed most earnestly that God would open a door for
1069 me to visit the prisoners here also. Quickly after, I dreamed that one

1070 of the prisoners came to be instructed by me : it was much impressed
1071 upon my heart. In the morning I went to the door of the county gaol
1072 ;—I knocked, but nobody came to open it. I waited still upon God in
1073 prayer ; and in some months after, came a letter from a friend at
1074 Oxford, desiring me to go to one Pebworth, who had broken out of
1075 Oxford gaol, and was retaken at Gloucester. As soon as I read this
1076 letter, it appeared to me that my prayer was now answered.
1077 Immediately I went to the prison : I met with the person, and finding
1078 him and some others willing to hear the word of God, (having gained
1079 leave of the keeper and two ordinaries,) I constantly read to and
1080 prayed with them, every day I was in town. I also begged money for
1081 them, whereby I was enabled to release some of them, and cause
1082 provision to be distributed weekly among them ; as also to put such
1083 books into their hands as I judged most proper. I cannot say that any
1084 one of the prisoners was effectually wrought upon ; however, much
1085 evil was prevented, many were convinced, and my own soul was
1086 much edified and strengthened in the love of God and man.”

1087

1088 “During my stay here, God enabled me to give a public testimony of
1089 my repentance,—as to seeing and acting plays ; for, hearing the
1090 strollers had come to town, and knowing what an egregious offender
1091 I had been, I was stirred up to extract Mr. Law’s excellent treatise,
1092 entitled ‘The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage Entertainment.’
1093 The printer at my request put a little of it in the news, for six weeks
1094 successively; and God was pleased to give it his blessing.” In this

1095 manner Whitefield employed himself during nine months ; and one
1096 effect of pursuing such plans was, that "the partition-wall of bigotry
1097 and sect religion was soon broken down" in his heart. "I loved all, of
1098 whatever denomination, that loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity." This
1099 acknowledgment stands, in his diary, connected with an account of
1100 the benefit he derived from studying the works of the
1101 nonconformists. Baxter's "Call" and Allein's "Alarm," accorded so
1102 with his own ideas of fidelity and unction, that wherever he
1103 recognized their spirit he acknowledged "a brother beloved."

1104

1105 Upon this portion of his history, the mind dwells with almost
1106 unmixed delight : the only drawback is, the undue importance
1107 attached by him to dreams ; and even those, considered as an index
1108 to his waking thoughts, are interesting; revealing, as they do, his
1109 deep solicitude on behalf of souls. His zeal was now according to
1110 knowledge ;—his object, at once, definite and scriptural ;—his
1111 measures direct and rational,—and his motive truly evangelical.
1112 Drawing his own hope and consolation immediately from the oracles
1113 of God, he led others direct to the same source ; shutting up to the
1114 faith those he associated with. In this respect Whitefield presents a
1115 striking contrast to Wesley, at the commencement of his public
1116 exertions. The latter, although equally conscientious, was so crazed
1117 with the crude notions of the mystics, that when he left Oxford to
1118 visit Georgia, Law's "Christian Perfection" was almost his text-
1119 book, while instructing his fellow-passengers. Accordingly the

1120 success of the two, at the time, was as different as the means which
1121 they severally adopted. While Whitefield won souls by reading the
1122 Scriptures, Wesley, by inculcating the austerities of the ascetics,
1123 laboured in vain : he was long "esteemed an Ishmael ; for his hand
1124 was against every man, and every man's hand was against him."

1125

1126 During the latter part of Whitefield's residence in Gloucester,
1127 although "despised " by many, his friends multiplied in spite of all
1128 the odium which his opinions and practice called forth. They became
1129 urgent for his immediate ordination, and solicitous to see him in a
1130 sphere worthy of his talents and zeal. But such were, now, his views
1131 of the ministry, that he put a decided negative upon all their
1132 applications ; entrenching his refusal in a resolution of the diocesans,
1133 "not to ordain any under twenty-three years of age." He was not yet
1134 twenty-one. This apparently insurmountable objection was, however,
1135 soon removed. He obtained, about this time, an introduction to Lady
1136 Selwyn, who had marked her approbation of him by a handsome
1137 present of money, and by an immediate application to the bishop on
1138 his behalf. The character she seems to have given of him had its due
1139 weight with Dr. Benson. "As I was coming from the cathedral
1140 prayers, thinking of no such thing, one of the vergers called after me,
1141 and said, the bishop desired to speak with me. I immediately turned
1142 back, considering within myself, what I had done to deserve his
1143 Lordship's displeasure. When I came to the top of the palace stairs,
1144 the bishop took me by the hand, told me he was glad to see me, and

1145 bid me wait a little, till he had put off his habit, and he would return
1146 to me again. This gave me an opportunity of praying to God for his
1147 assistance, and adoring him for his providence over me. At his
1148 coming again into the room, the bishop told me that he had heard of
1149 my character, liked my behaviour at church ; and, inquiring my age,
1150 said, ‘notwithstanding I have declared I would not ordain any one
1151 under three and twenty, yet I shall think it my duty to ordain you,
1152 whenever you come for holy orders.’ He then made me a present of
1153 five guineas to buy me a book.” Thus was the chief external
1154 hindrance removed at once ; and with it, his hesitation vanished.
1155 “From the time I first entered the University, especially from the
1156 time I knew what was true and undefiled Christianity, I entertained
1157 high thoughts of the importance of the ministerial office, and was
1158 not solicitous what place should be prepared for me, but how I
1159 should be prepared for a place. That saying of the apostle, ‘Not a
1160 novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the condemnation
1161 of the devil ;’ and that first question of our excellent ordination
1162 office, Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost
1163 to take upon you this office and administration ?’ used even to make
1164 me tremble, whenever I thought of entering into the ministry. The
1165 shyness of Moses and some other prophets, when God sent them out
1166 in a public capacity, I thought was sufficient to teach me, not to run
1167 until I was called. He who knoweth the hearts of men, is witness that
1168 I never prayed more earnestly against any thing, than I did against
1169 entering into this service of the church, so soon. Oftentimes I have

1170 been in an agony in prayer, when under convictions of my
1171 insufficiency for so great a work ;—with strong cries and tears, I
1172 have frequently said, ‘Lord, I am a youth of uncircumcised lips :
1173 Lord, send me not into thy vineyard yet !’ And sometimes I had
1174 reason to think God was angry with me for resisting his will.
1175 However, I was resolved to pray thus as long as I could. If God did
1176 not grant my request in keeping me out of it, I knew his grace would
1177 be sufficient to support and strengthen me whenever he sent me into
1178 the ministry.”

1179

1180 “To my prayers I added my endeavours, and wrote letters to my
1181 friends at Oxford, beseeching them to pray to God to disappoint my
1182 country friends, who were for my taking orders as soon as possible.
1183 Their answer was, ‘Pray we the Lord of the harvest to send thee and
1184 many more labourers into his harvest.’ Another old and worthy
1185 minister of Christ, when I wrote to him about the meaning of the
1186 word novice, answered, it meant a novice in grace, and not in years ;
1187 and he was pleased to add—if St. Paul were then at Gloucester, he
1188 believed St. Paul would ordain me. All this did not satisfy me : I still
1189 continued instant in prayer against going into holy orders, and was
1190 not thoroughly convinced it was the divine will, till God by his
1191 providence brought me acquainted with the bishop of Gloucester.
1192 Before I came home, the news had reached my friends, who being
1193 fond of my having such a great man’s favour, were very solicitous to
1194 know the event of my visit, Many things I hid from them ; but when

1195 they pressed me hard, I was obliged to tell them how the bishop, of
1196 his own accord, had offered to give me holy orders whenever I
1197 would. On which they, knowing how I had depended on the
1198 declaration his Lordship had made some time ago, said, and I then
1199 began to think myself, that, if I held out any longer, I should fight
1200 against God. At length I came to a resolution, by God’s leave, to
1201 offer myself for holy orders the next Ember-days.”¹

1202

1203 Having thus surmounted his difficulties, he proceeded at once to
1204 prepare himself for ordination. He had, before, satisfied himself of
1205 the truth of the Thirty-nine Articles, by comparing them with the
1206 Scriptures ; but it does not appear that the Prayer Book, as a whole,
1207 was submitted to the same test : he seems to have taken its truth for
1208 granted. This is the more remarkable, because in every thing else he
1209 was conscientious.

1210

1211 “I strictly examined myself by the qualifications required for a
1212 minister, in St. Paul’s Epistle to Timothy, and also by every question
1213 that I knew would be put to me at the time of my ordination. This

1213

¹ Ember days are four separate sets of three days within the same week—specifically, the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday—roughly equidistant in the circuit of the year, that were formerly set aside for fasting and prayer. These days set apart for special prayer and fasting were considered especially suitable for the ordination of clergy.

1214 latter, I drew out in writing at large, and sealed my approbation of it
1215 every Sunday at the blessed sacrament. At length, Trinity Sunday
1216 being near at hand, having my testimonial from the college, I went a
1217 fortnight beforehand, to Gloucester, intending to compose some
1218 sermons, and to give myself more particularly to prayer. When I
1219 came to Gloucester, notwithstanding I strove and prayed for several
1220 days, and had matter enough in my heart, yet I was so restrained,
1221 that I could not compose any thing at all. I mentioned my case to a
1222 clergyman : he said, I was an enthusiast. I wrote to another, who was
1223 experienced in the divine life : he gave me some reasons, why God
1224 might deal with me in that manner ; and, withal, promised me his
1225 prayers. The remainder of the fortnight I spent in reading the several
1226 missions of the prophets and apostles, and wrestled with God to give
1227 me grace to follow their good examples.

1228

1229 "About three days before the time appointed for ordination, the
1230 bishop came to town. The next evening I sent his Lordship an
1231 abstract of my private examination upon these two questions : Do
1232 you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost, to take
1233 upon you this office and administration?' And, Are you called
1234 according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ and the laws of this
1235 realm ?' The next morning I waited upon the bishop. He received me
1236 with much love; telling me, he was glad I was come, and that he was
1237 satisfied with the preparation I had made. Upon this I took my leave
1238 ; abashed with God's goodness to such a wretch, but, withal,

1239 exceedingly rejoiced, that, in every circumstance, he made my way
1240 into the ministry so very plain before my face ! This, I think, was on
1241 Friday. The day following I continued in abstinence and prayer. In
1242 the evening, I retired to a hill near the town, and prayed fervently,
1243 for about two hours, on behalf of myself and those that were to be
1244 ordained with me. On Sunday morning I rose early, and prayed over
1245 St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, and more particularly over that
1246 precept, 'Let no one despise thy youth.' When I went up to the altar,
1247 I could think of nothing but Samuel's standing a little child before
1248 the Lord, with a linen ephod. When the bishop laid his hands upon
1249 my head, my heart was melted down, and I offered up my whole
1250 spirit, soul, and body, to the service of God's sanctuary. I read the
1251 gospel, at the bishop's command, with power, and afterward sealed
1252 the good confession I had made before many witnesses, by partaking
1253 of the holy sacrament."

1254

1255 His feelings and views upon this solemn occasion, are recorded, still
1256 more forcibly, in two letters to a friend. The first is so excellent, that
1257 no apology is required for inserting it here entire.

1258

1259 "Gloucester, June 20th, 1736.

1260 "My dear friend,

1261 This is a day much to be remembered, O, my soul! for, about noon, I
1262 was solemnly admitted by good Bishop Benson, before many
1263 witnesses, into holy orders; and was, blessed be God ! kept

1264 composed both before and after imposition of hands. I endeavoured
1265 to behave with unaffected devotion ; but not suitable enough to the
1266 greatness of the office I was to undertake. At the same time, I trust, I
1267 answered to every question from the bottom of my heart, and
1268 heartily prayed that God might say, Amen. I hope the good of souls
1269 will be my only principle of action. Let come what will—life or
1270 death, depth or height— I shall henceforward live like one who this
1271 day, in the presence of men and angels, took the holy sacrament,
1272 upon the profession of being inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to
1273 take upon me that ministration in the church. This I began with
1274 reading prayers to the prisoners in the county gaol. Whether I myself
1275 shall ever have the honour of styling myself—’a prisoner of the
1276 Lord,’ I know not ; but indeed, my dear friend, I can call heaven and
1277 earth to witness, that when the bishop laid his hand upon me, I gave
1278 myself up to be a martyr for Him who hung upon the cross for me.
1279 Known unto Him are all future events and contingencies. I have
1280 thrown myself blindfold, and, I trust, without reserve, into his
1281 almighty hands; only I would have you observe—that till you hear
1282 of my dying for or in my work,
1283 you will not be apprized of all the preferment that is expected by G.
1284 W.”

1285

1286 (To the same person)

1287

1288 “June 23

1289 "Dear friend,

1290

1291 Never a poor creature set up with so small a stock. My intention
1292 was, to make at least a hundred sermons, with which to begin the
1293 ministry ; but this is so far from being the case, that I have not a
1294 single one by me, except that which I made for a small Christian
1295 society, and which I sent to a neighbouring clergyman to convince
1296 him how unfit I was to take upon me the important work of
1297 preaching. He kept it for a fortnight, and then sent it back, with a
1298 guinea for the loan of it ; telling me, he had divided it into two, and
1299 had preached it morning and evening to his congregation. With this
1300 sermon I intend to begin, God willing, next Sunday. ... "Help, help
1301 me, my dear friend, with your warmest addresses to the throne of
1302 grace, that I may not only find mercy, but grace to help in time of
1303 need. ... O, cease not ; for I must again repeat it, cease not to pray
1304 for... G.W.

1305

1306 The intense energy of these appeals to God and man, forms a
1307 striking contrast to his first views of the ministry, and leads the mind
1308 to expect a corresponding energy in his preaching.

1309

1310 "Being restrained from writing, I could not preach in the afternoon,
1311 though much solicited thereto. But I read prayers to the poor
1312 prisoners ; being willing to let the first act of my ministerial office be
1313 an act of charity. The next morning, waiting upon God in prayer, to

1314 know what he would have me to do, these words, ‘Speak out, Paul,’
1315 came with great power to my soul. Immediately my heart was
1316 enlarged ; and I preached on the Sunday following to a very crowded
1317 audience, with as much freedom as though I had been a preacher for
1318 some years.”

1319

1320 The following letter illustrates the truth of this statement, and excites
1321 curiosity about the sermon itself.

1322

1323 “My dear friend,

1324

1325 Glory ! glory ! glory ! be ascribed to an Almighty Triune God. Last
1326 Sunday, in the afternoon, I preached my first sermon in the church of
1327 St. Mary De Crypt, where I was baptized, and also first received the
1328 sacrament of the Lord’s supper. Curiosity, as you may easily guess,
1329 drew a large congregation together on the occasion. The sight, at
1330 first, a little awed me; but I was comforted by a heartfelt sense of the
1331 divine presence, and soon found the unspeakable advantage of
1332 having been accustomed to public speaking when a boy at school;
1333 and of exhorting and teaching the prisoners, and poor people at their
1334 private houses, whilst at the University. By these means I was kept
1335 from being daunted overmuch. As I proceeded, I perceived the fire
1336 kindled, till at last, though so young, and amidst a crowd of those
1337 who knew me in my infant, childish days, I trust I was enabled to
1338 speak with some degree of gospel authority. Some few mocked, but

1339 most, for the present, seemed struck ; and I have since heard, that a
1340 complaint had been made to the bishop, that I drove fifteen mad by
1341 the first sermon. The worthy prelate, as I am informed, wished that
1342 the madness might not be forgotten before next Sunday. Before then,
1343 I hope my sermon upon He that is in Christ is a new creature,' will
1344 be completed. Blessed be God, I now find freedom in writing.
1345 Glorious Jesus!

1346
1347 Unloose my stammering tongue to tell
1348 Thy love immense, unsearchable! ‘
1349 Being thus engaged, I must hasten to subscribe myself—G. W.”

1350
1351 The sermon was on “The Necessity and Benefits of Religious
1352 Society,” from Eccles. iv. 9-12, “ Two are better than one,” &c. That
1353 Whitefield should have chosen to commence his public ministry
1354 with such a subject, can only be accounted for by a reference to his
1355 peculiar circumstances. The social religion of the Oxford methodists,
1356 and of the society he had formed in Gloucester, was a new thing, the
1357 principles of which required to be explained and defended. He had to
1358 leave, that week, the little flock collected during his visit. They were
1359 to be as sheep without a shepherd ; and that they might not disperse
1360 on his departure, he wisely vindicated the object of such meetings,
1361 and removed some of the odium attached to them. In this point of
1362 view, the subject was well chosen, and quite consistent with his
1363 determination to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ, and

1364 him crucified. The sermon will be found in the fifth volume of his
1365 works ; but as it is not printed from his own manuscript, it would be
1366 unfair to quote from it any specimens of his style. And yet, even in
1367 its present form, it breathes, in no ordinary degree, that freshness and
1368 warmth which characterize all his writings. It is not rolled from that
1369 " secret place of thunder," which the foregoing letters disclose in his
1370 bosom, and which afterward pealed like the cloud on Sinai ; but it
1371 contains earnestness of his future energy.

1372

1373 It is not generally known, and this is not the place to explain it, but it
1374 is the fact, that whilst Whitefield never lost sight of his ordination
1375 vows, his views of the form of episcopal ordination underwent such
1376 a change, that he declared to Ralph Erskine, of his own accord, "I
1377 knew of no other way then ; but I would not have it in that way
1378 again, for a thousand worlds." The letter containing this
1379 acknowledgment, will be found in the Scotch part of his history.

1380

1381 Perhaps no mind, since the apostolic age, has been more deeply
1382 affected, or suitably exercised, by "the laying on of hands," than
1383 Whitefield's was. A supernatural unction from the Holy One, could
1384 hardly have produced greater moral effects. That high sense of
1385 responsibility, that singleness of heart, that entire and intense
1386 devotedness of soul, body, and spirit, which characterized the first
1387 ambassadors of Christ, seems revived in him. Accordingly, after
1388 reading the narrative of his ordination, we naturally expect from

1389 Whitefield a sort of apostolic career. This would be anticipated, were
1390 we utterly ignorant of the result. After witnessing at the altar, a spirit
1391 wound up to the highest pitch of ardour, throbbing and thrilling with
1392 strong emotions, and, like a renovated eagle, impatient to burst off,
1393 we naturally look for a corresponding swiftness of flight and width
1394 of sweep ; and feel that we shall not be surprised by any thing which
1395 follows. His unbosomings of himself disclose in his heart a “secret
1396 place of thunder,” and “a fountain of tears,” from which we expect
1397 alternate bursts of terror and tenderness—bolts of Sinai, and dew of
1398 Hermon ; and we shall not be disappointed. Agreeably to his
1399 engagement with Sir John Philips, Whitefield returned to Oxford,
1400 and took out his bachelor’s degree. During his residence, he resumed
1401 the care of the methodist society, and of the poor. His stay at Oxford
1402 was, however, but short. He received and accepted an invitation to
1403 officiate for a time in the chapel of the Tower of London. His first
1404 sermon in the metropolis was, however, preached in Bishopsgate
1405 church. On entering the pulpit, his juvenile aspect excited a general
1406 sneer of contempt ; but he had not spoken long, when the sneer gave
1407 place to universal symptoms of wonder and pleasure. The sermon
1408 stamped his character at once ; and from that time his popularity in
1409 London continued to increase. During his stay, which only extended
1410 to two months, he maintained his usual habits of visiting the
1411 prisoners and the poor.
1412

1413 About this time, letters were received from the Wesleys and Ingham,
1414 then in Georgia. Their descriptions of the moral condition of the
1415 British colonies in America, affected his heart powerfully, and
1416 awakened in him a strong desire to preach the gospel abroad. It was
1417 an undertaking suited to his energetic and enterprising character ;
1418 and therefore sunk deeply amongst his thoughts. He could not,
1419 however, come to a final determination then, and therefore he
1420 returned to Oxford again. There, Whitefield devoted the chief part of
1421 his time to the study of Henry's Commentary ; which seems to have
1422 been a favourite book amongst his associates in the University.
1423 "God," says he, "works by him (Henry) greatly here." How highly
1424 he prized his own copy, may be judged from his gratitude when he
1425 was able to pay for it. To the friend who furnished it, he writes,
1426 "Herewith I send you seven pounds to pay for Mr. Henry's
1427 Commentary. Dear Esqr. Thorold made me a present of ten guineas,
1428 so that now (for ever blessed be divine goodness !) I can send you
1429 more than I thought for." In a former letter he had said, " I hope to
1430 send you, in a short time, two guineas towards paying for Henry's
1431 Exposition."

1432

1433 The study of this invaluable work was soon interrupted, by an
1434 invitation to officiate for a short time at Dummer in Hampshire. This
1435 was a very different sphere to any he had been accustomed. The
1436 people were equally poor and illiterate ; but he was soon reconciled
1437 to them, and acknowledged that during his stay he had "reaped much

1438 spiritual benefit.” While he continued at Dummer, he adhered rigidly
1439 to his system of economizing time ; dividing the day into three equal
1440 parts ; eight hours for sleep and meals ; eight for public prayers,
1441 catechizing, and visiting ; and eight for study and devotional
1442 retirement.

1443

1444 While thus occupied in obscurity, he was not forgotten in London : a
1445 profitable curacy in the metropolis was offered to him ; but the chord
1446 touched by the spiritual wants of Georgia, had not ceased to vibrate
1447 in his inmost soul. From the moment it was struck, Oxford had no
1448 magnet, Hampshire no charms, the metropolis no fascination, for the
1449 young evangelist. He promptly and decidedly declined the lucrative
1450 and attractive curacy, being intent on going abroad. And an
1451 opportunity of gratifying his truly missionary spirit soon presented
1452 itself. “He received letters,” says Dr. Gillies, “containing what he
1453 thought to be an invitation to go to Georgia, from Mr. John Wesley,
1454 whose brother came over about this time to procure more labourers.”
1455 The doctor might have said “letters containing what was an
1456 invitation :” for although, at a future period, it was insinuated that
1457 Whitefield had intruded himself upon the sphere of the Wesleys in
1458 America, the imputation is unwarranted. Charles Wesley both urged
1459 and encouraged him to leave England. The following extracts are
1460 from a poem addressed to Whitefield by Charles Wesley, at the time.

1461

1462 1.

1463 "Servant of God, the summons hear ;

1464 Thy Master calls—arise, obey !

1465 The tokens of his will appear,

1466 His providence points out the way.

1467 ...

1468

1469 8.

1470 "Champion of God, thy Lord proclaim ;

1471 Jesus alone resolve to know ;

1472 Tread down thy foes in Jesus' name ;

1473 Go ! conquering and to conquer, go.

1474

1475 9.

1476 " Through racks and fires pursue thy way ;

1477 Be mindful of a dying God ;

1478 Finish thy course, and win the day;

1479 Look up—and seal the truth with blood !"

1480

1481 This impassioned adjuration to proceed to America, proves that

1482 Whitefield did not intrude himself on the mission, nor run unent.

1483 Had Dr. Southey observed those lines, he would not have said, that

1484 "Charles did not invite him to the undertaking." The truth is, both

1485 brothers appealed to him in the form most likely to win his consent ;

1486 making the call appear to be from God. "Only Mr. Delamotte is with

1487 me," says John, "until God shall stir up the hearts of some of his

1488 servants to come over and help us. What if thou art the man, Mr.
1489 Whitefield ? Do you ask me what you shall have ? Food to eat, and
1490 raiment to put on ; a house to lay your head in, such as your Lord
1491 had not ; and a crown of glory that fadeth not away." This is a real
1492 invitation, or mockery ; and precisely in that spirit which Whitefield
1493 could not resist. Accordingly, on reading it, "his heart," he says,
1494 "leaped within him, and, as it were, echoed to the call," A
1495 concurrence of favourable circumstances at the time, enabled him,
1496 thus promptly, to embrace the proposal, and embark in the
1497 undertaking. Mr. Kinchin, the minister of Drummer had been chosen
1498 dean of Corpus Christi College, and was willing to take upon him
1499 the charge of the prisoners at Oxford ; Harvey undertook to supply
1500 his place in the curacy ; and in Georgia, the novel sphere of
1501 usefulness, and the warm friendship of Wesley, were equally
1502 attractive, as inducements to leave England. The resolution thus
1503 formed, he solemnly confirmed by prayer ; and, that it might not be
1504 shaken by his relations at Gloucester, he wrote to assure them, that
1505 unless they would promise not to dissuade him, he would embark
1506 without seeing them. This promise they gave ; but they forgot it
1507 when he arrived. His aged mother, as might be expected, wept sorely
1508 ; and others, as Dr. Southey observes, who had no such cause to
1509 justify their interference, represented to him what "pretty
1510 preferment" he might have if he would stay at home. But, none of
1511 these things moved him : their influence was defeated by his own
1512 prayers, and by the weight of the bishop's opinion ; who, as usual,

1513 received him like a father, approved of his determination, and
1514 expressed his confidence that God would enable him to do much
1515 good abroad. From Gloucester he went to take leave of his friends at
1516 Bristol. During this visit, the mayor appointed him to preach before
1517 the corporation : even the Quakers thronged to hear him. But the
1518 effect of his farewell sermons will be best told in his own words.
1519 "What shall I say ? Methinks it would be almost sinful to leave
1520 Bristol at this critical juncture. The whole city seems to be alarmed.
1521 Churches are as full on week-days, as they use to be on Sundays, and
1522 on Sundays so full, that many, very many are obliged to go away
1523 because they cannot come in. Oh that God would keep me always
1524 humble, and fully convinced that I am nothing without him ; and that
1525 all the good done upon earth, God himself cloth it." The word was
1526 sharper than a two-edged sword ; the doctrine of the new birth made
1527 its way like lightning into the hearers' consciences. Sanctify it, Holy
1528 Father ! to thine own glory and thy people's good."

1529

1530 Similar impressions were made in Bath and Gloucester, and
1531 unprecedented collections obtained for charitable objects. His stay
1532 was, however, short : he was called up to London to appear before
1533 General Oglethorpe, and the trustees of Georgia. Having been
1534 accepted by them, he was presented to the bishop and primate, who
1535 both highly approved of his mission. But his departure from England
1536 was delayed for some months, owing to the vessel in which he was
1537 to sail not being ready at the time expected. He therefore undertook

1538 to serve, for a while, the church of one of his friends at Stonehouse.
1539 In this retirement his communion with God was, at once, intimate
1540 and habitual. Could the trees of the wood speak, he says, they would
1541 tell what sweet communion he and his Christian brethren had, under
1542 their shade, enjoyed with their God. "Sometimes as I have been
1543 walking," he continues, "my soul would make such sallies, that I
1544 thought it would go out of the body. At other times I would be so
1545 overpowered with a sense of God's infinite majesty, that I would be
1546 constrained to throw myself prostrate on the ground, and offer my
1547 soul as a blank in his hands, to write on it what he pleased. One night
1548 was a time never to be forgotten. It happened to lighten exceedingly.
1549 I had been expounding to many people, and some being afraid to go
1550 home, I thought it my duty to accompany them, and improve the
1551 occasion, to stir them up to prepare for the coming of the Son of
1552 man. In my return to the parsonage, whilst others were rising from
1553 their beds, and frightened almost to death to see the lightning run
1554 upon the ground, I and another, a poor but pious countryman, were
1555 in the field, praising, praying to, and exulting in our God, and
1556 longing for that time when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in
1557 flaming fire.' Oh that my soul may be in a like frame when he shall
1558 actually come to call me !" He refers to this scene in one of his
1559 letters. "Honest James and I were out in the midst of the lightning,
1560 and never were more delighted in our lives. May we be as well
1561 pleased, when the Son of God cometh to judgment."
1562

1563 He came glowing from this mount of communion to Bristol again,
1564 prepared to preach the gospel with new energy ; and the people were
1565 prepared to hear it with new interest ; for such was the impatience
1566 for his return, that multitudes on foot, and some in coaches, were
1567 waiting to meet him, a mile from the city ; and a still greater number
1568 welcomed him, as he passed along the streets. And if the city was
1569 alarmed during his former visit, it was now electrified : persons of
1570 all ranks and denominations crowded to hear him ; and such was the
1571 pressure in every church, that he could hardly make his way to the
1572 reading desk. “ Some hung upon the rails of the organ loft, others
1573 climbed upon the leads of the church, and altogether made the
1574 church so hot with their breath, that the steam would fall from the
1575 pillars like drops of rain.” When he preached his farewell sermon,
1576 and said to the people that perhaps they might “see his face no
1577 more,” high and low, young and old, burst into tears. Multitudes
1578 followed him home with tears, and many with entreaties that he
1579 would remain in England ; but he was firm to his purpose, and
1580 merely consented to spend the next day in speaking with those who
1581 had been awakened under his ministry. This he did from seven in the
1582 morning, until midnight, when he stole away secretly to avoid the
1583 parade of a public escort.

1584

1585 After some brief intermediate visits, he arrived again in London.
1586 Here invitations to preach and administer the sacrament poured in
1587 upon him from so many churches, and were so promptly accepted by

1588 him, that his friends were afraid for his health ; the crowds at each
1589 church being so overwhelming. But his answer was, "I find by
1590 experience that the more I do, the more I may do, for God." This was
1591 said when he was in the habit of preaching four times on the sabbath,
1592 and had often to walk ten or twelve miles in going from one church
1593 to another, and to preach five times in the week besides. Such
1594 unprecedented labours might well be, as they were, called " mighty
1595 deeds" by the newspapers ; but, this kind of notice hurt his feelings.
1596 In a letter to a friend he expresses himself on the subject thus "I
1597 suppose you have heard of my mighty deeds, falsely so called by the
1598 newspapers ; for I find some back-friend has published abroad my
1599 preaching four times in a day ; but I beseech Mr. Raikes, the printer,
1600 never to put me in his news again upon any such account, for it is
1601 quite contrary to my inclinations and positive orders." To his friends,
1602 however, he was not reserved in communicating either the extent of
1603 his labours, or the symptoms of their success. In another letter to the
1604 same person he writes, "Last week, save one, I preached ten times in
1605 different churches ; and the last week, seven ; and yesterday four
1606 times, and read prayers twice, though I slept not an hour the night
1607 before, which was spent in religious conversation, &c. God still
1608 works more and more by my unworthy ministry. Many youths here
1609 sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ ; and thousands, I hope, are
1610 quickened, strengthened, and confirmed by the word preached. Last
1611 Sunday (in St. Dunstan's) at six in the morning, when I gave my
1612 farewell, the whole church was drowned in tears : they wept and

1613 cried aloud, as a mother weepeth for her first-born. Since that, there
1614 is no end of persons coming and weeping, telling me what God has
1615 done for their souls : others again beg little books, and desire me to
1616 write their names in them. The time would fail me, were I to relate
1617 how many have been awakened, and how many pray for me. The
1618 great day will discover all !" This will be more minutely detailed in
1619 the next chapter.

1620

1621 Having thus traced the amazing effects of Whitefield's first sermons,
1622 it will now be interesting to examine their general character, and to
1623 ascertain what were the truths which thus arrested and aroused the
1624 public mind. Three of these successful sermons can, happily, be
1625 identified with these "times of refreshing ;" and they may be
1626 depended on, as specimens of both the letter and the spirit of his
1627 preaching, because they were printed from his own manuscripts :
1628 that "On Early Piety ;" that "On Regeneration ;" and that "On
1629 Intercession." Whoever will read these appeals, realizing the
1630 circumstances under which they were made, will hardly wonder at
1631 the effect produced by them ; the topics of the second and third, and
1632 the tone of all the three, are so different from the matter and manner
1633 of sermonizing, to which the public had been long accustomed. They
1634 do not surprise us at all ; because, happily, neither the topics nor the
1635 tone of them are " strange things to our ears." Both were, however,
1636 novelties, even in the metropolis, at that time. When—where had an
1637 appeal like the following been made in London ? "I beseech you, in

1638 love and compassion, to come to Jesus. Indeed all I say is in love to
1639 your souls. And if I could be but an instrument of bringing you to
1640 Jesus, I should not envy but rejoice in your happiness, however
1641 much you were exalted. If I was to make up the last of the train of
1642 the companions of the blessed Jesus, it would rejoice me to see you
1643 above me in glory. I would willingly go to prison or to death for you,
1644 so I could but bring one soul from the devil's strong holds, into the
1645 salvation which is by Christ Jesus. Come then to Christ, every one
1646 that hears me this night. Come, come, my guilty brethren : I beseech
1647 you for your immortal souls' sake, for Christ's sake, come to Christ !
1648 Methinks I could speak till midnight unto you ; I am full of love
1649 towards you. Would you have me go and tell my Master, that you
1650 will not come, and that I have spent my strength in vain ? I cannot
1651 bear to carry such a message to him ! I would not, indeed I would
1652 not, be a swift witness against you at the great day of account : but if
1653 you will refuse these gracious invitations, I must do it."

1654

1655 In this spirit (not very prevalent even now) Whitefield began his
1656 ministry. And there is a fascination as well as fervour in some of his
1657 early sermons. How bold and beautiful is the peroration (Concluding
1658 part of a discourse) of that on Intercession ! Referring to the holy
1659 impatience of "the souls under the altar," for the coming of the
1660 kingdom of God, he exclaims, " And shall not we who are on earth,
1661 be often exercised in this divine employ with the glorious company
1662 of the spirits of just men made perfect ? Since our happiness is so

1663 much to consist in the communion of saints, triumphant above, shall
1664 we not frequently intercede for the church militant below ; and
1665 earnestly beg, that we may be all one ? To provoke you to this work
1666 and labour of love, remember, that it is the never-ceasing
1667 employment of the holy and highly exalted Jesus himself : so that he
1668 who is constantly interceding for others, is doing that on earth,
1669 which the eternal Son of God is always doing in heaven. Imagine,
1670 therefore, when you are lifting up holy hands for one another, that
1671 you see the heavens opened, and the Son of God in all his glory, as
1672 the great High Priest of your salvation, pleading for you the all-
1673 sufficient merit of his sacrifice before the throne. Join your
1674 intercessions with His ! The imagination will strengthen your faith,
1675 and excite a holy earnestness in your prayers.”

1676

1677 Find more resources by George Whitefield at path2prayer.com