

THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF
SELINA
COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON



J. Huntingtondon

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BY A MEMBER OF THE HOUSES OF SHIRLEY AND HASTINGS

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PREFACE

IT WAS the express wish of **LADY HUNTINGDON**, that, at least for some years after her decease, her memory should be suffered to rest, and her actions to make their own impression on the minds of men. In deference to this wish, all attempts at the publication of her Correspondence have been resisted by her Noble Relatives; and it is only at the present day that a Cadet of her Illustrious Family, after long years employed in the collection and examination of the Documents and Papers to which he alone, perhaps, was in a condition to have easy and continued access, has been induced to arrange his materials into the form of a **MEMOIR OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SELINA COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON**.

Circumstances having prevented the Author from personally superintending the publication of his Work, a large share of responsibility has been thrown on those to whose hands it was committed; but the task was a labour of love, and the publication has been conducted with all possible regard to the public demand for ample information, to the feelings of the living, and the memory of the dead.

Among the illustrious characters of the eighteenth century, no one has shone more conspicuously in the religious world, or enjoyed a greater share of heartfelt esteem and love, than the venerable **COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON**. Above all her celebrated Contemporaries, she was honoured with a life of continued usefulness, protracted to the utmost period of mortal existence; with extraordinary talents, ample means, and a head and heart alike devoted to promote the "glory of God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards man."

Her body has long been committed to the earth from which it sprang, and her soul has returned to God who gave it, but she has left on earth a testimony which will out-live monuments of brass and stone; a reputation which has spread to the corners of the world, and a name which is revered by all whose approbation is praise.

The curiosity that has been as generally expressed as universally felt to know more of the life and character of this, in the best sense of the

word, *Illustrious Woman*, is a feeling which ought to be respected; and it has at length become a duty to make every effort in order to save from destruction those invaluable records of her heart and feeling; those delightful traits of her distinguished friends; those heart-stirring pictures of her private and every-day life; and those important records of her public services to religion and humanity, which are contained in these volumes, and which, but for the present publication, might have expired with their Compiler; or have left but a vague memory of her excellence, except in those instances where the sacrifice of her fortune has raised imperishable monuments to her piety.

The object of the present Work has been to afford a view of the Life and Times of this distinguished Woman so clear and ample as to render superfluous all future or collateral efforts at illustration. Every fact and incident of her long life is here recorded—every triumph of the Cross under her vigorous and well-directed leading—every place of worship opened under her auspices—and every mark of divine favour and encouraging grace bestowed upon her labours.

Conscious of the purity of his motive, and having for all his incentive the desire to pay just tribute to the memory of the departed Saint whose name he honours, the Author has spoken truth from his heart, resolved to flatter no one—to know no fear in the discharge of his duty. He has sought, with candid zeal, to avoid every evidence of a sectarian or party spirit in his statements. Bigotry, on both sides, may censure; but the just and generous, on all sides, will approve his course. Narrow prejudices are already vanishing; and good men, of all denominations, are ready to embrace the truth and each other. The good Countess was, in this respect, before her age; and it is her catholic and christian spirit which appears to have inspired her kinsman in the composition of this Memoir: read in the same spirit, it will serve to accelerate the benevolent current of true godliness, and to sweep away the narrow and contracted dispositions which would check its overflow or turn aside its course.

With this feeling, the Author has drawn, without hesitation, from all accessible sources, the illustrative matter of his Memoir. The Biographies of WHITEFIELD, WESLEY, VENN, and the Works and Letters of FLETCHER, BERRIDGE, ROMAINE, WATTS, HILL, and other eminently pious individuals, have supplied invaluable contributions to the Work; but its more valuable portion consists in the Original Letters and Anecdotes with which it

teems, and in the straight-forward integrity of purpose in its Author. Of himself and of his Work, he says:—

“To GOD, only wise, the Author of every good and perfect gift, my humble acknowledgments are paid. His grace rendered the subject of this Memoir what she was—His wisdom directed her pious and benevolent efforts for the extension of the Redeemer’s kingdom—and His Spirit supported her in her departing hours. To Him, therefore, and to Him alone, whose influence I implore, I commit these Memoirs, such as they are, in the hope that He will vouchsafe his blessing on a work which originated in an ardent desire to promote his glory; and that he will render it an instrument to extend the knowledge and experience of the glorious Gospel of God our Saviour.”

With these glowing words of the pious Author, the Conductors commit his Work to the candid judgment of the enlightened reader: remarking merely, as they are in justice bound to do, that the Religious Institution now known as “*The Connexion of the late Countess of Huntingdon,*” does not incur the slightest responsibility with regard to this Work: and that the Reverend Author of the Introduction to the present Volume, has undertaken to resume his pen for a similar introductory paper to the second volume of these Memoirs.

INTRODUCTION

PART I

MAN, amidst an almost infinite variety of circumstances, and modified, both in body and mind, by a thousand accidental influences, is, in every age and country, essentially the same. The *os sublime* and the *mens alta* alike distinguish him from the other inhabitants of the earth, and show, whatever may be his complexion and mental training, that GOD has made him to have dominion over the works of his hands—has put all things in subjection under him. Nor is there less of identity in man's moral propensities than in his corporeal and instinctive powers. Bent from his original rectitude, he stoops towards earth and the things of earth, and gives sad proof of having lost affection for the Source of his existence, and of being inclined to worship the creature more than the Creator. The rude savage, the superstitious devotee, and the intellectual sceptic do not like to retain GOD in their knowledge—that GOD who is "glorious in holiness," who is partially made known to his creatures by the works of his hand, and more fully revealed, and in a more encouraging light, by the words of his mouth.

This Atheistic spirit laboured with a giant's strength to deface the character of Deity impressed on the world before the flood; had cursed the earth with abominable idolatry, or with heartless superstition, before the coming of our LORD in the flesh; and, not satisfied with the mischief effected under dispensations of mercy less intelligible and distinct, has, to a most awful extent, corrupted a Church, professedly Christian, as it had polluted both the Jewish temple and the Patriarchal tent. To educe good out of evil, is the province of the Supreme Good; to pervert the good, and, so far as it relates to his own perceptions and conduct, to abuse and prostitute it to the worst of purposes, is, alas! the work of man.

Nothing can more affectingly evince the truth of this remark, than the contrast of the Church of Rome with the Church of the Apostles; than the pomp and mummery, the dogmatism and tyranny, the secularity,

the superstition, and the heathenism of Popery, with the simplicity, the spirituality, and the divinity of that religion which the writers of the New Testament advocated, for which they all suffered, and for which most of them died. The vapour which, rising from the two-fold shores of Corinth and the province of Galatia, annoyed Saint PAUL, continued to spread itself and to increase in density, till the true Church of JESUS CHRIST became scarcely perceptible, and ultimately was totally obscured by the thick and dark cloud. Let the mind proceed from the Apostles to EUSEBIUS, and thence to AUGUSTINE, and the next advance is to settled darkness, rendered visible by a few solitary rays of piety – real, though faint and sickly, and the transient scintillations of scholastic wit and learning. The page of Ecclesiastical History, though inscribed by persons less Evangelical than the MILNERS, will show that even superstition was only one shade in the dark ages; that vital godliness, as if in disgust, had fled from the Church, as she was pleased to call herself, to deserts, and mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth; that Justification before GOD, by faith alone in JESUS CHRIST, the "*Articulus stantis aut cadentis Ecclesiæ*," as LUTHER termed it, was buried beneath the records of Councils and the volumes of Fathers; and that men, having renounced the LORD as their RIGHTEOUSNESS, were without him as their STRENGTH. Like SAMSON, the Church was shorn of her energy and deprived of sight – the sport of the Philistines.

It was the glory of the Reformation that it struck at the root of the evil. The Church of Rome, not satisfied with seeking righteousness by the works of the law, must needs arrogate to herself a property in works of supererogation, and impudently bring it into the market; but for this daring imposition on common sense, the fire of LUTHER might have been employed rather in consuming the drapery of the man of sin than in the destruction of his person. The sale of indulgences, however, was such an outrage on the principle of the Gospel, that it roused his powerful mind, even when only partially enlightened, to bring all its united force against the blighting and unholy doctrine of human merit. Thus, in the process of resuscitation, the HOLY SPIRIT, by the agency of the Reformers, instead of restoring vital heat by friction at the extremities, breathed into the dead Church the breath of life, and restored to her a living soul. Animation diffused itself through a vast range of nominal Christians, converting them into living members of the body of CHRIST; and the life, which was felt to be redeemed was consecrated to Him "who loved his Church and gave himself for it."

The number of truly converted persons was, no doubt, very considerable in the days of the Reformers, and the hallowed work progressed under their survivors, both on the continent of Europe and in Great Britain. It would, however, be false charity to conclude that all Protestants, even during the warmth and freshness of the Reformation, were true Christians; an acquaintance with the history of the times, and with human nature, as well as with the subsequent condition of Protestant Christendom, will compel us to say, "that all were not Israel who were of Israel;" that multitudes, from political and secular motives, and from the force of custom, or from a conviction of the truth rather as an intellectual than as a moral proposition, protested more against the errors of the man of sin than against his iniquities, and were more anxious for emancipation from the thralldom of superstition than from the bondage of corruption. The easy transition, indeed, of the majority from one state to another, under HENRY the Eighth and the youthful EDWARD; their coming back again to Popery under MARY; and their ready return to Protestantism under her sister — proves that however many loved the truth, even unto the death, more were indifferent to its divine claims, and accommodated themselves to the times. The Vicar of Bray was only one of many who ebbcd and flowed with the ocean; and of those who will always show that a national religious improvement may be effected, where the renewal of the mind in the great body of society does not take place. Worldly men will preserve the element of their character amidst great external modifications — an element as decidedly opposed to the holy and humbling truths of the Gospel, in the Protestant as in the Papist, though exhibited under different forms.

This was the case in the reign of ELIZABETH. We hail, indeed, with feelings kindred with those of MILTON, when he escaped "the Stygian Pool," the settling of a better order of Ecclesiastical affairs, the liberty of prophesying given to the ministers of Christ, and the eminent piety, learning, and zeal of many of the clergy. Her reign is as illustrious for men devoted to the kingdom of our LORD JESUS CHRIST as it is for patriots and politicians: the preaching and the writings of those men, some of whom were the survivors of the martyrs, and of whom others seemed to grow out of their ashes, tended much to instruct the people in the great principles of the Gospel. These labourers, however, were few, compared with the extent and population of their spheres of action, and they could not fail to leave the mass of the people without the knowledge of true