

Selina, Countess of Huntingdon and Her Connexion (1707-1791)

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A woman worthy of note

Lovers of eighteenth century church history will have often come across the name of Lady Huntingdon and the ministry which she founded. Often, however, her name is merely dropped here and there in passing and when more space is afforded her, it is invariably in conjunction with well-known preachers such as Wesley, Doddridge, Whitefield, Toplady, Romaine and Venn. This fact has tended to place her in a subsidiary position in modern research into eighteenth century evangelism and church-growth. This is a pity as the very fact that Lady Huntingdon's name is associated with nearly every important move of the Spirit in the eighteenth century shows what a great influence she had under God during these times. She thus deserves to be studied as a person in her own right and as an individual character greatly used of God.

Lady Huntingdon, though a fine-looking woman, was not without warts and wrinkles of the metaphorical kind. Any woman, especially in the eighteenth century, would reap criticism for taking on roles otherwise attributed to men. We may thus smile when Berridge calls Lady Huntingdon teasingly 'Pope Joan' and look more carefully at Dr Ryland's evidence when he calls her movement Antinomian, here agreeing fully with William Huntington. The way the Countess often bossed men about, especially the students of her college and her chaplains will raise our eyebrows. The scandalous affair of her Chaplain Martin Madan, otherwise known as the Polygamous Parson, which did not result in his losing his post, shocked not only Newton, Cowper and Sir Richard Hill who defended the truth against Madan but thirty other Evangelical writers who wrote against this Antinomianism in legalistic guise. Also Lady Huntington's treatment of Roland Hill and William Huntington will leave the reader wondering whether this child of God preferred to behave as a haughty Countess rather than a Christian. In spite of all these warts and wrinkles which this author finds more numerous than those in the characters he normally portrays, Lady Huntington was such a gigantic figure for God, and therefore for good, in her day that she must be ranked amongst the foremost contenders for the faith, standing just a little behind great leaders such as Toplady and Romaine. The Christian who does not consider her testimony and work closely will be all the poorer in knowledge and edification for it.

Readily available sources on Lady Huntington's life

But where can we obtain information about this offspring of England's most noble families which does not leave her merely as an 'also-ran'? One of our main sources of information is the over 1,000 paged, two volumed biography and compilation of records produced by Aaron Seymour in 1839 with an introduction by J.K. Foster. This work, now reprinted, entitled, *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon*, was published by William Edward Painter. Seymour has been criticised for using his editorial pen at times like a pen-knife but as the memorabilia connected with her Ladyship is immense, selection and even compression of material might be thought necessary. Until someone comes up with a better work, Seymour is our main source. However, The American Tract Society issued a compilation of Lady Huntington's diaries, letters and memorabilia in 1853, edited and compiled by the charming hand of Helen C. Knight and named *Lady Huntington*[1] and *her Friends*. This compilation has remained my favourite quick-reference work on the Countess since I came across it over twenty years ago.

In 1857, A.H. New brought out his *The Coronet and the Cross, or Memorials of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon*. Seymour, Knight and New may be seen as complimentary volumes, each filling out scenes and topics in the other. Original letters, especially dealing with Lady Margaret's and Benjamin Ingham's involvement in Lady Huntington's coming to faith are extant in the Hastings Family Letters archived in the Leicester County

Records Office.

Also complimentary to these basic works is the correspondence with her Ladyship extant from the pens of Berridge, Toplady, Whitefield, Hervey, Venn and many other friends of Lady Huntingdon. The histories of chapels in the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion also provide excellent additional material. There are many references to Lady Huntingdon in Wesley's works, not all by any means of a positive nature. Also the diaries and journals of Lady Huntingdon's relations supply needy details such as the brief account by Lady Frances Hastings of a tour of Wales she undertook with Selina. Modern writers such as Arnold Dallimore on George Whitefield, Malcolm Pickles on Benjamin Ingham and Nigel Pibworth on John Berridge also afford deep insights into the life and times of Lady Huntingdon.

Selina's early life and conversion

Our subject was born at Stanton Harold[2], Leicester on 24 August, 1707, the daughter of Washington Shirley, the Earl of Ferrers. She was brought up in Chartley Castle and as a child tended to be melancholy by nature, yet with an early longing for God. This longing was not smothered by the pomp of being introduced to court life with all its routs and finery. Indeed, Selina Shirley soon identified herself with the Blue Stocking circle around sensible Mrs Montague. At the age of twenty-one, Selina married Theophilus Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon, well-known for his exemplary character.

For a number of years, Lady Huntingdon lived a life of prayer and good works, justly called Lady Bountiful by those who knew her. Happily, Margaret Hastings, Selina's sister-in-law, now living in Ledstone, Yorkshire, came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through the preaching of Benjamin Ingham whom she eventually married. Margaret wasted no time in visiting Theophilus and Selina to tell them of her new-found Saviour. Selina, who was in very poor health at the time, was at first, blinded by her own good works from viewing her own sinfulness. By God's grace, Margaret's and Benjamin Ingham's witness bore fruit and she could pray, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."

A peer of the realm witnesses for Christ

Lady Huntingdon, now thirty-two years of age, immediately sought contact with other Christians and invited John and Charles Wesley to visit her and Earl Huntingdon began to show a deeper interest for Christian fellowship and instruction. A number of the Hastings' friends were shocked at the change in the life of Selina and the Duchess of Buckingham even wrote complaining that it was a monstrous thing to be told by a lowly, disrespectful preacher that the nobility have hearts as sinful as "the common wretches that crawl upon the earth." Others, like Lady Marlborough confessed their great need of a Saviour and soon the Hastings

and Shirleys had formed a circle of spiritual seekers and finders which even attracted former society belles and beaux such as Countess Delitz, whose life was changed and Lord Bolingbroke, who remained a scoffer. Besides the Wesleys and Whitefield, James Hervey was a welcome guest at these gatherings and his letters to Lady Frances Shirley fill a volume. These gatherings included Dissenters as well as Church of England people, William Cudworth, Philip Doddridge, John Gill, and Dr Gifford being occasional visitors.

Tasting the work of the Spirit in Wales

In 1746, Earl Huntingdon died suddenly at the age of fifty when Selina was thirty-nine. Lady Huntingdon was now a mature Christian who could tell Doddridge that she wanted no holiness that God did not give her and without Him she could do nothing. Being somewhat free from the duties of a life in high society through the death of her husband, the Countess now concentrated on spreading the gospel through the help of evangelical clergy. A tour of Wales was carried out which reaped much fruit. It was also spiritually profitable for Lady Huntingdon who met Griffith Jones and other so-called Calvinistic Methodists such as Howell Harris, who, unlike Wesley, had no inhibitions about preaching the whole counsel of God, including election, predestination and perseverance. These sturdy witnesses had come in contact with George Whitefield in 1739 and Calvinistic Methodism had initially spread unhindered by the Wesleyan Arminian type which had not yet reached the same popularity. This probably was because the two popular pillars of Wesleyanism, i.e. free-willism and perfectionism, had not been developed so markedly as in later years.

During her visit to Wales, Lady Huntingdon stayed several days at Trevecca where the Welsh Calvinists and her own men preached four or five times a day to great crowds. Memories of Trevecca and the joyful way the inhabitants received the gospel eventually prompted Lady Huntingdon to set up a preachers' training college there some twenty years later. It was also through her visit to Wales that Lady Huntingdon was able to contact Whitefield. Knowing that Harris was on good terms with the Anglican evangelist, she asked him to bring Whitefield over to her Chelsea home. Whitefield now found himself preaching twice a week at her Ladyship's gatherings. A good number of England's nobility were converted during this period, or, as Lady Huntingdon put it, 'turned Zionwards'. It is worthy of note that during the year 1749 an extraordinary panic due to earthquakes and financial crises spread through London, moving many to listen to the gospel as preached by William Romaine and George Whitefield, both now working closely with Lady Huntingdon who had now moved to Ashby de la Zouch as her main country seat.

Lady Huntingdon's chapels

As more and more clergymen came to accept the gospel, many looked to Lady Huntingdon for financial support in founding suitable church

buildings for sound pastoral work. Something like a committee to manage these affairs was set up at Ashby de la Zouch with Hervey, Whitefield, Dr Stonehouse and Doddridge as 'members'. The result was the financing and building of Moorfield Tabernacle in 1753. Other chapels, even those of Dissenters such as Long Acre Chapel, London, were now placed at the disposal of Whitefield and his friends. Immediately the cry of 'irregularity' was raised by other clergy but Whitefield's bishop stood by him. In 1756 Whitefield opened another chapel at Tottenham Court, virtually as a Dissenting chapel under the Toleration Act, though the Church of England order was to be used. Using her freedom as a Countess to set up chapels with clergy of her own patronage, in 1760 Lady Huntingdon built a chapel at Brighton near to a house she owned there, financing it by the sale of much of her jewellery. Two of the most well-known preachers of the day, Augustus Toplady and John Berridge were often employed by the Countess to preach there. Now chapels were set up at a swift rate at Oathall, Lewes, Tunbridge Wells, Bristol, Bath and throughout the country with many a wealthy Christian donating money, land or lease-holdings. Many of these chapels were in wealthy areas where the Countess had property but a fair number of chapels and hired buildings, especially in Cornwall and the London area were opened in poorer areas. Often Lady Huntingdon's preachers could draw many thousands of colliers and other workmen to their services. The Countess said in Cornwall, "My call here is to the tinnners, and thousands and tens of thousands of poor perishing creatures, whom all seem to neglect; their souls are the object of my loving care, and if the Lord permit, I wish to make three or four establishments in the heart of the tin mines, for their instruction and salvation."

Becoming a reluctant Dissenter

One of the major factors in the Countess's slow but sure drift into Dissent, which she never really wanted, were her chapels. Lady Huntingdon had always maintained that as a peer she had rights and privileges denied to the common man. She could thus set up domestic chapels free of ecclesiastical or even parliamentary jurisdiction. A peer was above the law and her chapels need not be registered by any bishops' court or local political board. Initially, such chapels were indeed exempt from external control as they were intended for the peer's family and domestic staff only. Lady Huntingdon, however, opened her chapel doors to all. Nor were her chapels technically speaking hers as they were often set up by bodies who merely put themselves under the Countess's protection to avoid legal and ecclesiastical wrangling. The local clergy throughout the country now found chapels popping up like mushrooms. They were often better built, kept in a better state of repair and better financed than their own. This, they regarded as most unfair competition and complained vociferously. Lady Huntingdon was shocked at this lack of respect shown to a peer of the realm and took legal action but found that she was losing her cases. She thus paid a very prominent lawyer to handle her affairs with the intent of appealing to the King's Bench and the House of Lords. This piece of old-fashioned class privilege did not go down well with the populace and soon

Lady Huntingdon was unpopular amongst the people and clergy. The prominent lawyer told Lady Huntingdon that she could not expect much from the government as they did not want to anger the church. The Countess felt persecuted.

These matters came to a head when the Countess decided to follow the suggestions of two evangelically minded clergymen and convert a North London Palace of Entertainment called the Parthenon into a church building. Toplady said it was all right buying the building but the overheads and upkeep would be such a great financial burden, he advised against the purchase. Even Berridge told the Countess it would be too much for her, though he was in principle for the project. Lady Huntingdon followed sound advice and backed out of the transaction and others stepped in, but the Countess was able to secure the right to appoint ministers. This was contested by the local church authorities who claimed that the appointing of ministers was not the office of a rich lady but of the church representatives in the parish. The local minister who took the matter to court won his case and the Parthenon had to close down. Now Christian peers came to Lady Huntingdon's assistance and used their noble authority and influence to have the Countess given control of the chapel and its ministers. Astonishingly enough, the ruse worked for a while and the Parthenon re-opened. This was too much for the parish minister who took the matter to the church courts and again won his case.

Renouncing one oath to take up another

The attempt to keep the Parthenon open had been temporarily advanced by appealing to the ancient rights of the nobility, a recourse hardly feasible in a more democratic or Christian society. The next move on the part of the Countess's men was even more questionable. Two of the Anglican ministers, Wills and Taylor, who had been banned by the courts from serving in Lady Huntingdon's chapels on the grounds of irregularity, now rejected their ordination oaths and applied for licences as Dissenting preachers under the Toleration Act, which they were immediately granted on swearing a new oath. By a peculiar oversight in the act, Dissenters had more rights than itinerant Anglicans. Now services went on at the Parthenon as planned. Interestingly enough the two 'Dissenters' did not plead Free Church principles as their grounds for Dissent but gave their reason as their disagreement with the Church of England and the Government in preventing peers from exercising age-old privileges. Now such problems as had been faced at the Parthenon had to be faced at Mulberry-Gardens and other chapels run by Lady Huntingdon and the Countess found herself slipping deeper into Dissent. This had never been her aim, but like Wesley, she had contemplated a movement which "might occupy a neutrality between church and dissent-secession", but enjoying the privileges and blessings of both. Admittedly, Lady Huntingdon had the work of God at heart but she believed that she was called to do this outside of the normal bounds of church discipline and order. In reality, she wished to both eat her cake and keep it.

A further step on this path was the Countess's college at Trevecca. This college had been built on the work of Howell Harris and had trained students for itinerant work and especially for work in the colonies. A number of these young evangelists became Baptists or Independents and others were ordained into the Church of England by bishop friends of the Countess. However, after the Parthenon controversy, few bishops were prepared to ordain those who wished for the privileges of Episcopal ordination without submitting to Episcopal discipline. Thus, on 9 March, 1783 the first ordination of Dissenting ministers in what came to be called the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion, was carried out. The Connexion then numbered sixty-seven^[3] chapels, seven of which were the personal property of the Countess. Six young men were ordained on that day with Taylor and Wills officiating. Though Anglican stalwarts such as Romaine and Venn kept up their fellowship with Lady Huntingdon, they refused to join her in her Dissent and felt honour-bound not to preach at their Connexion meetings. Even leading Evangelical clergy who followed Lady Huntingdon into Dissent such as Thomas Haweis, did so only half-heartedly. Though now a trustee of Lady Huntingdon's chapels, Haweis confessed that he still held to an Episcopalian Church of England discipline and declared, "Nor is the liturgy of the church performed more devoutly, or the Scriptures better read for the edifying of the people, by any congregations in the realms, than by those in our connection." Haweis believed he had helped to found what modern evangelicals would call the Church of England Continuing. However, the vast majority of Evangelicals in the Church of England which was perhaps at their highest number ever,

did not join them.

Going home

All these trials weighed heavily on Lady Huntingdon but they could not pull her down. She saw her children die one by one and her dream to cover England with her evangelists fade away. Now aged over seventy, the Countess lived very frugally in her house adjacent to the Parthenon where she grew visibly in grace and in a most intimate knowledge of her Saviour. Though enriched by a number of legacies, including a fortune left by her son Earl Huntingdon, the Countess bought but one dress a year, cut down servants to an absolute minimum and gave generously to the work of the gospel, not forgetting the work of other sound denominations. The entire funding of Trevecca came from her pocket and she supported missionary work in many parts of the world and kept on erecting chapels and choosing ministers for them. Her Ladyship, however, did not merely found chapels but made sure that the surrounding neighbourhoods were visited, and, where necessary, the inhabitants were clothed and fed and given medical aid.

At the age of eighty-four, Lady Huntingdon felt the Father calling her to her heavenly mansion. Looking back on the ups and downs of her life, Lady Huntingdon could truly say, "What hope could I entertain, if I did not know the efficacy of his blood? How little could anything of mine give a moment's rest to the departing soul – so much sin and self mixing with the best, and always so short of what I owe." After a ruptured blood vessel and in answer to the question, "How do you feel?" the Mother in Israel replied, "I am well; all is well, well for ever. I see, wherever I turn my eyes, whether I live or die, nothing but victory." Now, though confessing that she was cradled in the arms of mercy, Lady Huntingdon had only one wish, "I want to go home." On 17 June, 1791, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon suddenly whispered with joy in her voice, "I shall go to my Father to-night." She was as good as her word! That night the Lord received her to Himself. The world was one great benefactress less, and heaven a richer place as yet another jewel shone in Christ's glorious crown.

Faith Cook and the Banner of Truth's new look at the Countess

During the past fifteen years or so, there has been a radical re-estimation of the testimony of eighteenth century stalwarts. Earlier Christian historians and biographers such as Thomas Wright and Aaron Seymour have painted fine pen-portraits of such eighteenth century men and women of God as George Whitefield, William Romaine, John Gill, James Hervey, William Huntington, Augustus Montague Toplady and Sir Richard Hill. Without the works of these two Christian scholars our knowledge of the evangelical nature of eighteenth century Calvinism and the Great Awakening would be small indeed. Headmaster Thomas Wright has given us excellent accounts of Isaac Watts, Augustus Toplady, William Huntington, William Cowper, Benjamin Beddome, Joseph Hart and many of their evangelical

contemporaries. We are indebted to Aaron Seymour for his fine descriptions of the awakenings in the eighteenth century and the men and women used of God and changed by God in them. Whereas Wright limited his biographies more to the personal, individual details in the lives of his subjects, Seymour shows us how these men and women of God interacted with one another and how they worked together for the spread of the gospel. These two men alone have provided a sure and sound basis for further research into the lives of God's ambassadors and the great work of the Spirit in the early and middle eighteenth century. They have no substitutes. Sadly, we now learn in much of the evangelical press that the Calvinism of the men and women of whom Wright and Seymour wrote is too 'high' for modern, theological taste and the expertise of these exemplary biographers too low. As such modern critics appear to have neither the sources nor the writing abilities, nor the theological acumen of the authors they condemn. We must rightly be suspicious of this wind of change.

Today, we are told, theological opinion has altered and Christian historical scholarship has benefited from these new tastes and new fashions. Those desirous to write Christian biography must adapt themselves to the new situation or fall by the wayside. The four-square, full gospel of such as Whitefield, Toplady, Romaine, Huntington and Gill is now often seen as foreign to the needs and capabilities of man and other heroes are being found such as Joseph Bellamy, Jonathan Edwards Junior, Charles Finney, Andrew Fuller, the Robert Halls and John Wesley. These are men who altered the strict emphasis on God's sovereign grace in salvation and spoke of God's provision of salvation which needed to be appropriated by man's agency. Man can be saved if he only will. Holders of these opinions which are aptly named New Divinity argue that not only former biographers such as Wright and Seymour should be ignored but also their subjects should be either re-examined, or, better still, forgotten.[4]

Wright is now described by professing Reformed men as "uncritical and lacking in Biblical insight"[5] because he sticks to the old orthodoxy and Seymour's great work is belittled as my review, enclosed below, will show for reasons which cannot possibly be maintained except for reasons of bigotry. However, it must be noted that when giving information on such stalwarts as Gill, Huntington, Hart, Toplady, and the Huntingdon Connexion, these critics of Wright and Seymour must quote from their works as they have no other major sources.

Since writing this chapter on the Countess of Huntingdon, the Banner of Truth has published a new work on her life which must be referred to here as it provides a fitting example in the campaign to denigrate Seymour and produce a revised historical picture based on an alternative view of Christian doctrine which the publishers see as the New Divinity doctrines of Andrew Fuller. Thus Fuller's movement, so Murray, led to the old Calvinism, which he calls 'High Calvinism', becoming "to all intents and purposes, a dead issue." [6]

The following review was published by New Focus magazine who have pledged themselves to "promote the Christ-centred Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace" and are "committed to the Protestant Reformed Faith and the advancement of conservative and evangelical Christianity." This Christ-centeredness in evangelism has been strongly criticised in recent years, [7] and it has been substituted by a legalistic doctrine of salvation by duty performance.

Selina Countess of Huntingdon by Faith Cook Published by Banner of Truth Trust

A new rival to Seymour's work

Faith Cook is well-known as a chronicler of the lives and times of Christian worthies of the past and her biography of Selina Countess of Huntingdon has been eagerly awaited. The work is a solid, sound, honest portrait. Nevertheless, it lacks the bounce, sparkle and catching narrative of Aaron Seymour's two volumed, indexed biography, republished shortly before Mrs Cook's book appeared. This was bad timing. If the Banner of Truth had produced the book before the long-announced reprint of Seymour, it would have been without a rival. Now it seems that the Banner of Truth aimed at just that – to produce a rival. This is verified by the scathing and quite unfounded criticism of Seymour's work appended to Mrs Cook's book.

So, comparisons with Seymour are inevitable. Faith Cook is a chronicler, whereas Seymour is a story-teller. Mrs Cook describes the intimate, day by day problems of Lady Huntingdon's personal, domestic life but Seymour dwells more on choice anecdotes which arose from them. Mrs Cook relates soberly and with great care the development of the eighteenth century revival, recording her selected facts as they come. Seymour presents us with choice highlights which make a believer jump for joy. Seymour confronts us with the sparkling, man-changing theology of the Great Awakening. Mrs Cook makes sure that these issues remain in the background. The new material, though widely announced as the *raison d'être* of the book, is meagre and disappointing. It does not present a 'new' Countess Selina though it fills some chronological gaps. Thus Mrs Cook still has to rely heavily on Seymour for her major documentation as she does on Tyerman, at times merely summarising the latter's work.

The dilemma of a good biographer

Obviously, one can hardly write enough about this key eighteenth century figure and one over whom the critics have always quarrelled. Great men of God such as Toplady, Grimshaw and Romaine viewed Lady Huntingdon as God's finest gift to England whereas the only matter that ever united the Fullerites, Arminians and Huntingtonians was their joint harsh criticism of Lady Huntingdon and her Connexion.

The problem is what to choose and what to leave out. Mrs Cook scarcely mentions the alternative opinions of fellow scholars who differ from her in her historical reconstruction of the Countess's life, particularly with reference to her birth, upbringing, conversion, handling of problems relating to theology, Christian outreach, Dissent and her practise of putting noble privilege and tradition before the law. Our present churches are sadly engaged in yet another Antinomian-Neonomian controversy and as this controversy was also rampant in Lady Huntingdon's day, it would have helped readers to understand the modern problem if Mrs Cook had explained Lady Huntingdon's part in the eighteenth century debate. The authoress merely mentions in a footnote that "some have even accused the Countess herself of being an Antinomian". It would have been opportune to hear why even such a moderate Calvinist as John Ryland Junior, in his defence of Gill, Brine and Toplady against accusations of Antinomianism, named Lady Huntingdon's Connexion especially as being tinged with the error. Furthermore, the long controversy with the Huntingtonians is only mentioned in a footnote in which Huntington is called a Hyper-Calvinist although he was a Sublapsarian who wrote widely against Antinomianism and was a Free Offer man in the Marrow Men style. Furthermore, one misses comment on the great scandal which split the Huntingdonians (as opposed to the Huntingtonians) down the middle when the Countess's protégé Martin Madan published his best-seller promoting bigamy.

Some well-presented characters

Owing to her care for detail, a number of characters are well-portrayed whilst other authors display them as mere background silhouettes. I was particularly struck by Mrs Cook's handling of Thomas Haweis (pronounced 'Haws' to rhyme with 'Paws', Mrs Cook tells us), who has so often been neglected or played a side-role in eighteenth century church history. So, too, the character of much neglected Benjamin Ingham comes through sharp and clear. Mrs Cook shows rare skill in laying out a panorama view of Lady Huntingdon's influence throughout England and Wales. She sets the reader on a high vantage point and he is able to look down and see what is happening in England's South, Midlands and North almost all at once before gaining a bird's eye view of the work in the Welsh valleys and mountains. The work at Trevecca is documented extremely well and is the best account this reviewer has read. So, too, the relationship between the Countess and the Wesleys is given a major place but often the Wesleys' biographies cut far too deeply into Lady

Huntingdon's own story. On the other hand, her Ladyship's coteries which even featured John Gill as a preacher are not treated in depth.

Doing more by doing less

Mrs Cook's book is too long-drawn-out. She has very good material and excellent quotes, which, although she complains of their eighteenth century language give life to the work. Mrs Cook censures Seymour strictly for 'rambling from one subject to another' but, in order to link her narratives, Mrs Cook often plods on in a heavy, slow style. If she had cut out these tedious links of small talk, culled mostly, it seems, from material Seymour wisely left out, her book would have compared well with Seymour's.

Mrs Cook measures herself against Seymour

In Mrs Cook's appendix on the Countess's biographers, Seymour is accused of inaccuracy, over-deferential regard for aristocracy, fusing events and even letters, relying on the Countess's copyist instead of originals, not being able to read her ladyship's writing, being in the infancy of biography in the modern sense etc.. Mrs Cook further criticises Seymour for making the Countess more than she really was, giving as her sole and certainly not conclusive example Seymour's comment that his "illustrious subject of the present memoir was an example of piety, benevolence and zeal." Given the facts, who, besides someone who wished to play down Seymour's achievements, could disagree with that quite balanced statement? What is lacking, however, in Mrs Cook's criticism is solid, scholarly evidence that her many strictures are valid. She herself admits difficulty in reading her Ladyship's handwriting and, as her Ladyship made copies of these letters, slight differences inevitably occur. Nor has Mrs Cook had access to Seymour's sources as she claims that "the majority of letters written by the Countess and cited by Seymour are no longer extant." Regarding fusing events, this is a device used widely in modern biography when treating the subject thematically rather than chronologically. Indeed, what marks off Seymour from Cook as a biographer is his modern, spirited, biographical style. Reading Mrs Cook is like reading the style and English of eighteenth century Hannah More. This is a most positive appraisal but it turns negative in Mrs Cook's case as she believes she is presenting the Countess in a more modern and therefore more acceptable garb.

Furthermore, though this reviewer could not call himself his Ladyship's unqualified admirer, he yet believes that Seymour's summary of the Countess's character, quoted negatively by Mrs Cook, is just, exact and well-expressed. Concerning Seymour's kow-towing to a member of the aristocratic Hastings family, this is clearly a misunderstanding on Mrs Cook's part. The Hastings scarcely rose higher than the abbey knights that they were, whereas Seymour was of a long line of Royalty.

Huntingdonian Foster on one side, critic Edwin Welch on the other

and the Cheshunt archives but does not mention that J. K. Foster of the

college, an expert on the history of the Connexion, wrote two long introductory essays to Seymour's 1839 first edition, affirming its accuracy and recommending it strongly without reservation. Thus cries of inaccuracy against Seymour should be treated warily, especially when evidence against him is not forthcoming. On the other hand, Mrs Cook obviously relies heavily on Edwin Welch a fierce critic of Seymour, for her opinions. Welch has become the guru of lesser informed Huntingdon scholars for reasons not apparent. His criticisms of Seymour are flimsy and superficial, and derived from secondary sources whose authors such as Knox, Reynolds and Overton knew less of Lady Huntingdon than Welch himself. Welch's ungrounded animadversions against Seymour's research methods, which Mrs Cook takes over, reveal rather sound, superior methods on Seymour's part which have preserved the bulk of our knowledge of the Countess. Welch claims, followed by Cook, that Seymour is wrong because he cannot find corroboration in writers who have done less research than Seymour. This is naive and unscholarly. The fact, however, that Mrs Cook, where she examines Welch diligently, finds him wanting, ought to have made her wary of accepting Welch's other ideas which she apparently takes over uncritically because they suit her taste. Trying to destroy the reputation of a famous man is a risky business and evidence must be available and used wisely, carefully and diligently so as to be found trustworthy.

and her Friends for a starter, Seymour for the main course, and Faith Cook for the pudding. Then the full story, like the readers, will be well-served.

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1. Many old records spell Lady Huntingdon's name thus.
 2. The Countess's birthplace is a matter of debate. Other authorities give Chartley or Astwell Castle in Northhants.
 3. Some sources give sixty-four.
 4. One example here is that Seymour mentions Gill taking part with Whitefield and others at a Connexion meeting but our modern critics tell us that Gill had nothing to do with the Countess nor with Whitefield.
 5. See Iain Murray's William Huntington, Issue 373, Banner of Truth Magazine.
 6. See Iain Murray's John Gill and C.H. Spurgeon.
 7. See Banner Of Truth publication No Holiness, No Heaven! Here, Richard Alderson teaches that the Christ-centred preaching of Romaine and Huntington led to Antinomianism. Alderson believes that the two great evangelists erred because their preaching rested on God's sovereign mercy and not on modern ideas of 'moral government', ideas explained by Alderson, quoting from John Angell James, in terms of human duties. In

his book, Alderson, showing clearly that he is not familiar with his subject, also turns Tobias Crisp into an ‘Antinomian’. In contrast Alderson presents Thomas Aquinas as one having a better understanding of sin. In this entire book, depicting the new Banner of Truth doctrine of justification and sanctification, the writer adopts a mixture of the Roman Catholic Scholastic teaching and the ‘pull your socks up’ moral preaching of a rugby coach. Also, Richard Brooks’ Antinomianism—The Present Confusion Part 1, Free Church Witness, January 2005.

8. When the Trevecca lease ran out in 1792, the college moved to Cheshunt, Herts.

9. The Huntingdons were nick-named ‘The Tons’, either giving rise to or referring to the alternative spelling.

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