

**Anne Dutton:  
An Eighteenth Century British Evangelical Woman Writer**

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This article is presented to Dr. Jerry Flora with deep gratitude and thanksgiving in honor of his affirmation of women in ministry. Specifically significant is his appreciation for the women faculty, staff and students of Ashland Theological Seminary. We appreciate his support of women's contribution to the service of Christ and his church.

Anne Dutton, whose maiden name was Williams, was born in 1695 at Northampton, England. She was converted at age 15 and joined the Church of Christ in Northampton, under the pastorate of Mr. Hunt. Under his pastorate, she was given training in Bible, religion, and musical hymnody. At the age of 22, she married Mr. Cole. When he died, she then married Mr. Benjamin Dutton, a Baptist pastor. In 1733, they settled at Great Gransden, just west of Cambridge, England.<sup>1</sup>

In 1743, after about 10 years of marriage, Mr. Dutton went on a trip to America. On the return trip, the ship went down and he drowned. Anne Dutton never remarried and remained at Great Gransden until her death in 1765. In June 1998, I had the opportunity to visit Great Gransden and to see her home and grave site in Great Gransden. She is buried in the garden of the house. Her house was used as a meeting house for the congregation before the present Baptist Church was built. In 1887, a stone to Anne Dutton's memory was erected in the present church.<sup>2</sup> Her gravestone states that she wrote 25 volumes of letters and 38 other published works.

Anne Dutton became well-known throughout England for her letters and correspondence. In 1887, Mr. James Knight of Southport, England, erected the memorial stone in her honor in the present Baptist Church at Great Gransden. He issued a volume of her *Letters*. At his death it was reported that he gave nearly a complete set of her works to a Baptist Chapel near Southport.<sup>3</sup>

In her *Autobiography*, October, 1740, Anne Dutton writes, "The Lord opened a door for me to write many letters to the Methodists and likewise blessed them to many souls."<sup>4</sup> She came in touch with John Wesley, George Whitefield, and William Seward in the early years of Evangelical Renewal in

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England. It is estimated that her spiritual letters filled twenty-five printed volumes. Rev. J.A. Jones of London in 1833 states, "Her epistolary correspondence was most extensive, throughout England, Scotland, Wales, Holland, America and continuing; so that after her death several sacks full of letters, were found, which were all burnt."<sup>5</sup>

There is proof that Anne Dutton wrote several times to John Wesley and that he replied to her letters. In John Wesley's diary entries he refers to her. On October 25, 1739 (*Standard Journal* ii, 299) an entry states, "Writ to Mrs. Dutton." Again on June 25, 1739, and August 22, 1739, and December 23, 1740, it is repeated each time, "Writ to Mrs. Dutton." On December 4, 1740, an entry occurs, "Read Mrs. Dutton's book." On January 6, 1741, he also writes, "Read Mrs. Dutton's letters." On February 28, 1741, there is another entry, "Writ to S[ister] Dutton."<sup>6</sup>

What was Anne Dutton's book to which Wesley referred? Mr. R. Heffer of Saffron Walden, England, possessed several volumes of her *Letters*. He stated that in 1735 she published *A Discourse Upon Walking with God*, which had a wide circulation. Probably this is her work to which Wesley referred and read.<sup>7</sup> Wesley regarded Anne Dutton with respect. Her work, *A Discourse Upon Walking with God*, is in the archives of the New British Library, London, today.

Anne Dutton, in 1743, also published anonymously a booklet entitled, *Letters to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley Against Perfection*, which possibly shows further correspondence between Anne Dutton and Wesley. Anne Dutton was a Calvinist and opposed perfection as attainable in this life.<sup>8</sup> Anne Dutton wrote at least one more tract against Wesley's doctrine of perfection. In 1747, she wrote *A Letter on Perseverance*.<sup>9</sup> One of her letters to John Wesley survives and is in the archives of the New British Library, London. It is, "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. J. Wesley. In Vindication of the Doctrines of Absolute... Election, Particular Redemption, Special Vocation, and Final Perseverance" (1742).

Anne Dutton also corresponded with George Whitefield on more friendly terms. Whitefield also commented on the influence of Anne Dutton's *A Discourse Upon Walking With God*. Whitefield paid a visit to her at Great Gransden, as recorded in his Letter 301 in his *Works*. Several of his letters to her are published in the 1771 edition of his *Works*.<sup>10</sup> Whitefield advertised Anne Dutton's works in his paper, *The Weekly History*, and published her letters to John Wesley in it in 1741-1742. The Calvinist views they both shared contributed to their friendship. Whitefield spoke of her kind letters.<sup>11</sup>

William Seward also wrote to Anne Dutton as stated in his *Journal of a Voyage from Savannah to Philadelphia, and from Philadelphia to England* (1740). Seward states,

Wrote several letters particularly one to that choice servant of Christ, Mrs. Anne Dutton, of Great Gransden...when I had finished the letter I providentially read one I had from her in May, 1739, full of such comforts and direct answers from what I had been writing that it filled my eyes with tears of joy.<sup>12</sup>

Anne Dutton was also known as a spiritual writer as late as 1761. The archives of the New British Library lists "Mr. Sanddeman Refuted by an Old Woman," dated 1761. Also, as late as 1761, Anne Dutton edited a work entitled, "Divine, Moral, and historical miscellanies in prose and verse." She was also a hymn writer. She is given a paragraph in Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*. A line of her poetry possibly inspired B. Beddome's hymn, "Faith Is a Precious Grace." Anne Dutton wrote 64 *Hymns Composed on Several Subjects*, published in London in 1743. The first verse of Hymn 42 states: "God as a Father dear His children doth correct, Because they're full of failings here, that they may them inspect."<sup>13</sup>

There is a biography of Anne Dutton in Gibbon's *Memoirs of Eminently Pious Women* (1804, vol. 2). The revised new one volume edition by S. Burder, published in Philadelphia in 1836, gives her spiritual experience of conversion and a portrait.<sup>14</sup> A book by Anne Dutton, published in London in 1743, entitled *A Brief Account of God's Gracious Dealings with the Author* (Parts I and II), gives her account of conversion. Part III of this work, completed in 1750, lists her publications. This work is in the archives of the New British Library, London.

Nineteen sources of Anne Dutton's books, letters, articles, and hymns are listed in the archives in the New British Library, London (See the bibliography). With references in Wesley, Whitefield, Seward's works we know of her immense impact upon Evangelical activity in 18th century England. Her spiritual and theological contributions to Evangelicalism must not be forgotten. Anne Dutton remains as a significant historical figure and prolific spiritual writer.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Roland Austin and Arthur Wallington, "The Weekly History," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 11 (1917) part 2, pp. 39-48.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 44. *The Works of John Wesley: Vol. 19: Journal and Diaries 1738-1743* (ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Hertznerater; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). See Appendix A: *London Diaries*, September 17, 1738-August 8, 1741. See *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.* (ed. Nehemiah Curnock; Vol. 2; London: Epworth Press, 1911).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 45, and Stephen Stein, "A Note on Anne Dutton: Eighteenth Century Evangelical," *Church History* 44 (1975) 491.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>10</sup>These are found in *Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 91, 250, 277, 328, 449, and Vol. 2, pp. 31, 32.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-48 and Stein, p. 489, and "Newly Discovered Letters of George Whitefield, 1745-46," ed. John W. Christie, *The Presbyterian Historical Society* 32/2 (1954) 69-90, 32/3 (1954) 159-86, 32/4 (1954) 241-70. George Whitefield, *Letters of George Whitefield, 1734-1742* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976; reprinted from *The Works of George Whitefield* [6 vols.; London: 1771-1772]).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 48 and John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnody* (New York: Scribner's 1892), 316.

<sup>14</sup>*Eminently Pious Women* (ed. Samuel Burder; rev. ed.; Philadelphia, 1836).

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\_\_\_\_\_, *A Discourse Concerning the New-Birth: To Which are Added Sixty-Four Hymns: Composed on Several Subjects* (London, 1743).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Discourse Upon Justification: Shewing the Matter, Manner, Time and Effects of it to Which are Added Three Poems* (London, 1743).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Discourse upon Walking with God: Together with Some Thoughts*

upon Joseph's Blessings. Deut. xxxiii.13 and Continuing as also a Short Account How the Author was Brought into Gospel-Liberty in a Letter to a Friend (London, 1735).

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The Following are Original Manuscripts of Anne Dutton's Works  
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A Discourse Concerning God's Act of Adoption. To which is added a Discourse upon the Inheritance of the adopted sons of God, 1737.

A Discourse Concerning the New Birth, 1740.

A Discourse upon Walking with God: in a letter to a friend, 1735.

Divine, Moral, and historical miscellanies in prose and verse, A. Dutton, ed., 1761.

Hints of the glory of Christ, 1748.

Letters on spiritual subjects, and divers occasions, sent to relatives and friends, 1748.

A Letter to all the Saints on the general duty of love, etc. 1742

A Letter to the Rev. Mr. J. Wesley. In Vindication of the Doctrines of Absolute...Election, Particular Redemption, Special Vocation, and Final Perseverance, 1742.

Mr. Sanddeman Refuted by an Old Woman. 1761

A Narration of the Wonders of Grace, 1734.

A Narration of the Wonders of Grace, in verse, 1734.

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A Poem on the special work of the Spirit in the hearts of the elect. 4th ed. Corrected by C.G., 1818.

A Treatise on Justification, 1778 (author is given as Thomas Dutton, but it is attributed to Anne Dutton)

Also: A Letter from the Reverend Mr [Erasmus Middleton] to A[nne] D[utton], 1735.