

Brave New World

READERS of the London Magazine would get a shock when they perused the issue for December, 1745. In place of the many attacks on Methodism, here was a defence, though but a grudging one, of its most abused exponent, George

Whitefield. It related to his famous Orphan House in Georgia, for which he had made such impassioned appeals that he was able to sail back to America in 1739 with over £1,000 in his pocket, most of it from collections at his open-air meetings. (One Sunday morning collection had brought in £32, of which £22 was in copper!) Many people, with bitter memories of the South Sea Bubble, wanted to know what had happened to their money. True, Whitefield had published a detailed list of his income and expenditure; but comparatively few had seen it, and suspicion was still rife about this brave new world that Whitefield was supposed to be building across the waters.

And now a correspondent of the London Magazine had actually been round the fabled Orphan House near Savannah. He begins his description of it thus—

"It gave me much Satisfaction to have an Opportunity to see this Orphan House, as the Design had made such a Noise in Europe, and the very Being of such a Place was so much doubted everywhere, that, even no farther from it than New England, Affidavits were made to the contrary."

The 500 acres which the Georgia Trustees had granted Whitefield had been selected by his right-hand man, James Habersham, later to become Governor of Georgia, and father to George Washington's Postmaster General. The architect, Mr. Day, had received £2 10s. 0d. "for drawing a plan for the Orphan House." The critical traveller writes—

"It is a square Building, of very large

Dimensions (actually 60ft. x 40ft.), the Foundation of which is of Brick, with Chimneys of the same, the rest of the Superstructure of Wood: the whole laid out in a neat and elegant Manner. A Kind of Piazza-Work surrounds it, which is a very pleasing Retreat in the Summer."

He thus describes his first introduction to the inmates—

"They were at dinner when we arriv'd, the whole Family at one Table. . . . Besides Mr. Barber, the Schoolmaster, and some Women, there were nearly 40 young Persons of both Sexes, dress'd very neatly and decently. After Dinner they retir'd, the Boys to School, and the Girls to their Spinning and Knitting: I was told, their vacant Hours were employ'd in the Garden and Plantation-Work."

It would be a mixed company. Whitefield himself tells that his first forty-nine children consisted of "twenty-three English, ten Scots, four Dutch, five French, and seven Americans". The whole day, from 5 a.m. till about 9.30 p.m. bed-time, was occupied in devotions, lessons, and work. Whitefield proclaimed that—

"No time was allowed for idleness or play, which are Satan's darling hours to tempt children to all manner of wickedness."

The London Magazine investigator admitted to being "prepossess'd with a bad opinion of the Institution," especially in view of "that Spirit of Uncharitableness, and enthusiastick Bigotry their Leader is so fam'd for." He therefore probed its affairs the more carefully, with the result, extremely surprising both to himself and others, that he "became a Convert to the Design." He concludes with this hard-won tribute to Methodism—

"Whatever Opinion I may have of the Absurdity of some of their religious Notions, Tenets and Practices, yet so far as they conduce to inculcate Sobriety, Industry, and Frugality, they deserve Encouragement from all Well-Wishers of their Country."

F.B.

In Wesley's Day

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