



Hannah More 1745-1833

Though undoubtedly the most well-known and influential woman in the England of her day, today Hannah More's name is sadly virtually unknown. Who was this now obscure woman who counted so many leaders and prominent persons among her friends?

Born near Bristol, England, in 1745, Hannah was the fourth in a family of five girls. Her father, Jacob More, was a school-master who saw that his daughters were well-educated. While still in their teens, the three oldest More daughters established a girls' boarding school in Bristol which soon became famous. Hannah completed her education there and before she was eighteen had written *A Search for Happiness*, a play which was later published and widely read.

In 1772, Hannah took her first of many trips to London where she soon became an important social and literary figure, enjoying the company and friendship of artist Sir Joshua Reynolds, famous actor David Garrick, statesman Edward Burke, and writer Samuel Johnson. David Garrick himself directed her successful play *Percy*. John Wesley wrote Hannah to encourage her in her literary pursuits because her Christian example could greatly influence the London artistic and literary set. However, when her friends David Garrick and Samuel Johnson died, London society lost its glamour and interest for Hannah.

After 1785, she increasingly turned to more distinctly Christian work. Pastor John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace," became her spiritual advisor, and young William Wilberforce, leader in the abolition movement, became a close friend. Members of the Clapham Sect, a group of well-to-do Anglican evangelicals, also became Hannah's friends and supporters.

All of Hannah's writings were permeated with a strong didactic and moral purpose. She wrote a series of popular essays on the importance of Christianity in establishing moral laws as well as a series of popular tracts to counter the rationalism of the French Revolution. The most popular, *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, went through many editions and was translated into several languages. In

1809, Hannah published a widely-read novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, which was really an essay on how to choose a good wife. It went through 30 editions in the United States within ten years. Her *Structures on the Modern System of Female Education* encouraged education for women based on the foundation of Christian teaching and morals.

Appalled at the poverty and immorality in the mining towns, in 1787, Hannah and her sisters began establishing Sunday Schools in many of the villages. Within ten years they were supporting and administering over sixteen schools, teaching the poor children to read the Scriptures, learn Christian morals, and acquire skills which would help them in life. Believing firmly that Christian teaching should be the basis of all education, Hannah wrote many of the books used in the schools.

Hanna More died in 1833 at the age of 88. Her writings and philanthropy deeply influenced the public mind and social character of her day.