

**MEMOIRS OF THE LATE
MRS. MARY GILBERT,
WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF
MR. FRANCIS GILBERT**

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Memoirs of the late mrs. Mary Gilbert, with some account of mr. Francis Gilbert by Henrietta F. Gilbert

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HENRIETTA F. GILBERT

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MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

MRS. MARY GILBERT,

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF

Mr. Francis Gilbert,

(*HER HUSBAND,*)

Second Son of the Honourable NATHANIEL GILBERT, of Antigua.

IN A LETTER TO THE REV. MR. BENSON.

BY

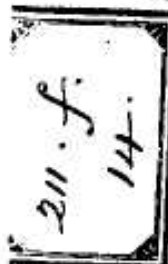
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1817.



MEMOIRS
OF
MRS. MARY GILBERT,
&c. &c.

REV. SIR,

SHOULD the following account of my late invaluable aunt, Mrs. MARY GILBERT, be deemed worthy of publication, it will gratify one, who feels she ought not to be surprised if it be refused; and whose chief hopes are founded on the subject affording some apology for the defects of the writer.

Mrs. Mary Gilbert was born at St. Alban's, in the county of Hertford, on the 24th of February, 1733. She sprang from an ancient family of the name of Walsh; the death of her father, when she was but three years of age, materially affected the fortunes of his children; and in 1750, at seventeen, the subject of this account launched on the ocean of life, with a husband, who, though just twice her age, was without compass or chart, and therefore could not steer a beloved wife into the haven of peace. Gay and thoughtless himself, he was delighted that she was so too; but ere she attained her twentieth year, that still small voice, which often speaks more powerfully than thunder, reminded my maternal friend, *she must die, and after death must come to judgment!*

The admonition was duly regarded. For some

time she strove, by the works of the *law*, to silence the suggestions of conscience; but soon became sensible, that were it possible for her to live spotless for the time to come, her doing so could not atone for the least of her past sins. While thus restless and unhappy, inquiring "Who will shew me any good?" and resorting in vain to every popular preacher, not branded with the name of *Methodist*, she providentially called to see a poor dying woman, at the very time when a Methodist gentleman was striving to overthrow some self-righteous notions entertained by the person in question. The two visitors entered into conversation, and the delegate of heaven at last prevailed over the fears of falling into error, which had kept the sincere warm-hearted seeker from hearing either of the two Mr. Wesleys: and, as it was Sunday evening, she consented to go immediately, and judge for herself. Her guide put her into a pew, and left her, like an ethereal messenger; for never more did my valuable friend see, never was she able to discover, to whom she was obliged. The Rev. Charles Wesley was the ambassador of Christ, who so effectually shewed what his delighted hearer sought; that doubting no longer, she soon threw in her lot among those whom she resolved should be her people, and their God her God; and the much-loved minister was remembered on her death-bed. This definitive step was not taken without raising a storm of persecution, some of which was of the most dangerous sort. Mr. Leadbetter, stung to the soul at the alteration discovered in his wife's conduct, particularly in point of dress, expressed his astonishment that she should expect to be made *wiser* and *better* by those who had not one *as wise or excellent as herself among them*. At another time, he declared the day of her joining the society should be that of their final separation; and, at a third, furnished her with an elegant

lantern, vowing, "If she would go to hear these people, it should not be in the dark." At last he would have compromised, by consenting to her hearing the two Mr. Wesleys, and their most celebrated preachers! In all this, she came off more than conqueror, abiding alike the storms of passion, and the seductive allurements of unsubdued tenderness and regard; assuring her husband, she was as ready now, as at any former period, to obey his commands in all things that did not affect her salvation; but was determined to judge for herself in all that did; well convinced he could not answer for her at the bar of offended justice.

I ought to have observed, that in 1752 she became a mother, but her son was only lent a few hours. The next year she was blessed with a lovely girl, who, about this time, June, 1755, was snatched from her, falling a victim to the small pox at two years and a half old, and going off suddenly when the disorder seemed abated. This severe affliction required all the aids religion could afford, and, with them, was so exquisitely felt as almost to *shake reason*. By this stroke, more than ever detached from earth, she trod more firmly the path to heaven; and was not only the instrument of leading a young friend, and two of her servants in the same way, but had the comfort of finding her powerful influence, in a good measure, subduing the prejudices of her husband; who even heard, accidentally, while coming out of chapel with her, that she had joined the society sometime before;—heard it in silence, without expressing the smallest resentment. Mr. C. Wesley's *kind efforts*, and *fascinating manners*, particularly charmed him; he greatly regarded him; learned to admire some of the preachers; and too soon required all that could be done to smooth his passage to eternity; a consumption, which began, and finished its commission in six months, termi-

nating his life in October, 1758; little more than eight years after he had obtained the blessing of such a wife;—declaring to the last her excellence; and that she had done every thing she could for his soul and body; and leaving a good hope he was eternally obliged to her. During his illness, he was constantly visited by *one* of the most eminent preachers; objecting to *more than one*, and regretting that that one could not be his favourite Mr. C. Wesley, who then resided at Bristol.

Soon after this second bereavement, Providence brought my beloved aunt acquainted with Mr. Nathaniel Gilbert, and his wife, who had come to England two years before on a religious account, and were about to return to Antigua, their native place; intending to propagate the knowledge of that Gospel they had become more fully instructed in, under the ministry of the Messrs. Wesleys; and wishing to be accompanied by one or two equally zealous in the best of causes. The ardent mind and warm zeal of their new acquaintance, freed from the ties of husband and child, soon embraced the scheme; and, much against the inclination of a favourite brother, she embarked with them in the year 1759, for that distinguished colony; so persuaded she was directed by heaven, that her "heart never failed in some very threatening dangers met with in the voyage." One of these occurred on their embarkation. The vessel, in which Mr. Gilbert, eager to obey his father's orders to return, engaged a cabin, had been an old French one, taken up by government to convey anchors to his Majesty's yard at English harbour. The captain, too much addicted to liquor, to know exactly what he was about, summoned his passengers on board late at night, after giving them leave to lodge on shore. As soon as they obeyed, he assured them he should not sail till the morning, and finally, *most providentially* weighed anchor

while it was dark, taking with him Mr. Francis Gilbert, and a brother of my aunt's, and a lieutenant in the navy, who intended staying, till obliged to quit the next day! The poor crazy ship now fell so much on one side, as imminently to endanger the lives of those on board; its want of ballast and proper stowage, rendering it doubtful whether it was *intended* to reach its apparently destined port. Mr. Walsh instantly applied to the owners, who had gone on shore; telling them what he saw, and on their framing evasions and excuses, spoke out, declaring what he was, and assuring them if they did not take in ballast at the next port, he would go to the Admiralty and inform against them. This threat had the desired effect, and they thought fit to put *forty ton of ballast* on board; but when Messrs. Walsh and Gilbert left the vessel, they gazed after it with tearful eyes and aching hearts, fearing they had taken a last look of friends and relatives so dear. My heroic friend, informed by Mr. Gilbert of the danger her brother apprehended, (who at the same time told her he intended to brave it with his family, but intreated her not to risk her safety on their account,) persisted in going, declaring she would not recede, having counted the cost, and being fully resolved to share all their perils. Another narrow escape took place at Torbay, where they had a most violent storm, and where the captain refused to cut his cable, though it seemed impossible to draw it up, and the ship was in *instant danger of foundering!* Providence here again interposed, and the strength of the gale broke the rope, giving the sea room necessary to their preservation. Even when anchored in English harbour, danger was not over, for the first thing they met was a ship of war on fire!

In the new world, our female missionary, (do not start at the term, Rev. Sir, till you hear

·further,) bent down her attention, and all the resources of a cultivated refined mind, to the instruction of poor untaught Africans; alike disregarding the sneers of the worldling, (some of whom were compelled to admire the form religion wore in her,) the advice of those who wished her less singular, and the astonishment of all; meeting with various success. Among other instances, the late highly favoured, and now much afflicted writer, has heard her relate with pleasure, humility, and gratitude, but in far more interesting terms than she is able to use, the affecting story of a very young negro woman, who drew near to listen while she was endeavouring to instruct one far advanced in the journey of life. The pleased and pleasing girl, seemed in a moment to comprehend what the other was unable to understand. A spark from heaven appeared in one instant to illuminate her mind, and soften her heart; and she strove in her own language, evidently to little purpose, to convey to her hoary fellow slave the instruction just received by herself. *She had heard to purpose*; such a plant was not neglected; and though my charming friend left the island before the full effect of this effort was known, she learned in about two years that the youthful convert had lived and died proving herself one of those who would bless the hour her dear instructor embarked for a trans-atlantic shore: which, in 1762, she was induced, after three years residence, to quit, having in that time, been brought to the verge of the grave by a most violent fever then rife in the island; immediately after receiving the dying testimony, and hearing the last sigh of a young mulatto woman, summoned by this disease into a world of spirits; but not unprepared for the change.

In my loved aunt's severe affliction, she was for many days completely deranged; and during