

BHS News letter – December 2004

My Desert Island Book

It was several years ago that I was first introduced to the world of eighteenth century female spirituality through the writings of, and several fascinating conversations with, the late Marjorie Reeves about Anne Steele and her Baptist intellectual circle. It was with much eagerness that I awaited the arrival of my copy of the recently published first volume of *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton, Eighteenth-Century, British-Baptist, Woman Theologian*. Compiled and introduced by Joann Ford Watson, H R Gill Family Professor of Theology at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio, published by Mercer University Press, volume 1 contains the collection of Letters on numerous spiritual subjects, many to noted eighteenth century religious celebrities. Further volumes are promised - the next, volume 2, containing hymns, prayers and writings.

Having had some opportunity to dip into the treasury of the volume I have in my hand, I would indeed welcome a desert island experience to have time to become more familiar with Anne Dutton's peculiar and powerful wisdom. I constantly marvel at how relevant and fresh the letters appear after two hundred and fifty years or so have passed. As I write this at the beginning of Advent, having recently begun a series of new challenges in ministry, I read in letter xlviii: 'Some Scriptures were sweet and precious to me this week, and made me hope that the Lord will appear for us. Oh, that we may meekly and humbly wait to see what God will do, and look upon opposing creatures as instruments of trial in the hand of our all-wise Refiner and most gracious Father!'

Some of her letters recipients are named, including John Wesley and George Whitefield. Others are quite anonymous, as her everyman-everywoman correspondence ministers across the centuries, letter lxviii being a case in point: 'I am glad, my dear sister, that you love the slain Lamb, and long to see the crown flourishing upon His royal head. In this my soul closely joins with yours. Let us mourn for the dishonour done to our Saviour-King, and His glorious gospel, the rod, the sceptre of His strength, by many that profess to be His subjects and servants.' Amen, I say. Now, I know I'm allowed my Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare on my desert island - but please can I ditch the Shakespeare (a hobby-horse I will gladly share with you privately) and reserve space for volume 2 when it appears?
Kerry J Birch.