

## THE REVEREND GEORGE ROSS

S. P. G. MISSIONARY AT NEW CASTLE, DELAWARE

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## I.

## THE PLANTING OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH IN DELAWARE

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH of Delaware has its source in the Swedish colonists, who brought their native religion to the American shores, and in the Anglican adherents; for, while the two systems existed side by side for some time, there was a remarkable spirit of friendship and co-operation between them, and eventually the Swedish foundations became Episcopal parishes. Religious services were held at Christina, probably in 1638 or earlier; and not long afterwards, at Tinicum. The lower congregation embraced those on the opposite side of the Delaware River, below Raccoon Creek and extending down to Penn's Neck; the upper congregation, those from Raccoon Creek upwards. After the building of the churches at Raccoon and Penn's Neck, the two mother congregations were confined to the west side of the river; the lower embraced all below the neighborhood of Marcus Hook and Chester; the upper, those above, eventually comprising the congregations of Wicacoe, Kingsessing, and Upper Merion in one parish. Christina and Wicacoe always remained the leading churches.<sup>1</sup> "The Swedes were a religious people, and in all their plans of colonization they proposed to themselves the extension of Christianity, and provided

<sup>1</sup>Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, trans. by Horace Burr, p. 6.

themselves with the means of religious instruction."<sup>1</sup> The Christina congregation was first ministered to by Riorus Torkillus, a Swedish clergyman who accompanied Peter Minuit, the founder of the settlement (afterwards called Wilmington). He officiated till his death, September 7th, 1643.<sup>2</sup>

The Tincum congregation dates from the administration of John Printz, who was sent over in 1642, as governor of the Swedish settlers. With him came John Campanius as chaplain of the colony. Printz's instructions, dated from Stockholm, August 15th, 1642, contained twenty-eight articles, specifying his duties in relation to the Swedes, to the Europeans living in the vicinity, and to the Indians. In relation to the Swedes, "he was to promote by the most zealous endeavours, a sincere piety, in all respects, toward Almighty God; to maintain the public worship, conformably to the doctrines and rites of the national Church; to support a proper ecclesiastical discipline; to urge instruction and virtuous education of the young; to administer justice according to the Swedish laws; to preserve, as far as practicable, the manners and customs of Sweden; to promote diligently all profitable branches of industry. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Tincum was chosen for the Governor's residence; and a fort was erected. A wooden church, consecrated September 4th, 1646, was ministered to by Campanius.<sup>4</sup> The Indians frequently visited the house of the clergyman; and he tried to explain the Christian religion to them. They seemed well-disposed to accept Christianity; and Campanius translated the Catechism into their language, and sought to make them see the beauty and excellency of his religion.<sup>5</sup> Other clergymen ministered to the Swedes in those early days; besides Torkillus, who died some five

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<sup>1</sup>Ferris: *History of Original Settlements on the Delaware*.

<sup>2</sup>Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, trans. by Horace Burr, p. 7; Lee: *Planting and Watering*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Clay: *Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware*, 2nd ed., pp. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

years after the planting of the colony at Christina, and Campanius, who returned to Sweden in 1648, there are mentioned Israel Holgh, the Reverend Mr. Peter, and the Reverend Lars Lock (Lokenius). The last-named came over during Printz's regime, and remained till about 1688.<sup>1</sup>

In 1655, the Swedes surrendered to the Dutch, who compelled them to deliver up their forts. Nine years later, the Dutch submitted to Sir Robert Carr; and Delaware, with its capital New Castle, became annexed to the government of New York. There was an influx of English immigrants, and undoubtedly many Church of England members settled in the colony, but there is no record of Anglican services for a number of years.

A church was built at Crane Hook, on the south side of the mouth of the Christiana, in 1667. This church stood on a beautiful spot close to the Delaware, so that the people from New Castle and Raccoon Creek, as well as those on the banks of the Brandywine and Christiana, could come almost to the church door in their boats. (This was a great convenience at a time when there were no riding carriages in the country and few roads and no bridges.) This church was supplied by Mr. Lock, who was for years the only Swedish clergyman in the colony, and who also had to supply the congregation that still met in the fort and at Tinicum. In 1677, a Dutch clergyman arrived from New York, named Jacob Fabritius; he ministered principally to the people of Wicacoe (now a part of Philadelphia). Though totally blind during the last nine years of his ministry, Mr. Fabritius continued till about 1691, when he retired. The Swedes were then left to depend on the services of two worthy laymen: Andrew Bongsten at Wicacoe, and Charles Christopher Springer at Christina.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, trans. by Horace Burr, p. 7. The date of Mr. Lock's leaving has been given as early as 1668 (Lee: *Planting and Watering*, p. 4).

<sup>2</sup>Ferris: *History of Original Settlements on the Delaware*; Lee: *Planting and Watering*, p. 4; Perry: *American Episcopal Church*, I., p. 245; Clay: *Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware*, 2nd ed., p. 36.

Thirty of the leading colonists, at last, forwarded a petition to Sweden for "good shepherds," to feed them with God's "holy word and sacraments." The King laid their appeal before the Archbishop of Upsala. After some delay, there were sent the Reverend Messrs. Andrew Rudman, Eric Biorck, and Jonas Auren, who sailed from Gottenberg. August 4th, 1696, and reached the James River in Virginia, June 2nd, the following year. Biorck took charge of the congregation on the Christiana; Rudman ministered to the flock at Wicacoe.<sup>1</sup>

Biorck wrote on June 27th, 1697, in his diary, that on that day the missionaries from Sweden visited "the upper congregation at a place called Wicaco, which is the nearest to Philadelphia, and where the Swedes have a church, in which we gave them an account of our voyage and objects. . . . We did the same thing on the 2d of July to the lower congregation at Tranhook (Christina), where they also have a church."<sup>2</sup> Biorck, Rudman, and Auren gave notice of their arrival to Vice-Governor William Markham, of Philadelphia, and showed him their passport, with King William's hand and seal, dated from Kensington, November 22nd, 1695; the Vice-Governor assured and promised them all possible favour and assistance. The first official visit to the congregation at Wicacoe, when they produced their credentials, was on the 30th of June; then they officially visited the Crane Hook Church.

In his diary, July 11th, 1697, Biorck wrote:

I began in Jesus' name my first Divine Service in Crane Hook Church, when I informed them how I purposed to conduct Divine Service, if circumstances are favourable thereto, *viz.*, as follows:

*1st.* Begin with a morning Psalm and then read from the pulpit a chapter of the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, beginning with the first in each.

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 504-505; Clay: Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware, 2nd ed., p. 49; Lee: Planting and Watering, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Clay: Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware, 2nd ed., pp. 56-57.

2d. Read the Catechism, without the Lutheran explanations.

3d. Read the Athanasian Creed, ending with the Benediction and a suitable hymn.

IV. Thereafter, if there is occasion, 1st, Confess; 2d, Bury the Dead; 3d, Baptise Children; 4th, Church Women, &c.

V. (a) Then begin High Mass, according to the order contained in the directory. . . .

In accordance with this plan, services were begun on the 18th of July (the Seventh Sunday after Trinity). The first chapter of Genesis and the first chapter of St. Matthew were read; various books were distributed, and instructions given as to the use of the same. Bibles were promised to those who assured the pastor that they would faithfully adhere to the Church.

I moreover added a prudent talk, representing to them that whatever was for the best for the Church was also for the best good of the people.<sup>1</sup>

On the 30th of July, 1697, a meeting was called by Biorck, to select a place for building the new church. The site was discussed; and it was agreed that it should be erected at Christina, of brick or stone. On the 19th of September, the church-wardens and the superintendent of building were selected; the dimensions were considered.<sup>2</sup> "I hope it will be done in a year," he wrote; "for the congregations are rich, and easily persuaded by good reasons, such as I have given them."

Probably because of the irregular religious ministrations in the past, Biorck found that the spiritual level of the people had declined.

That makes us fear that we shall have great labour and difficulty; but we remember our oaths, which are always before our minds, and will endeavour to bring them as nearly as possible to the state of the congregations in Sweden.<sup>3</sup>

Rudman bore witness to the same difficulties, in a letter, October 20th, 1697. "The churches are old and in bad condition. Wherefore, with God's help we are endeavouring to build new ones."

<sup>1</sup>Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, trans. by Horace Burr, pp. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15ff.

<sup>3</sup>Clay: *Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware*, 2nd ed., pp. 57-58.

The population is very thin and scattered, all along the river shore; so that some have sixteen miles to walk or ride to go to church. Nevertheless, they very regularly attend divine service on Sundays.<sup>1</sup>

On the 4th of June, 1699 (Trinity Sunday), the new church at Christina was first used and consecrated. Messrs. Rudman and Auren took part in the service, as well as Mr. Biorck; and the dedication and the entertainment which followed are described in the pastor's diary.<sup>2</sup> That church stands today—one of the landmarks of Wilmington, but still used as a place of worship; known as Holy Trinity, or Old Swedes, Church, it is an Episcopal parish of more than mere historical importance.

Almost the only monument remaining to show that there ever was a Swedish colony on our shore, is the Old Swedes' Church on the bank of the Christiana. Very few of their old dwelling houses remain. Their posterity, a mixed race, cannot now be distinguished from their fellow citizens. Their language is so entirely lost, that it is doubted whether they possess a single individual who can read or speak it. But there stands their venerable old church; with solemn aspect, silently but expressively bearing testimony to the existence and piety of a generation that has passed away forever. And there is their graveyard, where repose the mortal remains of those who formed the first enduring settlement on the Delaware, and where some have rested more than two hundred years. There lies all that could die of a community that connects our country directly with ancient Scandinavia, a region which more than one thousand years ago poured its victorious legions over Western and Southern Europe, and whose blood is now largely mingled with that of the most polished nations of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The three lower counties (New Castle, Kent, and Sussex) had been leased to William Penn, and later conveyed to him by deed of feoffment (August, 1682); "but differences in race and religion, economic rivalry

<sup>1</sup>Clay: *Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware*, 2nd ed., p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, trans. by Horace Burr, pp. 40-44. (In the Library of the General Theological Seminary, New York, the printed date, July 4th, has been interlined, and "June" substituted, with note by the late Bishop Leighton Coleman of Delaware: "Corrected at the request of the author.")

<sup>3</sup>Ferris: *History of Original Settlements on the Delaware*, quoted in Lee: *Planting and Watering*, p. 37.

between New Castle and Pennsylvania towns, and petty political quarrels over representation and office-holding . . . were so intense that Penn in 1691 appointed a special deputy governor for the 'lower counties.' Although reunited with the 'province' of Pennsylvania in 1693, the so-called 'territories' or 'lower counties' secured a separate legislature in 1704, and a separate executive council in 1710; the governor of Pennsylvania, however, was the chief executive until 1776."<sup>1</sup>

When the Reverend George Keith and the Reverend John Talbot made their survey of religious conditions and needs, at the instance of the newly-founded Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, they visited parts of Delaware. In Keith's Journal (published in 1706), we find that he preached on the 8th and 11th of April, 1703, at New Castle, and held baptisms. He had written the Reverend Doctor Thomas Bray, February 24th, that there was no minister at New Castle, though one was needed there.

There is a mighty Cry and desire allmost in all places where we have travelled to have Ministers of the Church of England Sent to them.

He had been told that if no minister be sent, the Presbyterian ministers would "swarm into those New Countries, and prevent the increase of the Church."<sup>2</sup> On the 10th of April, 1703, Talbot wrote Richard Gillingham, that in New Castle, which is "a Pretty Town," there is no church or orthodox minister, but one Mr. Wilson, a Presbyterian, preaches to the people in the court-house. He has left, but intends to return. "He has much disoblged some People thereby which makes them the more favourable to the Church, which I hope by God's Blessing be found here very Speedily."

The Place (New Castle) is very Pleasant and agreeable as most in America & would be very populous, but that there is no Settled Ministry nor Government, for what good does it do

<sup>1</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., VII., p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, I., No. 87 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

People to live in a Place void of Gospel & Law too, so that several People have moved and gone elsewhere to the Church seeing the Church does not come to them.<sup>1</sup>

The people of New Castle attached to the Church of England decided to petition for a minister. Their appeal to the Bishop of London was dated August 11th, 1703. Confident of a favorable response, they engaged workmen to build a house of worship, "drawing up a Formula for themselves & Friends, to subscribe & set down w<sup>t</sup> Sum each of them was willing to bestow towards the erecting the Fabric." They agreed to build their church on the corner of the green, in the middle of the town, where the citadel had been built, "from a persuasion that, as it belonged to their Sovereign, it was not in the power of any of their troublesome Neighbours to disturb them in their commendable undertaking." Governor Francis Nicholson was the first subscriber.<sup>2</sup>

The church thus projected was begun in 1704. Originally it was a simple, oblong structure. On the 5th of October, 1704, the Reverend Evan Evans of Philadelphia reported to a convention of clergy in New York, that there "a fair Church of Brick is building, the Windows set in, & likewise to be covered before Winter. The Church is built on a plot of Ground where formerly was a Fort, which we suppose may belong to the Crown, but is now claimed by Mr Pen, Proprietor; it is large enough for a Minister's house & school-house; the Inhabitants petition that her Majesty may be solicited to confirm this Land to the use aforesaid." A minister who could speak in Welsh was desired. The people were few and poor. The opposition came mostly from dissenters, who were largely Presbyterians. The minister from Chester (the Reverend Henry Nicholls) occasionally preached on week-days.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, I., No. 119 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Ross's History, in Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 43-44.

<sup>3</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 503-504.



The congregation of Apoquiniminck, in New Castle county, was founded in 1704, through the efforts of the S. P. G. Mr. Evans reported to the aforesaid group of clergy that the Apoquiniminck church was boarded and covered, and would soon be fit for service. Governor Nicholson had been a generous contributor. There was no minister, and the people were very poor. (This report was made October 5th, 1704.)<sup>1</sup>

On the 30th of August, 1703, twenty-two inhabitants of Dover signed a petition for Church of England services. They signified their willingness to contribute to the maintenance of a minster, and represented the increase of sin and crime due to the want of one.<sup>2</sup> The country was very fruitful, but the families lived in scattered plantations rather than in towns. Dover had few houses and not more than forty families at the time. The Reverend Thomas Crawford was sent to Dover by the S. P. G. On the 27th of August, 1705, he reported his arrival, "after a long Fatigue at Sea." He received a cordial welcome; the Reverend Evan Evans entertained him with civility.<sup>3</sup>

He wrote home, August 3rd, 1706:

At my first coming, I found the people all Stuffed with various Opinions, but not one in the place that was so much of a Churchman as to stand God-father for a Child, so that I was two months in the place before I baptised any, on that Account; they would have none, and I required. But now (I thank God) I have baptized a great number. They bring their children with sureties very orderly to the Church, and also People at age a great many, the greater part whereof were Quakers and Quaker children. . . . I have baptised families of them together, so I have daily additions to the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

Later Crawford wrote:

There was not one man in Kent county that understood the Prayer-Book; no, not so far as to answer the Psalms, or other parts of the service.

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, p. 503.

<sup>2</sup>Dorr: Christ Church, Philadelphia, p. 422; copies owned by Christ Church, Dover.

<sup>3</sup>S. P. G. Series A, II., No. xevii. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript.)

<sup>4</sup>S. P. G. Series A, II., No. clx. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript); Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 1-3.

He worked very hard. In about two years, he had baptised 230 in Kent, besides many in Sussex county. The church was built in about three years. He preached the length of the county; catechised the children diligently; and saw considerable improvement.

George Ross, the S. P. G. missionary to New Castle, arrived at the same time with Crawford. With his coming, there began a large and fruitful ministry, and the introduction of a family celebrated in American history.

## II.

### MR. ROSS'S MINISTRY

George Ross was the second son of David Ross of Balblair, and was descended from the ancient Earls of Ross. He was born at Balblair in 1679. He was put to school early, and made some progress in the Latin tongue; his scholarly inclinations were early recognized. He took his degree of Master of Arts in Edinburgh in 1700; afterwards, he returned home and became tutor to the son of the Lord of May, for which service he was allowed ten pounds sterling a year—"great wages in that part of the world." Having a desire to see the world, he soon took leave of his father and journeyed to Edinburgh; there he entered his name among the students of divinity under a worthy professor by the name of Meldrum. There was hope of his becoming a Presbyterian minister; but, as he expressed it in a letter to his son, John Ross, "the closer he applied himself to reading, the stronger his aversion grew to the party then uppermost in Scotland. He observed the leading men of that side to be some conscientious and hypocritical. He could not digest the ministers' odd gestures, grimaces, dry mouths, and screwed faces in their pulpits. He could not comply with their practices even to save him from want of bread. . . . When he passed among the students for an orthodox

brother, he was diligently informing himself of the principles of the Church of England, which (he) approved of so well that he was resolved, as soon as he could find encouragement, to set out for England." By the aid of Mr. Thomas McKenzie, Chaplain to the Earl of Cromarty, Secretary of State for Scotland, together with a recommendation from the Bishop of Edinburgh (then ousted by the Revolution), he was able to gain proper recognition in London and secure ordination in the Church of England. Soon afterwards, he was given a chaplaincy on board a man-of-war; he found the captain "a haughty fellow," and soon grew sick of that station. Returning to London, he was admitted, along with his friend McKenzie, to the ranks of the recently founded Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. McKenzie was sent as a missionary to Staten Island, New York; while Ross was ordered to New Castle.<sup>1</sup>

On the 27th of August, 1705, he wrote informing the Society that he had safely arrived in America—it was his fourth day in Philadelphia—and that the Reverend Evan Evans of Christ Church had introduced him to the Governor.<sup>2</sup> The church at New Castle was in expectation of a minister; and there was a group ready to receive him. On May 17th, 1706, Mr. Ross reported that there were but few Church people at New Castle. "we have many Opposers, both from without and from within; yet, blessed be God, we faint not, neither are we discouraged. . . . The Presbyterians have a meeting in Town, and the Anabaptists have another in the Country."<sup>3</sup> The Anglican Church had been opened in 1706; the Reverend Andrew Rudman, the Swedish minister of Wicacoe, had preached on that occasion.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Ross was able to report, July 19th, 1708, that

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<sup>1</sup>This information is largely contained in a letter written by George Ross to his son, John Ross, Esq., and published in *Rossiana* (a book on the Ross Family in America), pp. 156-158. See Ross Glass Cleland, in *Dictionary of American Biography*, XVI., p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, II., No. xciv. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript.)

<sup>3</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Lee: *Planting & Watering*, p. 10.

the New Castle Church was "quite finished . . . by the unwearied diligence and liberal Contributions of several Gentlemen in the place. . . . A fair & stately building & one of the largest in this Government." He complained of financial difficulties: there was no legal provision for the support of the clergy, and he was obliged to pay thirty pounds a year for his accommodations. He could not live there except for the bounty of a gentleman whose son he instructed in Latin. His congregation had become smaller, because of an epidemic; but the dissenters felt more kindly towards the Church since the epidemic. Country people, some living over twelve miles away, made up a considerable part of his congregation.<sup>1</sup>

The same year, the Reverend Henry Nicholls moved from Chester, Pennsylvania, to Maryland; and Mr. Ross, somewhat discouraged, left New Castle and moved to Chester. He had recently married, and hoped to secure a better maintenance for his family by keeping a boarding school. The Reverend Thomas Jenkins, who took his place at New Castle, wrote the S. P. G. that the people there would have been left destitute without a minister, if he had not arrived; the Presbyterians had built a spacious church there and would soon convert all the people to their way of thinking.<sup>2</sup> Ross excused himself to the Society for moving away, saying that he had suffered grievances, which the people were slack in redressing. He had asked for some small encouragement, since he could not live on his allowance, and had requested that a house be provided. The wardens would not take the trouble to accommodate him. He declared that he enjoyed the esteem of the people;

And I had not been obliged to leave them, had it not been for the carelessness and indifferency of some that were intrusted with the management of the affairs of the Church, and their unhappy easie tempers of being led away by those whose greatest Calamity it is, to hear the rebukes of a Clergyman.

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, IV., No. xliv. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript.)

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, IV., No. lxiii. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript.)

He expressed his hope that the Society would approve of his removal. (He had not consulted the Society before taking this step.)<sup>1</sup>

But the Venerable Society did not signify approval; on the other hand, Ross was suspended from his S. P. G. stipend during his ministry at Chester. Ross was criticised by the other clergymen of the province for making the change. To add to his troubles, he found the outlook at Chester far from promising. The congregation there was small, due, as he alleged, to some differences that occurred while Nicholls was missionary in charge; and he despaired of doing effective work among the Indians. The red men seldom came his way, except when leaving winter quarters and trading; and their language was impossible to master. So, on the 9th of March, 1709, he wrote the Society, stating that, if the New Castle wardens would redress the grievances, he would return to his former charge. If he found the place unhealthy, he would be glad for the Society to allow him to move to a more agreeable location, and not confine him to "a corner of the Country which has proved very hurtfull to (his) Person."<sup>2</sup>

Soon after this, the Reverend Thomas Jenkins died (July 30th, 1709); he had been in charge of New Castle only five months. The Reverend John Talbot of Burlington, New Jersey, thus described his death:

Poor Brother Jenkins was baited to Death with Muscatoes & blood thirsty Galknippers which wou'd not let him rest night nor day till he got a fever at Appoquiminy, came to Philadelphia & dyed immediately of a Calenture. . . . If you please to call to mind, I told the Society when I was there, that those places must be served by Itinerants and that 'tis hardly possible for any body to abide there, that is not born there, till he's Musketo proof, those little things are a great plague in some parts and when a Man is persecuted in one place he shou'd have leave to go to another or else he has very hard measure, especially in those parts where our Life is a kind

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A., IV., No. liv. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, IV., No. xcix. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript); Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 21-22.

of Penance both Winter and Summer and nobody can tell which is the Worse the extream heat or Cold.<sup>1</sup>

The Delaware Church was reduced to an unhappy state, with Nicholls removed to Maryland, Jenkins dead, and Ross at Chester. Besides, the Reverend William Black, the Sussex county missionary, left his field without the consent of the Society, and moved to the eastern shore of Virginia in August, 1709. The vestry of Apoquinimink (September 5th) thus expressed their situation:

If our church be soon supplied we shall not fear any hurt they can do us. Otherwise all our charges of building our church and the endeavours of our late Minister will prove abortive.

Ross did not remain long at Chester, but went to Maryland for a short time. Then he appeared in Philadelphia, where the Reverend Evan Evans accused him of trying to get hold of the school there which had been taught by the Reverend John Clubb.<sup>2</sup> The Reverend John Talbot described Ross as "a wandering star."

We do not know where he will fix; meanwhile he does not well to supplant and undermine, let him be confined to some place where there is need, and not stay altogether in the town to do more hurt than good.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise the vestry of New Castle sought to vindicate their own reputation; and sent a letter to the S. P. G., October 17th, 1709, explaining their conduct to Mr. Ross during his stay. They said that they had subscribed fifty pounds per annum, and that this sum would have been enlarged had he duly attended his ministry, but that his frequent absences from the Church, for weeks at a time without providing a supply, caused contributors to hold back. Ross, they said, was averse to a vestry, and acted in all matters according to his own pleasure without any interruption from them. The opening of the Church was done by

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, IV., No. xiii. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript.)

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 47-50.

<sup>3</sup>Hills: History of the Church in Burlington, N. J., p. 93.

Messrs. Ross and Rudman (the Swedish minister), and called "Emmanuel" without any notice to those undertaking the erection or any of the parishioners. Furthermore, Ross's sudden leaving was a surprise, and in the face of assurances of encouragement which would amount to more than the former subscriptions. After he moved to Chester, they entreated his return, but his demands were too great; he promised to return to his charge within six weeks, but instead he moved to Philadelphia. "His life and conversation was answerable to his sacred function, save only what we have before expressed." Hence they begged for another minister—one "able to prevent unstable minds from wandering."

Our long want of the true established ministry giving us more than ordinary occasion for such a person.<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop of London felt that Ross's conduct was blameworthy; and he wrote the Secretary of the Society, December 16th, 1709, that trouble had been caused by Ross's ambition "to get nearer to Philadelphia," which "trapped poor M<sup>r</sup> Jenkins over to New Castle, and set the only friend M<sup>r</sup> Nichols had at Chester so inveterately against him that he was forced to fly to Maryland and so made way for himself to get into that place, where he had no sooner got, but immediately upon M<sup>r</sup> Clubb's removal he applied himself to the Gentlemen of Philadelphia to be chosen schoolmaster in his room which they have actually done, and by his own Letter I perceive he is undermining M<sup>r</sup> Evans to get likewise into that Church, M<sup>r</sup>. Black is got to Virginia; M<sup>r</sup> Jenkins is dead, so that there is likely to be a very great desertion in those parts unless speedy care is taken to prevent it."<sup>2</sup>

Some gentlemen of Chester wrote in Ross's defence, July 14th, 1710, saying they understood that Nicholls had falsely suggested that by bitter treatment he was forced to leave their church to make way for Mr. Ross.

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, p. 58.

They were sorry that Nicholls should be "so disingenuous, but when he was ashamed to assign the true reason he was obliged to find out some other. He left this church near two months before M<sup>r</sup> Ross came."<sup>1</sup>

Ross felt, however, that it was incumbent on him to vindicate himself in person before his ecclesiastical superiors; so he returned to Great Britain in 1710, carrying with him a commendatory letter from the Chester vestry. He evidently convinced his diocesan, the Bishop of London, that he was excusable in his conduct, for the Bishop wrote:

I am so well satisfied in M<sup>r</sup> Ross' his innocence, that I am of opinion we ought to pay him his arrears when we can, and that it will be best to send him to Chester for the convenience of his family.<sup>2</sup>

Thus reinstated, Ross started for America. On his return, however, he was subjected to a very trying experience. He fell into the hands of the French and was carried prisoner to France; there he was stripped of all his clothing and given rags. To such difficulties and dangers were travellers subjected on the high seas in those days. When he secured his release and returned to Chester, he found that Quakerism had taken deep root there. In a letter written from Dinant, March 16th, 1711, he described his trouble.

I left England about the latter end of January, in Company with the East India fleet, and their Convoys. The ship on Board whereof I was, among others, unhappily lost the fleet by reason of badd weather, and the next day but one it pleased God to suffer us to fall into the hands of our Enemies; For the L'Achille a Man of War of 62. Guns, and 500. men came up with us and made us strike without a Blow this happen'd on O. S. Friday 9<sup>th</sup> february. In the heighth of our Confusion and Consternation we were Commanded to come on Board the Frenchman; and accordingly the Capt. and I, with some hands, put off, and w<sup>th</sup> much ado, gott safe Aboard the Enemies Ship, 'twere tedious to relate all the hardships we underwent during our Stay there; 'tis enough to Convince you of their

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 58-59.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60.



baseness and Savage disposition, that on Thursday O. S. 15<sup>th</sup> Feby. when we came to Anchor before Brest, I, as well as others, was Strip't of all my Cloaths from the Crown of my head to the Sole of my ffeet; in a word I was left as Naked as I was born; and that by means of the Greedy Priest that was Chaplain of the Ship; he perceived that my Cloaths were better than his own, and therefore he never ceased to importune his Captain till he got leave to Change, forsooth, with me, so that I am now Cloathed in Raggs in Testimony of my Bondage. Had I concealed myself and not discovered my ffunction to the enemy, I should take in better part the hard usage I met with. But after I signified to the Captain what I was, and produced my Credentials to that purpose, I cou'd not forbear telling the Priest, how unhandsomely the french requited the English for their Civilitys to such of their Missionaries as had the misfortune to be taken at Sea. I had three Shirts upon me, and yet so furious were the Men that strip'd me, that they wou'd not allow me one of 'em: Such were their Orders from their holy ffather, and to be sure they deserved well at his hands for using an heretical deceiver in so barbarous a manner. But I forgive them and their Confessors too, and may I be enabled from above to pray for them that despitefully use me.

I arrived here 1<sup>st</sup> March O. S. that is about three days ago, having travel'd hither from Brest almost all the way afoot; My imprisonment in a Close jayl at Brest and my journey afterwards has brought me near Death's door, so that I have not been able to read Pray<sup>rs</sup> to my Fellow Prisoners but once since I came to this place. While I remained in the Jayl of Brest, I read the service for the Morning and Evening every day without Interruption, and God be thanked we were not without some good and serious men amongst us whose example was no small Curb to the Lycentious temper of the Croud of Sailors; concerning the generality of whom I cannot speak but with great Concern, since Changes do not prevail with them to fear God. They make light of Cursing instead of blessing their Enemies and Prosecutors. . . . And now S<sup>r</sup> since my misery calls for some speedy relief, I beseech you for Christ's sake take my distressed Condition into Consideraõn and let the same be laid before the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Society. . . . There are 400. Prisoners at this time in this place; the Lisbon Packet Board (boat?) which came into S<sup>t</sup> Maloes yesterday adding to our Number not a few.<sup>1</sup>

Back in Pennsylvania, and undoubtedly a much chastened man, Ross wrote to the Society from Chester, January 22nd, 1712:

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, VI., No. 40. (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript.)

The number of those who profess themselves members of our Church in the County of Chester is but small in comparison of the mischievous brood of Quakers here. The seeds of Apostacy have taken deep root and that fatal Weed of Quakerism is cultivated with the utmost skill and tenderness, so that it is not like to fade all on a sudden. The novelty is so fashionable & prevailing in this place that some of those who own themselves Church people are strangely bewitched & lull'd into an indifference about the baptism of their Infants, and notwithstanding what I could offer, both in public & in private, to cure this infection, yet I cannot say that I have succeeded so well as might be reasonably expected. But Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.

He needed books and tracts for distribution. At the same time he had become crippled financially through his capture.

'Tis so very low with me by reason of my being taken into France that it is not possible for me to surmount the difficulties I am at present involved in without the compassion and special aid of the Society. I am obliged to live very much below my Character because my salary is burthened with some debts which I was necessitated to contract to redeem me out of France, as well as to bear my charges in my Voyage to this Country.<sup>1</sup>

Ross was very much concerned over the progress of Quakerism, which was then regarded as a pernicious heresy and subversive of patriotic principles. In his letter to the Society, May 15th, 1712, he said:

I live where Quakerism has taken deep root, and is cultivated by Act, and Policy and recommended by faction and Interest, so that it is no wonder if the Doctrine of Christ meets with so much reproach and Opposition, and makes but few Proselytes amongst a haughty and prevailing faction.<sup>2</sup>

He desired books with which to refute the Quakers' arguments; they had abundance of tracts.

Writing to the Society, December 30th, 1712, he said:

The flock committed to my charge is indeed small, but God be thanked, generally sound, which is as much as can be well expected, considering the Genius of the bulk of the people

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, VII., p. 510 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

among whom we live. I need not tell you that Quakerism is generally professed in Pensilvania, and in no County of that province does the haughty Tribe of that persuasion appear more rampant than where I reside, there being by a modest computation twenty Quakers, besides other dissenters, in the County of Chester, for one true Church man.

Thus Quakerism has number and interest on its side; and the true religion is crush'd as unfashionable and impoverishing, whilst its proselites gain but a few friends by their change and draw upon themselves the certain displeasure of many implacable enemies. This is the reason why many who are thought well wishers of the Church are either neuters in Religion, or for the present lean to the strongest and most gainful side.<sup>1</sup>

Ross was commended to a Mr. Yeates of Chester for his diligence in training up the negroes in the Christian religion.<sup>2</sup> He evidently faced his tasks with good resolution, and was thankful to be back in harness with the approbation of the Society.

I will not presume to compare my labours with the endeavours of the meanest of their Missionaries; but this I can safely say, that since the time I began to enjoy my health in this Country as I do now, blessed be God, I have not knowingly missed an opportunity to carry on the design of my mission and to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the Saints.

He held services not only at Chester, but also at Concord and Chichester.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile he was winning the confidence of his fellow-clergymen. May 18th, 1713, he wrote:

We are all blessed be God of One Mind, And Strenuous Maintainers of that Fraternal Correspondence which our Superiors do heartily recomēd to all the Missionaries.<sup>4</sup>

Since Ross left New Castle, the place had been ministered to by the unfortunate Jenkins and by the Reverend Robert Sinclare and the Reverend Jacob Henderson. When the last-named asked to be released from the charge in July, 1713, he suggested that the Society appoint Mr. Ross to his former charge. This

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 68-70.

<sup>2</sup>Pascoe: Two Hundred Years of the S. P. G., p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 69-70.

<sup>4</sup>S. P. G. Series A, VIII., pp. 476-478 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

was complied with; and once more Ross was stationed at New Castle, where the remaining forty years of his life were spent. In a letter written October 9th, 1714, he thanked the Society for the appointment, and spoke of the general satisfaction expressed by his flock at seeing him there.<sup>1</sup> He entered upon his duties with determination, and was encouraged at the response which he received. On the 20th of April, 1715, he wrote that he was well satisfied with the change; his communicants had increased since Christmas from eighteen to thirty-six; galleries were to be built to accommodate the larger congregation. Yet he was distressed at the desolate condition of Apoquinimick and Dover Hundred, which he had occasionally supplied. "The one lyes from me, about 24 miles & the other about 60. and both of them I have more than once supplied since my coming to New Castle." Many of the Dover churchmen were ready to revolt, feeling that they had been neglected by the honorable board; and they were about to settle a Presbyterian teacher in the church. Indeed, Ross preached to them the day that the dissenters were to take charge of the pulpit, and succeeded in thwarting the plan.

For my own part I can safely say I spare no pains or trouble to discharge my mission up & down the country where there is most occasion & I can reach without neglecting to spend it in the service of our common Lord & Master. I have nothing further to add but my hearty thanks to my most Honorable Patrons and Benefactors for all their Favors towards me and sincere Prayers for their Prosperity & welfare.<sup>2</sup>

He reported to the Society, October 1st, 1715, that he worked at New Castle and several other places, as often as he could be spared from his own flock; and he prayed that—

God enable the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Society Speedily to furnish the desolate Churches in my Neighbourhood, with able Missionaries, that I may have some Assistance to reap with me in so great a harvest.

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, IX., p. 219 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, p. 82.

He counted his congregation at New Castle as 180, the number of actual communicants as 40, and the baptised persons as 18. (The last figure refers to those baptised but not yet admitted to the Lord's Supper.)<sup>1</sup>

The shortage of Church of England missionaries was a considerable handicap in all the provinces, throughout the colonial period; and Mr. Ross felt the need keenly. In a letter to the Society, August 28th, 1716, he wrote:

There are so many places in the province of Pennsylvania and territories, that want your ministry of the word, and so few Missionaries to supply them (and now fewer than ever) that except the hon<sup>ble</sup> Society will please to send us help, we who endure so long the heat of the day must needs give out, while we are spent so much in journeying often, & traveling far from our several places of residence and habitation.

'Tis really wonderful to consider how the church prevails, even where it is most opposed. There is a congregation of Christians lately sprung up in one of the darkest corners of Pennsylvania where Quakerism seemed to be out of all danger from the Priests. Friends are now convinced of their mistake for Priest Humphreys & Priest Ross entered their borders and wounded the beast by preaching Christ and the resurrection.

But though we and the Quakers do thus widely differ, yet tis observable that when any of them do leave their own way, and become Christians they generally make their application to your missionarys for Baptism, instead of going to dissenting teachers, who tho' ten to one of us do not convert one Quaker to ten that come over to the church.

(The whereabouts of this congregation may be surmised from the letter of the Reverend John Humphreys, of Chester, October 3rd, 1715, wherein he says that he and Ross had raised a congregation at a township called Marlborough, thirty miles from Chester; and that he and Ross had preached at St. John's, eighty miles away, to a fine congregation which Mr. Ross had lately rescued out of the hands of the Presbyterians.)<sup>2</sup>

Ross deplored the lack of religious life in the families; he had made efforts to popularize family prayer.

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, X., pp. 144-145 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 98-100.

I resolved w<sup>th</sup> myself to add example to precept and exhortation and accordingly, sometime before I was taken ill, I visited some one family or other, every Sunday evens & having performed divine service I recommended it to the master to go on in the Worship of God in his house, as it was then set on foot, and begun in his family. At the same time I catechised the children & servants that belonged to the family, or entertained the auditory w<sup>th</sup> some brief practical remarks upon the second lesson for the evening service, w<sup>ch</sup> proved so agreeable to the neighbourhood, that some dissenters were thereby encouraged to joyn with us in prayer & to speak more respectfully of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The frame of St. James's Church, White Clay Creek, New Castle county, was raised on the 4th of December, 1716; this made three churches in the county, and in all of them Ross was expected to officiate—"which they may be sure of to my Power." In reporting the same, Ross took occasion to speak of the handicap under which the Church struggled because of no resident bishop to ordain prospective ministers.

Had we a Bishop among us there are those in these parts, who are Capable and willing to enter into Orders, and so the Church would be served without being always Obliged to Europe for her Pastors and teachers. And with all, the presence and Authority of one of the Episcopal Order among us, would by his influence and good Managem<sup>t</sup> prevail so far upon the people, as to allow their Ministers a competency even by voluntary Contributions; and then the Society might Expect to be Eased of their burden. A Bishop is Certainly wanted Among us; and if we are denyed this blessing much longer beware, that presbyterian ordination may not put in that claim hereafter which it did of late years some where nearer home, viz. That the Govern<sup>t</sup> of the Church must be presbyterian, because presbyters, and they only in person were the first planters and preachers of the Gospel among them.<sup>2</sup>

On the 24th of June, 1717, Ross wrote the Society that the flock committed to his charge was not on his account in a declining state. "We have the pleasure of dwelling together in Unity, and in the Bond of Peace, which is a wall to us against the Attacks of those, who find their Acco<sup>t</sup> in jars and division." His

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 101-102.

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, XII., pp. 181-183 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

greatest discouragement was in the fact that he had not been able to persuade many of his people to make their monthly communions; on the most solemn festivals, he had a good number of communicants. There was no Church of England minister in the three lower counties but himself; and he felt unable to supply the wants of all his neighbors.

Three congregations are as much as I can well look after, and in some measure provide for.

He served at New Castle two Sundays a month, at Apoquinimick one, and at the White Clay Creek Church another.

The people at New Castle lay claim to all my service, & seem to take it some what amiss, when I am employed Abroad on Sundays. I would not willingly disoblige them, nor yet see, if I could help it, the Church at Apoquonimy, which is as frequent as that at New Castle, quite desolate and forsaken.<sup>1</sup>

Soon afterwards, he made a tour of Sussex and Kent counties at the invitation of Governor William Keith. On August 6th, 1717, he went with the Governor to the courthouse of Sussex county (Lewes), and read the service; the justice of the county court and others were present. The next day, he preached in the courthouse before a crowd, some listening at the doors and windows. The people were interested; they had not heard a Church of England minister in a long time. He baptised thirty children there.

The Zeal & affection of the people of Lewis Town for the Church has appeared so great of late that they have pitched upon a sober person among them to read prayers to them every Lord's day, which he does with so great applause that the Congregation he supplies as a reader doth visibly increase every sabbath.

On the 10th of August, he went to a place of worship about sixteen miles from Lewes—"a small Building erected by a few well disposed persons, in order to meet together there to serve God according to the way of the Church of England. They pursue the same

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series A, XII., pp. 192-193 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

methods here that the Church people do at Lewis." Zealous readers kept the Anglicans from falling away to the dissenters. During his week in Sussex county, Ross baptised 102 persons. From there he went to Dover Hundred in Kent county; he was impressed by the fact that Governor Keith introduced public business with prayer (as at Lewes). He had fourteen baptisms at Dover; and was much affected by the aggressiveness of the Presbyterians, who had built a meeting house. Keith commended Ross to the S. P. G.; and spoke of the industry and exemplary lives of the clergy, who were too few in number.<sup>1</sup>

Christ Church, Philadelphia, being vacant because of the removal of the Reverend Evan Evans to Maryland, the Secretary of the S. P. G. offered Mr. Ross the choice of continuing at New Castle or going to the larger city parish; this offer was made in consideration of his "Long and dilligent Services in the Church in America." Ross replied that he would go to Philadelphia, if the Bishop of London so directed; "yet the Interest of Religion and my duty in the service of the church . . . will not permit me to leave my little flock at Newcastle, expos'd to many dangers until some Person is appointed there in my room, or that some other orders shall arrive to justify my conduct in that point."<sup>2</sup> He remained at New Castle; and the Reverend John Vicary was appointed to Christ Church.

The voluntary conventions of the clergy of the colonies made for fellowship and effectiveness. There are several accounts of such gatherings. In 1719, the four Anglican clergymen of the vicinity of Philadelphia—George Ross, John Vicary, John Humphreys, and Robert Weyman wrote the Society:

We at stated times meet together, to advise and direct one another, which is always done with discreet freedom & gravity & our conversation is managed with the greatest intimacy and affection. To make our meetings useful to the people, one

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 32-35.

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series A, XIII., pp. 285, 292-293, 302-304 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).



of our number preaches a sermon suitable to the occasion by which method of proceeding our Churches are edified, & we are examples of brotherly love & unity.<sup>1</sup>

Such meetings gave opportunity to compare notes and discuss the needs of the Church; and recommendations were forwarded to the Society in London.

Around 1723, there was quite an immigration of people from the north of Ireland; and New Castle was a place of settlement. On the 17th of September, 1723, Ross informed the Secretary of the Society that the Church there was environed with a greater number of dissenters than ever, because of these fresh recruits. "They call themselves Scotch Irish ignavum pecus, and the bitterest railers against the Church that ever trod upon American ground." We asked for some of Bishop King's books, to use in refuting their statements. While his baptisms had decreased, he was industrious in holding services, "that I might not be outstriped in diligence by those who would amuse the world by a more than ordinary application in Lecturing."<sup>2</sup>

Ross was an earnest advocate of the uplift of the negro—a cause championed by not a few of the colonial clergymen but regarded callously by the majority of the laity. The conscience of the people in general had not been aroused on that score; and there was throughout the provinces a feeling that baptism would emancipate the slaves. Even though certain early legislatures specifically enacted that the admission of the slaves to baptism would not entail their freedom, the masters seemed unconvinced. In 1727, Ross wrote that in New Castle there was little care taken of instructing the slaves; the Quakers leave their negroes "to their common principles, the natural light"; the dissenters "are so taken with the doctrine of absolute decrees," that they lay no stress on baptism. "Those few that are baptized belong to Churchmen. The

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 122-124.

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 37-38.

truth is, there is a general indifference in churchmen, as well as in those of other sentiments, to make proselytes of their Slaves; the true cause whereof is the want of Zeal in Masters, and the untoward haughty behaviour of those Negroes who have been admitted into the Fellowship of Christ's Religion."<sup>1</sup>

The Reverend William Becket was sent as a missionary to Sussex county, soon after the visit of Mr. Ross and Governor Keith. This lightened the burden of the New Castle rector; but he continued to find abundant work to do, and needs to be met. On the 4th of October, 1729, he wrote an encouraging letter to the Society, saying that religion never appeared at New Castle in so lively a state as at present; the Lord's Supper was regularly administered.

That Generation is almost extinct who were my hearers at my first settling here; & those who Succeed them are a Sort of very honest Zealous Churchmen, whose lives adorn their profession, & cool the heat of those who are prejudic'd against our grave and manly worship. We are blessed with peace & mutual love; and none among us is tainted with new & Strange opinions<sup>2</sup>

A letter written November 7th, 1732, reveals opposition to the Church.

It cannot be expected, without the intervention of extraordinary means, that the church should flourish in a country where to revolt from her doctrine & discipline is both profitable & fashionable. . . . An Harangue was made here t'other day, from the bench of Justices, exposing those for Idiots who pay any regard to Priests or Churches. . . . To be a missionary here, in the present posture of affairs, is in good earnest to fight with beasts of Ephesus. Nothing but hacking & hewing is left unattempted to discourage us & drive us away. Our subscriptions are Nullities, whilst our hearers are publicly laughed at by those who make the greatest figure, for parting with their money to support—as they say—a pack of cheats & villains.<sup>3</sup>

Having heard that there were several Church of England members from Ireland, settled some twenty-

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>S. P. G. Series B, VI., No. 252 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript); Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>S. P. G. Series B, VI., No. 275 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript); Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 64-67.

four miles from New Castle, Ross offered his services. On May 15th, 1733, he preached in the barn of the gentleman who gave him the information; and had "a mixt multitude, among whom were many presbyterians. . . . The church people were very thankful, & rejoiced that they had an opportunity of serving God their own way, in the part of the province so far from any missionary." He baptised ten children, and churched six women. He made return trips June 11th, August 6th, September 3rd, and October 2nd. The place he visited was in Chester county, Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> He continued to minister there.

In his letter of June 15th, 1736, to the Society, Ross complained of the dimness of his eye. The New Castle congregation had lost two of its chief supports and benefactors. "My hearers are generally poor, and of a mean appearance. Many of them are new Comers, from the North of Ireland, who sit now in pews formerly possessed by those who were reputed Gentlemen."

With much ado, I collected as much money as bought me a Surplice, but some grand Villain has not suffered us to enjoy it long. We are now where we were, and like to continue so, unless you please to use your interest to relieve our misfortune.<sup>2</sup>

The Reverend George Whitefield, the erratic but earnest evangelist, visited Pennsylvania and New Castle, upsetting the equilibrium which existed. An Anglican clergyman himself, Whitefield was able to gain entrance into the churches of the towns visited by him; but his methods served to alienate the clergy sooner or later. Many letters attest the confusion that resulted from his tours. On August 1st, 1740, Ross reported that "the Church here enjoys a profound Calm, after being threatened with a meer tempest of Enthusiasm. We felt this storm in this village in its decline when its fury was almost spent. I was

<sup>1</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 68-70.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

never so much astonished, as when I saw the fluctuating humor of our people." Whitefield had discredited himself by his attacks upon Archbishop Tillotson and other clergymen of high repute; and by "his amassing such vast sums & therewith supporting a company of young fellows and gadding young women who follow him to Georgia, instead of applying the charities for his little orphan house, to their proper end." His congregation was somewhat disrupted by Whitefield's visit; but "thanks be to God, the snare wherein they were caught is broken, and they are happily delivered, and now we live in peace and love."<sup>1</sup>

Aeneas Ross, the son of the Reverend George Ross, was sent to England for ordination; and on the 26th of February, 1741, he received the royal bounty, and was sent back to Pennsylvania as a missionary of the S. P. G.<sup>2</sup> Young Ross was twenty-six years old at the time; he had been carefully reared by his father. For awhile, he was *locum tenens* at Christ Church, Philadelphia, following the death of the Reverend Archibald Cummings. He also served Bristol and surrounding places; later he was put in charge of Oxford and Whitemarsh. Finally, he became rector of his father's parish at New Castle, where he spent the remaining twenty-five years of his life.<sup>3</sup>

On the 4th of March, 1742, George Ross reported that the town of New Castle "seems to decline both in its trade, and Number of inhabitants, So that the congregation of my people make not that Shew they formerly did."

We have a Society erected here upon Whitefield's plan; it consists of various professions; but its heat seems to cool, tho' industriously supported by a new sett of Itinerant Preachers & pretended reformers from the Presbytery; who, because they preach loud, long & thunder out hell & damnation, are caressed & followed by the weaker sort as inspir'd persons, but *nihil vehemens est durabile*. . . .

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<sup>1</sup>Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, pp. 204-205.

<sup>2</sup>Fothergill: Emigrant Ministers, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Pascoe: Two Hundred Years of the S. P. G., p. 852.

The numbers of communicants here have not increased since my last to you; the Country being unhinged from their former ways, by a torrent of enthusiasm, nor has some of my flock escaped the infection but the Tide seems to turn.<sup>1</sup>

In his report of the state of the New Castle Church submitted to the Reverend Doctor Jenney of Philadelphia, Commissary of the Lord Bishop of London, September 7th, 1743, Ross gave a gloomy account of the declining condition of the town and parish. His congregation consisted chiefly of farmers, mechanics, and day-labourers. Persons of distinction were rare. "Formerly we cou'd vie with our Neighbours in Coll<sup>s</sup>, Captans, & Publick Officers. Our desolation at present is so great, that we have Several fair houses without Inhabitants, A Port without trade & Consequently an useless Collector." The majority of his hearers were "plan Country men; many of them constant Communicants, & generally devout frequenters of divine Worship." The Church had been repaired by the generous contributions of the community, with some assistance; and covered with cedar shingles. The gifts proved the devotion of the people.

One Edward Howie, a Young man, by trade a Carpenter, died here last winter, & tho' his Circumstances were but mean & low, yet out of Zeal for the Cause of Religion, He Ordered, by his Will, that his Watch sh<sup>d</sup> be sold & the Money Applied to repair the Communion Table, & the rails that Inviron it; & whatsoever else in that part of the Church was gone to decay.

His gift also provided a gate, "w<sup>ch</sup> is both an Ornament & Security to Our Church Yard."<sup>2</sup>

Though Ross was sensible of the decline of the parish, he attributed the fact to prevailing conditions. "This ebb of the church here can be by no means laid to my charge, for all the country about me can bear witness to my diligence. . . . The truth is, the Village is in a ruinous condition, without Trade, & meanly inhabited; & most of the few that inhabit it are

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series B, X., No. 116 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript)  
Perry: Historical Collections, Pennsylvania, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Fulham MSS., Pennsylvania, No. 101 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

strongly preposs(ess)ed against our way, and tho' the Meeting House be deserted, they choose to stay at home rather than attend our worship." Still the young people were favourably inclined; several had applied to him for prayer-books. His communicants were persons of "very orderly lives."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, he could see the fruits of his own toil. On the 23rd of November, 1745, he wrote that the New Castle Church "is for the most part of my own training up."

I have been now about forty years in the Mission, & most of my present hearers I have Baptized & catechized myself, & if I might express myself without imputation of vanity, they are as true conformists, both in principle & practice, as any congregation upon this main.

Dissenters were attending his Church, since the meeting house was deserted; the people "must now either come to our church or sleep at home." The old people deeply rooted in their prejudices, stay away; but the younger sort conform.<sup>2</sup>

The town of New Castle, consisting of about four-score houses, "waxes poorer & poorer," wrote Mr. Ross, March 27th, 1750; "And falls into Contempt more and more, every year, haveing Several houses without inhabitant, & Some not fit for habitation. The Church under my care, visibly Shareing in the wretched Fate of the poor town, makes a much meaner appearance than at any time heretofore. This dying Condition is partly owing to an upstart village lying on a Neighbouring creek, which yields a convenient port to the adjacent Country." Still he did his duty; "no man may upbraid me with haveing an hand in the languishing State of this church."<sup>3</sup>

May 24th, 1751, Mr. John Ross, a prominent lawyer of Philadelphia and the son of the New Castle rector,

<sup>1</sup>Letter of March 6th, 1735. Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, pp. 86-87. S. P. G. Series B, XII., No. 42 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, p. 87; S. P. G. Series B, XII., No. 43 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>3</sup>S. P. G. Series B, XVIII., No. 154 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress, transcript).

reported to the Society that his honourable father had lately been afflicted with a violent fit of sickness, "but blessed be God is now on the Recovery."<sup>1</sup> The aging clergyman was nearing the end of his earthly labours. On the 13th of October, 1752, he wrote to the Society:

I am at this time upon the verge of Extreme old age, being, according to my own computation, in the 73<sup>rd</sup> year of my life, and the 47 of my mission. Hence some imagine that I am not only the oldest missionary, but the oldest man in the mission. Be that as it will, I have been very often exercised for 2 years past with those maladies and infirmities which are commonly incident to my present stage of life. This, to my no small mortification, interrupted my former correspondence with you, and perhaps exposed me to the charge of negligence. My Service at this time is confined to the mean village of Newcastle, where little or nothing occurring beside the common offices of a settled cure, it was not in my power to offer any thing to your consideration that deserved a place in your collection. . . . As I am in a tottering condition, this may happen to be my last to you. If this should be the case, I beg this may transmit my most hearty acknowledgments to the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Society for their innumerable favours conferr'd upon me in the course of a long mission; which, had my lot fallen any where but in a poor sinking town, would have prov'd, I believe, more Successful. I cannot clear myself from oversights & mistakes in the course of so many years, but thank God, he has been pleased in his great goodness, to preserve me from such blots and stains as would do harm to the cause I was engaged to maintain,—the Honor, I mean, and interest of the Church of England, from which I never varied from the day I wrote man.<sup>2</sup>

He did not survive long the writing of this letter. The Abstract of the Society for 1754, page 59, quotes from this last communication; and adds:

And it hath lately pleased God to call to Himself this worthy Servant to receive the Reward of his pious Labours.

Mr. Ross witnessed the rise and decline of New Castle. He entered upon the field a young, ambitious man, rather restless and independent; he became a self-sacrificing, industrious, and consecrated missionary, persisting in a difficult work. He faced considerable

<sup>1</sup>S. P. G. Series B, XIX., No. 108 (Stevens & Brown Library of Congress transcript).

<sup>2</sup>Perry: Papers relating to the Church in Delaware, p. 99.

opposition; but he lived to find himself respected and sought after by the children of the ones who had blocked his early progress. He watched a whole generation grow up under his care, reflecting in their lives his prayers and teaching. The Society which once suspended his stipend for his insubordination, grew to look upon him as one of the most sincere and dependable workers in the field.

George Ross was the founder of the family of his name which has contributed much to American life and institutions. He married, first, Joanna Williams, of Rhode Island, by whom he had six children. She died September 29th, 1726, at the age of thirty-six; and her tomb is near the eastern gable of Immanuel Church, New Castle. His second wife was Catherine Van Gezel, of New Castle; seven children were born of this union. One son, John Ross, was one of the leading lawyers of Philadelphia. Another son, named for his father, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of Congress. His daughter Gertrude was married to George Read, of New Castle, also a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Betsy Ross, of American flag celebrity, was the wife of John Ross, the son of the Reverend Aeneas Ross, who followed his father at Immanuel Church. The grave of the Reverend George Ross is unmarked and unknown, as are many others in the venerable churchyard of New Castle; but on the wall of the Church a commemorative tablet was erected by Mary Ross, a great-granddaughter, extolling justly the "piety, learning, and zeal for the cause of Christ," which characterised her ancestor.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Courtesy of the Rev. Joseph H. Earp, rector of Immanuel Church, New Castle (1937).



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