

An ACCOUNT

Of a REMARKABLE

WORK of GRACE,

Or the great Succels of the *Gospel*
in VIRGINIA,

In a Letter from the Rev. Mr. *Davis* of
Hanover County in *Virginia*, to the Rev.
Mr. *Bellamy* of *Betblem* in *New-England*:

With an Account of the State of RELIGION
in several Parts of *North-America*, from
1743 to June 1751.

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G. Englefield, in *West-Street* near the *Seven-Dials* 1752.

[Price One Penny.]

Rev. and Dear SIR,

IF the Publication of a Narrative of the Rise, Progress, and present Situation of Religion in *Virginia*, may not only be agreeable to good People, but also, - as you give me Reason to hope, animate their Prayers for us, and encourage Preachers to come into these Parts; I should charge myself with a criminal Neglect, if I declined publishing the marvellous Works of the Lord among us; it being evident that the Holy Spirit hath effectually wrought upon many.

Before the Revival in 1743, there were a few who were awakened, as they have told me, either by serious Reflection, suggested and enforced by divine Energy, or on reading some Authors of the last Century, particularly *Bolton*, *Baxter*, *Flavel*, *Bunyar*.

There was one Mr. *Samuel Morris*, who being for some time very much concerned about his own Salvation, after obtaining blessed Relief in Christ, became zealous for the Salvation of his Neighbours, and very earnest to use Means to awaken them. This was the Tendency of his

Conversation ; and he also read to them those Authors which had been most useful to himself, particularly *Luther on the Galatians*, and his *Table Discourses*, and several Pieces of honest *Bunyan's*. By this Means some of the Neighbours became more thoughtful about their Souls ; but the Concern was not very extensive. I have prevailed on my good Friend just now named, who was the chief private Instrument of promoting the late Work, and therefore well acquainted with it, to write me a Narrative of its Rise and Progress, and this, together with what he and others have told me, I shall present to you.

“ In the Year 1740, Mr *Whitefield* had preached at *Williamsburg* at the Invitation of Mr. *Blair* our late Commissary : But we being sixty Miles from *Williamsburg*, he left the Colony before we had an Opportunity of hearing him. In the Year 1743, a young Gentleman from *Scotland*, had got a Book of Mr. *Whitefield's* Sermons preached at *Glasgow*, which had been taken from his Mouth in short hand : After I had read it, with great Benefit, I invited my Neighbours to come and hear it read. The plainness and fervency of these Discourses, being attended with the Power of the Lord, many were convinced of their undone Condition, and were persuaded to seek Deliverance with the greatest Earnestness. A considerable Number met to hear these Sermons every Sabbath, and frequently on Week-Days, The Concern of some was so great, that they could not avoid crying out, and weeping bitterly, &c. Their Indications of religious Concern were so strange and uncommon, that they could not be occasioned by Example or Sympathy, for the Affectation of them would have been so unprofitable an Instance of Hypocrisy, that none could be tempted to it. At length my Dwelling-house was too small to contain the People, therefore we determined to build a Meeting-house, merely for Reading. And we having never been used to social *extempore* Prayer, none of us durst attempt it. By this single Mean several were awakened, and their Conduct ever since is a Proof of the Continuance and happy Issue of their Impressions. When the Report was spread abroad, I was invited to several Places to read these Sermons, at a considerable distance ; and by this Means the Concern was propagated,

About this Time, our absenting ourselves from the established Church, contrary, as was alledged, to the Laws of the Land, was taken notice of, and we were called upon by the Court to assign our Reasons for it, and to declare what Denomination we were of. As we knew but little of any Denomination of Dissenters, except *Quakers*, we were at a loss what Name to assume. At length recollecting that *Luther* was a noted Reformer, and that his Books had been of great Service to us, we declared ourselves *Lutherans*; and thus we continued till Providence sent us the Rev. Mr. *William Robinson*.

This Mr. *Robinson* was a zealous, laborious Minister of Christ, who by the Permission of the Presbytery, took a Journey through the new Settlements in *Pennsylvania*, *Virginia*, and *North Carolina*. He founded a Congregation at *Lunenburg*. In *Amelia* also, a Country somewhat nearer us than *Lunenburg*, his Labours were extensively blest: And while he was there, some of our People sent him an Invitation to come and preach at our Reading-house. Being satisfied about the soundness of his Principles, and being informed that the Method of his preaching was awakening, we were very desirous to hear him. On the sixth of *July* 1743, he preached his first Sermon to us from *Luke* xiii. 3. and continued with us preaching four Days successively. The Congregation was large the first Day, and vastly increased the three ensuing. 'Tis hard for the liveliest Imagination to form an Idea of the Condition of the Assembly on these glorious Days of the Son of Man. Such of us as had been hungry for the Word before, were lost in agreeable Surprise and Astonishment; and some could not refrain from publicly declaring their Transport: We were overwhelmed with the Thoughts of the unexpected Goodness of God, in allowing us to hear the Gospel preached in a Manner that surpassed our Hopes. Many that came through Curiosity were pricked to the Heart, and but few in the numerous Assemblies on these four Days appeared unaffected. They returned alarmed with Apprehensions of their dangerous Condition, convinced of their former entire Ignorance of Religion, and earnestly enquiring *what they should do to be saved*. And there is Reason to believe there

was as much Good done by these four Sermons, as by all the Sermons preached in these Parts before or since.

Before Mr. *Robinson* left us, he successfully endeavoured to correct some of our *Antinomian* Mistakes, and to bring us to carry on the Worship of God more regularly at our Meetings. After this we met to read good Sermons, and began and concluded with Prayer and singing of Psalms, which till then we had omitted. The Blessing of God remarkably attended these more private Means; and it was really astonishing to observe the solemn Impressions begun or continued in many, by hearing good Discourses read. I had repeated Invitations to come to many Places round, some of them 30 or 40 Miles distant, to read. Considerable Numbers attended with earnest Attention and awful Solemnity, and several were in a Judgment of Charity turned to God, and, thereupon erected Meeting-houses, and chose Readers among themselves, by which the Work was more extensively carried on.

Soon after Mr. *Robinson* left us, the Rev. Mr. *John Blair* paid us a short Visit; and truly he came to us in the Fulness of the Gospel of Christ. Former Impressions were ripened, and new ones made on many Hearts. One Night in particular a whole House-full of People was quite overcome with the Power of the Word, particularly by one pungent Sentence. They could hardly keep themselves under any proper Restraints: So general was the Concern, during his Stay with us, and so ignorant were we of the Danger of Apostasy, that we pleased ourselves with the Thoughts of more being brought to Christ at that time, than now appears to have been; though there is still the greatest Reason to hope that several bound themselves to the Lord in an everlasting Covenant never to be forgotten.

Some time after this, the Rev. Mr. *Roan* was sent us by the Presbytery of *Newcastle*. He continued with us longer than any of the former, and the happy Effects of his Ministrations are still apparent. He was instrumental in beginning and promoting the religious Concern in several Places where there was little Appearance of it before. This, together with his speaking pretty freely about the Degeneracy of the Clergy in this Colony gave,

gave a general Alarm, and some Measures were concerted to suppress us. To incense the Indignation of the Government the more, a perfidious Wretch made Oath that he heard Mr. *Roan* utter blasphemous Expressions in his Sermon. An Indictment was thereupon drawn up against Mr. *Roan* (though by that time he had departed the Colony) and some who had invited him to preach at their Houses were cited to appear before the general Court, and two of them were fined. While my Cause was upon Trial, I had Reason to rejoice that the Throne of Grace is accessible in all Places, and that helpless Creatures can send up their Desires unseen, in the midst of a Croud. Six Witnesses were cited to prove the Indictment against Mr. *Roan*, but their Depositions were in his Favour; and the Witnesses, who accused him of Blasphemy, when he heard of the Arrival of Mr. *Tennent* and Mr. *Finley*, fled and has not returned since, so that the Indictment was dropt. But I had Reason to fear, being banished the Colony, and all Circumstances seemed to threaten the Extirpation of Religion among the Dissenters in these Parts.

In these Difficulties, having no Person of a public Character to appear in our Favour, we determined to acquaint the Synod of *New-York* with our Case. Accordingly four of us went to the Synod *May* 1745, when the Lord favoured us with Success. The Synod drew up an Address to our Governor, the Hon. *William Gooch*, and sent it with Mr. *Tennent* and Mr. *Finley*, who were received by the Governor with Respect, and had Liberty granted them to preach among us. By this Means the dreadful Cloud was scattered for a while, and our languishing Hopes revived. They continued with us about a Week, and though the Deluge of Passion in which we were at first overwhelmed, was by this time somewhat abated, yet much Good was done by their Ministry. The People of God were refreshed, and several careless Sinners were awakened. Some that had trusted before in their moral Conduct and religious Duties, were convinced of the Depravity of their Nature, and, and the Necessity of Regeneration; though indeed there were but few unregenerate Persons among us at that time, that could claim so regular a Character,

the most Part indulging themselves in criminal Liberties, and being remiss in the Duties of Religion, which, alas! is too commonly the Case still in those Parts of the Colony the late Revival did not extend to.

After they left us, we were for a considerable time without a Minister, and continued our Meetings for Reading and Prayer in several Places, and the Lord favoured us with his Presence. I was again and again presented and fined in Court for absenting myself from Church, and keeping up unlawful Meetings, as they were called: *But the Bush flourished in the Flames.*

Those that were next appointed to supply us, were the Rev. Mr. *William Tennent* and Mr. *Samuel Blair*. They administered the Lord's Supper among us for the first Time (since our separating from the Church of *England*) and we have Reason ever to remember it as a most glorious Day of the Son of Man. The Assembly was large, and the Novelty of the Manner of the Administration, did particularly engage their Attention. It appeared as one of the Days of Heaven to some of us; and we could hardly help wishing, we could with *Josua* have delayed the Revolutions of the Heavens to prolong it. After Mr. *Tennent* and Mr. *Blair* were gone, Mr. *Whitefield* came and preached four or five Days, which was the happy Means of giving us farther Encouragement, and engaging others to the Lord, especially among the Church People, who received the Gospel more readily from him than from Ministers of the Presbyterian Denomination. After his Departure, we were destitute of a Minister, and followed our usual Method of Reading and Prayer at our Meetings, till the Rev. Mr. *Davis*, our present Pastor, was sent us by the Presbytery to supply us a few Weeks in the Spring, 1747, when our Discouragements from the Government were renewed and multiplied: For, upon a Lord's Day, a Proclamation was set up at our Meeting-house, *Strictly requiring all Magistrates to suppress and prohibit, as far as they legally could, all itinerant Preachers, &c.* which occasioned us to forbear Reading that Day, till we had Time to deliberate and consult what was expedient to be done; but how joyfully were we surprised before the next Sabbath, when we unexpectedly heard that Mr. *Davis* was come to

to preach for a long time among us, and especially that he had qualified himself according to Law, and got four Meeting-houses likewise among us, which had never been before! Thus *Man's Extremity is the Lord's Opportunity*. For this seasonable Interposition of Divine Providence, we desire to offer our grateful Praises, and we earnestly request the Friends of *Zion* to concur with us."

Thus far Mr. Morris's Narrative. Then the Rev. Mr. Davies proceeds to give an Account of the State of their Affairs since he came among them in April 1747.

Upon my Arrival, I petitioned the general Court to grant me a License to officiate in and about *Hanover*, at four Meeting-houses, which after some delay was granted, upon my qualifying according to the Act of Toleration. I preached frequently in *Hanover*, and some of the adjacent Countries; and though the Fervour of the late Work was considerably abated, and my Labours were not blessed with Success equal to those of my Brethren, yet I have Reason to hope they were of Service in several Instances. The Importunities they used with me to settle with them were invincible, and upon my Departure, they sent a Call for me to the Presbytery. After I returned from *Virginia*, I spent near a Year under melancholy and consumptive Languishings, expecting Death. In the Spring 1748, I began slowly to recover, though I then looked upon it only as the Intermission of a Disorder that would finally prove mortal. But upon the Arrival of a Messenger from *Hanover*, I put my Life in my Hand, and determined to accept of their Call; hoping I might live to prepare the Way for some more useful Successor, and willing to expire under the Fatigues of Duty, rather than in voluntary Negligence.

The Hon. Sir *William Gooch*, our late Governor, always discovered a ready Disposition to allow us all claimable Privileges, and the greatest Aversion to persecuting Measures; but considering the shocking Reports spread abroad concerning us by officious Malignants, it was no great Wonder the Council discovered a considerable Reluctance to tolerate us. Had it not
been

been for this, I persuade myself they would have shewn themselves the Guardians of our legal Privileges, as well as generous Patriots to their Country, which is the Character generally given them. In *October 1748*, besides the four Meeting-houses already mentioned, the People petitioned for the licensing of three more, which with great difficulty was obtained. Among these seven, I have hitherto divided my Time. Three of them are in *Hanover County*, the other four in the Counties of *Henrico, Carolina, Louisa, and Goochland*. The nearest are 12 or 15 Miles distant from each other, and the Extremes about 40. My Congregation is very much dispersed, and notwithstanding the Number of Meeting-houses, some live 20, some 30, and a few 40 Miles from the nearest. Were they all compactly situate in one County, they would be sufficient to form three distinct Congregations. Many of the Church People also attend when there is Sermon at any of these Houses. This I looked upon at first as meerly Curiosity after Novelty; but as it continues, and in some Places seems to increase, I cannot but look upon it as a happy Token of their being at length thoroughly wrought upon. And I have the greater Reason to hope so now, as Experience has confirmed my former Hopes: Fifty or sixty Families being thus happily intangled in the Net of the Gospel by their own Curiosity, or some such Motive. There are about 300 Communicants in my Congregation, of whom the greatest Number are in the Judgment of rational Charity real Christians. Besides some, who being excessively scrupulous, do not seek Admission to the Lord's Table. There is also a Number of Negroes. Sometimes I see a 100 and more among my Hearers. (*Psal. 68. 31.*) I have baptised about 40 of them within these three Years, upon such a Profession of Faith as I then judged credible. Some of them I fear have apostatised, but others, I trust, will persevere to the End. I have had satisfying Evidences of the sincere Piety of several of them, as ever I had from any Person in my Life; and their artless Simplicity, their passionate Aspirations and Breathings after Christ, their incessant Endeavours to know and do the Will of God have greatly

greatly delighted me. But alas! while my Charge is so extensive, I cannot take sufficient pains with them for their Instruction, which often troubles me. There have been Instances of unhappy Apostasy among us, but blessed be God, not many in Proportion to the Number brought under a Concern. At present there are a few under promising Impressions; but in general a lamentable Security prevails. *Oh! for a little Reviving in our Bondage.* I might have given you a particular Account of the Conversion of some Persons here, as indeed there are some uncommon Instances of it, but I shall only observe in general, that abstracting from particular Circumstances, the Work of Conversion has been carried on in such Steps as are described by experimental Divines, as *Allein, Shepherd, Stoddard, Flavel, &c.* And nothing confirms me more in the Truth of their Opinions about experimental Piety, than the Agreement as to the Substance, in the Exercises of those that can make the fairest Claim to saving Grace.

There is one *Isaac Oliver* here, whose History, could I write it intelligibly to you, would be very entertaining. He has been deaf and dumb from his Birth, and yet, I have the greatest Reason to believe he is truly gracious, and also acquainted with most of the Doctrines; and many of the historical Facts of the Bible. I have seen him represent the Crucifixion of Christ in such significant Signs, that I could not but understand them. Those that live in the House with him can hold Conversation with him very readily. There is so much of the devout Ardour of his Soul discovered at Times, as is really affecting, and I have seen him converse in Signs about the Love and Sufferings of Christ till he has been transported into Earnestness, and dissolved, into Tears. The above *Mr. Morris*, with whom he lives, has told me, that eight Years ago he appeared remarkably changed, and ever since is very conscientious in the whole of his Behaviour: he generally delights to attend both public and Family-worship, though he cannot hear a Word; and is observed sometimes to retire to secret Prayer, though he signifies that he is praying with his Heart, when about his Business, or in Company, which is peculiarly practicable to him, as in all Places he enjoys Retirement.

I could relate several Peculiarities about him, but as they are unintelligible to myself, or might seem incredible to those that are unacquainted with him, I omit them.

So

So much, however, I know of him, that I cannot but look upon him as a miraculous Monument of Almighty Grace, that can perform his Purposes on Men, notwithstanding the greatest natural or moral Impediments; and I submit it to the Judgment of others, whether a Person so incapable of external Instructions, could be brought to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven any other Way than by immediate Revelation. Besides the People in this Place, several of my Brethren, who have been here, particularly Mr. *Samuel Blair*, and Mr. *John Roan*, can attest this Relation. I forgot to inform you in its proper Place, that the Rev. Mr. *Davenport* was sent by the Synod to *Hanover* last Summer, and continued here about two Months: And blessed be God, he did not labour in vain. Some were brought under Concern, and many of the Lord's People much revived, who can never forget the Instrument of it. — Thus, dear Sir, I have given you a brief Account of what I'm persuaded you will readily own to be the *Work of the Lord*. We claim no *Infallibility*, but we must not fall into *Scepticism*. If we could form no Judgment of such a Work, why should we pretend to promote the Conversion of Men, if we cannot have any *satisfying* Knowledge of it, when it appears? Indeed the Evidence of its Divinity here is so irresistible, that it has extorted an Acknowledgment from some, from whom it could hardly be expected. Were you, Sir, a narrow Bigot, you would, no doubt, rejoice to hear that there are now some *Hundreds* of God's People in a Place where a few Years ago there were not *Ten*; but I assure myself of your Congratulations on a nobler Account, because a considerable Number of perishing Sinners are gained to the blessed Redeemer, with whom tho' you never see them here, you may spend a blissful Eternity. — After all, poor *Virginia* demands your Compassion; for Religion at present is but like the Cloud which *Elijah's* Servant saw. Oh that it may spread and cover the Land!

As to other Counties where Dissenters are settled. There are two Congregations, one in *Albemarle*, and one in *Augusta* County, belonging to the Synod of *Philadelphia*, that have Ministers settled among them: But those that have put themselves under the Care of *Newcastle* Presbytery (which are vastly more numerous) notwithstanding their repeated Endeavours, are still destitute of Ministers. There are as many of them as would form five distinct Congregations, three at least in

Augusta,

Augusta, one in *Frederica*, one at least in *Lunenburg* and *Amelia*. Notwithstanding the Supplies our Presbytery have sent them, some of them, particularly *Lunenburg*, have been above a Year together without one Sermon. I hope one of them will soon be provided with a Pastor, by a pious young Man, Mr. *Todd*, sent by *New-Brunswick* Presbytery, but I have no Prospect as to the rest; for I can now count up at least six or seven destitute Congregations in *Pennsylvania*, and two or three in *Maryland*, besides the five mentioned in the Frontier Counties of *Virginia*, and one of the Places where I preach, which I would willingly leave, if the People could have another Minister. And there are about 12 Members in *Newcastle* Presbytery, and 2 or 3 Candidates that are preingaged to destitute Congregations in *Pennsylvania*. We have indeed of late licensed several pious Youths, but our Congregations increase almost as fast as our Ministers, by the Settlement of new Places, or the breaking out of a religious Concern in Places where there was little before; and some of our most useful Members are lately called Home by Death; namely, Mr. *Robinson*, and Mr. *Dean*, and also Mr. *Samuel Blair*. May the Lord incline faithful Ministers from *New-England*, or wherever they may be spared, to come and help us! While these Congregations have been destitute of settled Pastors, itinerant Preaching among them has, by the Blessing of God, been very useful. Mr. *Robinson* underwent great Hardships in *North Carolina* without much Success, by reason of the Fewness and savage Ignorance of the Inhabitants; but the Case is now happily altered. A new Congregation, I think upon *Pee-dee* River, sent a Petition lately to our Presbytery for a Minister. Besides this, I hear of several other Places in *North Carolina*, that are ripening very fast for the Gospel. O that the Lord would send forth faithful Labourers into his Harvest! Mr. *Robinson* was the Instrument of awakening several in *Lunenburg* and *Amelia*, with whom I lately spent a Fortnight, at their earnest Desire; and there is a Prospect of doing much Service, were they furnished with a faithful Minister. It was really afflicting to me that the Necessity of my own Congregation constrained me to leave them so soon. In *Augusta* there is a great Number of solidly Christians. There was a pretty general Awakening there, some Years ago, under the Ministry of Mr. *Dean*, and Mr. *Byram*. I believe three Ministers might live very comfortably among them. In *Frederick* County there has al-

been (as I am informed by my Brethren who have been there) a considerable Awakening some Years ago, which has had a blessed Issue in many, and the Congregation have been seeking a Minister these several Years. In *Maryland* also, there has been a considerable *Revival*, or perhaps the first Plantation of Religion in *Baltimore* County, where I am informed Mr. *Whittlesea* is likely to settle. In *Kent* County, and *Queen Anne's*, a Number of careless Sinners have been awakened and hopefully brought to Christ. The Work was begun and chiefly carried on by the Instrumentality of that favoured Man Mr. *Robinson*, whose Success, whenever I reflect upon it, astonishes me. Oh! he did much in a little Time, and who would not choose such an expeditious Pilgrimage through this World? There is a great Stir about Religion in *Buckingham*, a Place on the Sea-shore, about four Years ago, which has since spread and issued in a hopeful Conversion in several Instances. They also want a Minister. But the most glorious Display of Divine Grace in *Maryland* has been in and about *Somerjet* County. It began, I think, in 1745, by the Ministry of Mr. *Robinson*, and was afterwards carried on by several Ministers that preached occasionally there about two Months, when the Work was at its Height, and I never saw such a deep and spreading Concern: The Assemblies were numerous, though in the Extremity of a cold Winter, and unwearied in attending the Word; and frequently there were very few among them that did not give some plain Indications of Distress or Joy. Oh! these were the happiest Days that ever my Eyes saw! Since that, the Harvest seems over there, though considerable Gleanings, I hear, are still gathered. They have of late got Mr. *Henry* for their Minister, a young Man, who, I trust, will be an extensive Blessing to that Part of the Colony.

I shall esteem it, dear Sir, as a great Blessing, if you and others of the Lord's Servants and People in distant Parts, will favour us with your Prayers: And shall be glad to correspond with them. Our Acquaintance with the various Parts of the Church, qualifies us to adapt our Prayers to their State. May your Divine Master bless you and succeed your Ministrations, and pour out his Spirit on the Land where you reside. I am, &c.

Hanover, June 28, 1751.