

## Letters of Philip Quaque 1766-1811

### Introduction.

Between 1740 and 1750 the Reverend Thomas Thompson, M.A., served as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Monmouth County in New Jersey. He became interested in the negroes (presumably the slaves of the American colonists who formed his congregation) and succeeded in instructing some of them in the Christian faith and baptising them into the Church. In 1750 he wrote to the S.P.G. in London, saying that he had now "a mind to go serve his great Master in Guinea." He asked the Society to continue his salary, giving him the title of their Missionary, a request to which they agreed. Thompson sailed from New York in 1751, and by May 1752 was settled at the English trading and slaving castle at Cape Coast, in what is now Ghana. Here, he served the garrison and traders as chaplain and attempted some missionary work among the local people, starting a small school in the Castle.

Thompson, like nearly all the early missionaries on the west coast of Africa, never enjoyed good health whilst residing there, and seems to have realised very early that foreigners would never be the best missionary agents in that region. He formulated a scheme for sending some of his brighter pupils to England for further education, and the S.P.G. agreed (19 January, 1753) to empower him to send "to the Number of 6 Negroe Children, not exceeding ten years of age, to be maintained and educated at the Expense of the Society." Thompson sent to England, in June 1754, three boys all related to "men of figure in the town" of Cape Coast, and in 1756, after an almost fatal illness, he himself returned home.

Of the three Cape Coast boys, two fell ill and died during their years in London, but the third, Philip Quaque (pronounced, and in modern times spelt, Kwaku or Kweku) lived to be ordained priest in the Church of England, to marry in England, and to return to Cape Coast as Thompson's successor. As the S.P.G.'s "Missionary, Catechist and Schoolmaster on the Cold Coast", Quaque was obliged to send regular reports of his activities to the Society in London. A surprisingly large number of these letters survive in the Society's archives. Some additional matter can also be seen in the Society's Journals, which record in great detail the minutes of the Society's meetings and of its committees, and especially correspondence with its Secretary. (We are largely dependent on the

Journal for details of Thompson's dealings with the Society, his letters having apparently disappeared. Thompson did, however, publish a short book about his experiences in America and Africa, entitled Two Missionary Voyages, by Thomas Thompson A.M., 1745-1756. This was reproduced in facsimile by the S.P.G. in 1937, but it is now out of print and unobtainable.

This film-strip reproduces all Quaake's surviving letters and reports (including, for instance, specimens of his pupils' handwriting), with the exception of his first letter to the Society after his arrival at Cape Coast, describing his journey and reception (dated 29 February, 1766). The letters are full of interest, containing, as they do, a picture of life in a semi-military, semi-trading, European fort on the African coast in the second half of the eighteenth century, as well as an impression of African life and customs seen through the eyes of an African whose formative years had been spent in Dr. Johnson's London. Quaake has also plenty to say of his personal troubles, his three marriages, his worries about the education of his children, his fears, as an old man, that his widow will not be adequately supported by her stepchildren, and his difficulties with insolent or irreligious European Governors and officers.

Quaake seems to have been a rather lonely and unfortunate man and, when he died in 1811, had no immediate successors. His own church, which was largely dormant in the Gold Coast during the century, after his death, is now active and vigorous and almost entirely African; it looks back with pride on the apparently unsuccessful Philip Quaake as a faithful pioneer, the first non-European priest in the history of the Anglican Communion.

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