

3. JAMES IRELAND PREACHING THROUGH PRISON BARS

James Ireland became a Baptist in 1769 and was so effective as a preacher at the age of 21 that the authorities put him in jail almost immediately. In the Culpeper Jail from November, 1769 to April, 1770, attempts were made to destroy him by explosives, suffocation, and poison--permanently injuring his health; but Ireland converted fellow-prisoners, and preached to the crowds that gathered outside the jail which he called his "palace in Culpeper." With the application in 1770 of the Toleration Act by William and Mary, the magistrates were forced to set him free. He procured a license to preach and built a meeting house. Ireland was a distinguished and able minister of the gospel in Virginia for thirty-five years.

The Artist says:

To portray the imprisonment of James Ireland, first the decision had to be made of choosing between two viewpoints. From outside looking into the jail window was one. However, the more dramatic and emphatic would be to put the viewer in the darkened jail with Ireland and see the reaction of the crowd through the bars. The condemnation, the ridicule, the hatred, would show on the face of the majority, while a few (the Baptist family in the foreground) would have even dressed for the service, and show intent interest and concern on their faces.

The light of day coming from the rear through the window high-lighting the part of a green vine that has penetrated into the darkened cell symbolizes the touch of God on the occasion. The open Bible, the up-stretched arm and the face of Ireland denote conviction and courage as he intently delivers the sermon.

The torn sleeve of the left arm would show the results of the swords of the guards who chopped at his arms as he preached.

One would know that Ireland, and many persecuted Christians before him, rested on the prophetic words of Christ in Matthew 10:16-20.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in the same hour what ye shall speak.

For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.