

Preface

'The missionary should be as learned as his university can make him; he should have as thorough a knowledge of theology as his professors can bestow upon him; he may be as religious as the most extreme pietist; yet he may be wanting in the essentials of a Church-building apostle. The man who is to plant Churches must be himself on fire of the Holy Ghost. Men of learning and diligence, though cold and unsympathetic, may be very useful in a Church already formed; but such men will not found a Church. A breeze, even a cold breeze, will fan into brighter blaze a fire already lit; but only by fire can fire be engendered. Fire alone can introduce fire into material previously dead.'

JOHN ROSS, 'The Most Difficult Missionary Problem.'

THE first thing I need to say is that this book is not an autobiography. The fact that both subject and author share the same name is fortuitous; there is no reason to believe we are blood relations. North and east of Scotland's Great Glen, Rosses are run-of-the-mill, and John Rosses two-a-penny. The more famous Rosses have been soldiers and Arctic explorers, one even a Cherokee chief. The less famous were and still are butchers, bakers and, doubtless, candlestick makers. Not a few have been Presbyterian ministers. At least three were missionaries. The subject of this biography, John Ross of Balintore, Manchuria and Korea, was, however, singular.

It is a truism to say that I could not have written this book without help, but it must be said for all that. Even the idea came from someone else. As I was contemplating retirement – or was that re-tyre-ment? – William Mackenzie of Christian Focus Publications approached me

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to say that he had a project up his sleeve that might enjoyably and profitably occupy my time after pastoral ministry, but he wouldn't tell me what it was. The disclosure was only made after my formal retiral, just when we were in the throes of moving home to Fort William to care for the Kilmallie and Ardnamurchan Free Church of Scotland congregation. To them I owe a very great debt, not least for their gracious tolerance when they had so much on their minds and quite rightly expected the undistracted attention of their interim moderator.

The task of research and writing has been a roller-coaster, successively a thrill and a daunting challenge. The lockdowns connected with the Covid 19 pandemic meant that libraries closed. Simultaneously, the hugely important New College Library in Edinburgh temporarily moved its collection to 40 George Square during building improvements at The Mound. Once more, the imperturbable staff, including Lauren McKay, Karen Bonthron and Linda Blackwood, went further than the second mile in assisting me electronically, but even they couldn't do the impossible when some important material I wished to consult was stored even beyond their long reach. It was then that the indomitable Maureen Ross of The John Ross Visitor Centre at Hilton came to the rescue, loaning me Dr Hyung Shin Park's two volumes: *The Rev. John Ross: A Primary Source Book*, published in 2019 by the Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea. These contained scanned images of almost all the documents I wished to consult.

I also record my gratitude to the staff of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; Iver Martin, Principal, and Ruth Smith, Assistant Librarian, for access to the Edinburgh Theological Seminary library; Hector Morrison, Principal, and Geordie Cryle, Librarian, for access to the library at the Highland Theological College; Mhairi Jarvie, Archive Assistant at the Highland Archive Centre, in Inverness; and Craig Brough, the Information Services Librarian at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, who illuminated Ross the botanist and the plants named after him. Donald E. Meek, previously Professor of Celtic at the University of Aberdeen, and James Grayson, Emeritus Professor of the School of East Asian Studies at Sheffield University, read the manuscript and spared my blushes with helpful corrections and suggested improvements. James Skinner of

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Tain cast light on education in Ross-shire's seaboard villages in the mid-nineteenth century, and supplied a copy of John Ross' will, thus clarifying details regarding the properties he came to own in Balintore. Another Easter Ross resident, Hugh Mackenzie, very kindly chauffeured us around the area pointing out places connected with the Ross story, while his wife Mary sustained us with gracious hospitality. Kim Watt helped me track down one of Ross' daughter's movements. Malcolm Maclean, Rosanna Burton, Irene Roberts, Alex MacAskill and Willie Mackenzie of Christian Focus Publications have all corrected me, prodded me, assisted and chivvied me, and altogether encouraged me to keep going.

My wife Elizabeth has, once again, been a tower of strength supporting and encouraging me, and sometimes applying the brakes when the project became obsessive. The publication of this volume marks not only the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of John Ross' arrival in Manchuria, but also our Golden Wedding anniversary, when together we look back on fifty rich and blessed years of Christian ministry together in Nigeria, Belfast, globally with Christian Witness to Israel, at Greyfriars Free Church of Scotland in Inverness, at Dumisani Theological Institute in South Africa, and at Glenurquhart and Fort Augustus, and Kilmallie and Ardnamurchan Free Church congregations. I hope she feels that this book in some way compensates for, or at least explains, my frequent distraction, preoccupation and inattention.

Many Chinese place names have changed since John Ross' time: I have used modern names of places better known to westerners, but otherwise retained the forms used in contemporary missionary accounts, although these vary; for example, the town of Mukden, which features so prominently in this narrative, is sometimes spelled 'Moukden' and sometimes 'Mookden'. I have retained Mukden throughout. When I am quoting verbatim, I have adhered to the spelling as given by the source. South Korean place names are generally given in their contemporary form. North Korean place names are unaltered. There is a table at the back of the book that lists many of the names occurring in this account with their modern equivalents.

Of course, any misinterpretation of events and other errors are mine. I regret any failure to acknowledge the work of others. This is

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not a comprehensive biography; there are many facets of Ross' character and work left unexplored, and my hope is that my deficiencies may stimulate someone else to do better.

This book leaves my desk with the prayer that what God did in Manchuria and Korea through John Ross and his colleagues, he might do here in Ross' homeland, and everywhere where this book is read. To him alone belongs the power and the glory!

DRUMNADROCHIT,
EASTER 2022

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*William Burns:
'The Spiritual Father'*

'Make the desolate of heart to sing.'

HENRY GRATTAN GUINNESS

THE vigour with which the dying William Burns spoke was so startling that his biographer, his brother Islay, felt he had to render the words in block capitals: FOR THINE IS THE POWER, AND THE GLORY. As he lay on his bed in Newchwang, Manchuria, his last lucid thoughts were spoken with 'extraordinary power and decision.' Indeed, there was something about them of the old passion that had marked out the best of his preaching, 'an almost preternatural terribleness and grandeur.'¹

For a month or more, Burns' life had been ebbing away and he was reconciled to it. He was ready for rest and eager for what his Lord had promised and prayed for, that he might be with him and see his glory (John 17:24). He might be dying, but God's work in Manchuria was not yet finished. Of that he had no doubts. 'God will carry on the good work; I have no fears for that,' he had said. Still, a question burned in his mind. If he couldn't continue the work, who would? He had had his own thoughts on that too. He had told his colleague Carstairs Douglas that he hoped the Irish Presbyterians might come up

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to Newchwang and take over. But when he died on 4th April, 1868, and was buried in the foreigners' graveyard, the matter remained unresolved.

William Chalmers Burns was one of the most remarkable figures in Scottish Church history. He was born in 1815 in the manse of Dun, near Brechin, Angus, where his father was minister. The family relocated to Kilsyth, Lanarkshire, in 1821. Here he enjoyed the countryside and entertained a notion of being a farmer. His plans were disrupted when his uncle Alexander Burns, a lawyer, seeing his intellectual potential, took him under his wing and put him through Aberdeen Grammar School. In 1829 Burns entered Marischal College. Two years later he left to work in his uncle's office in Edinburgh. The next year he was converted. He recommenced his studies, this time at Aberdeen University, graduating in 1834. Believing himself called to be a minister, he took a divinity course at Glasgow University, where he felt drawn to consecrate himself to God's will with a premonition that this might mean overseas missionary work.

Burns was acutely sensitive to the lostness of humanity. Once, overwrought by the crowds thronging Glasgow's bustling Argyle Street, he sought respite in the Argyle Arcade and completely failed to notice his mother who, entering from the other end, had walked right up to him. Apologising, he explained, 'I was so overcome with the sight of the countless crowds of immortal beings eagerly hustling hither and thither, but all posting onwards towards the eternal world, that I could bear it no longer, and turned in here to seek relief in quiet thought.'²

In 1839 Burns was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Glasgow, the same year that Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the twenty-six-year-old minister of St. Peter's, Dundee, departed with three other ministers to conduct a survey of Jewish communities in Europe and Palestine to inform the strategy of the Jewish Committee of the Church of Scotland. Although St. Peter's was a new congregation, established barely two and half years earlier, and despite Burns having no pastoral experience, M'Cheyne nevertheless invited him to be his locum for the duration of his absence. Burns was overawed by the responsibility. After walking