

THE FIRST NEGRO ORGANIZATION

Incidentally, we gather much valuable information with respect to the rapid progress made by the people of African descent, during the first century of their presence in this country, from public advertisements in the metropolitan newspapers, looking to the capture of certain slaves who had taken it upon themselves to run away from their masters; or, from such advertisements offering for sale men or women held in bondage. Necessary descriptions were essential in identifying such as had gone away, and, equally essential it was to advertise the good, strong points, and diverse qualifications of black men and women who were offered for sale. Thus, in this incidental way, we are privileged to learn much of the civilizing and industrial progress made by members of our group in that very early day.

In the American Weekly Mercury, of Philadelphia, January, 1721, a Negro youth of about 16 or 17 years of age is sought. He "speaks very good English." A number of such advertisements, of the same nature, appear in the newspapers of that time. Another says: "Speaks pretty good English," another, "Can speak Dutch or English." Another, "Speaks remarkably good English for a Negro and is exceedingly artful." Another, "Speaks very proper, and can, at any time, make out a plausible tale." Another, "Speaks French." The various mechanical trades possessed by the slaves were mentioned, as well as their sober and industrious qualities.

These various advertisements, previous to the Revolutionary period, serve to indicate the general industrial, and otherwise, progress of the great body of the people of African descent imported into this country from African heathenism.

But, it is after the Revolutionary war that anything like organized life among the people of African descent is made manifest. Especially in the North, at that time, the atmosphere of Liberty, and Freedom, issuing from the American victory, and the initiation of our National life, as a free and independent Republic, prepared the way for gradual Emancipation, in those parts, and, with the beginning of such a policy, the dawn of organized Negro life appeared.

The magnanimous, and gracious, spirit prevailing in the Northern section of our country, at that time, is beautifully expressed by the Legislature of Pennsylvania in its act for the gradual abolition of slavery, passed in 1780:

"It is not for us to enquire why, in the creation of mankind, the inhabitants of the several parts of the earth were distinguished by a difference in feature or complexion. It is sufficient to know that all are the work of an Almighty hand. We esteem it a peculiar blessing granted to us, that we are enabled this day to add one more step to universal civilization, by removing, as much as possible, the sorrows of those, who have lived in undeserved bondage, and from which, by the assumed authority of the kings of Great Britain, no effectual, legal relief could be obtained. Weaned, by a long course of experience, from those narrow prejudices and partialities we had imbibed, we find our hearts enlarged with kindness and benevolence towards men of all conditions and nations; and we conceive ourselves at this particular period extraordinarily called upon, by the blessings which we have received, to manifest the sincerity of our profession, and to give a substantial proof of our gratitude."

Reflecting the atmosphere of such a benevolent spirit, and noble aspirations, the "first-fruits" of the emancipated sons of Ethiopia at once began to stretch out their hands unto God, in grateful acknowledgment of what He had wrought through men of good will. Not at all "lifted up" in heart by their freedom, in all humility, they gave their accustomed attendance upon holy worship in the Methodist Meeting House of St. George. But, very soon, their manhood and sense of self-respect compelled a withdrawal from an environment fatal to the exercise, cultivation, and enjoyment of their new relationship to society and the government under which they lived.

The Rev. William Douglass, in his "Preface" to the "Annals

of St. Thomas Church," published in 1862, has to say, with respect to this new, and original, line of procedure:

"That separate and distinct churches for colored people are now established here, and in different parts of the country, is a fact, the propriety of which the subscriber has considered useless to discuss. It is much more in accordance with his natural promptings, to identify himself with the praise-worthy deeds of his predecessors—to travel back to those events with which they were intimately connected, and which transpired before he was born, simply addressing himself to the whole train of those past occurrences, which, under a wise and inscrutable Providence have led to results of incalculable good—than to be hyper-critical, in regard to what may now appear to have been a mistaken policy on their part."

The Methodistic Attraction

From time to time, there has been much speculation as to why such a very large proportion of the people of African descent were drawn towards the "Methodists," rather than towards other religious bodies conducted by members of the white race. The Rev. Mr. Douglass, who was formerly a Methodist himself, and who was personally acquainted with a number of the "old survivors" of the first days of St. Thomas Church, Philadelphia, in his introduction to the "Annals," says:

"As Methodism addressed itself chiefly to the feelings and affections—which are always strongest among undisciplined minds—the great majority gave their adherence to that system. Another cause of the success of this denomination in gathering to their folds more of the colored population than any other, may be ascribed to their illiteracy. This class of ministers, at the time referred to, made no pretensions to literary qualifications, and being despised and persecuted as religious enthusiasts, their sympathies naturally turned towards the lowly, who, like themselves, were of small estimate in the sight of worldly greatness."

It can not be disputed, the comparatively large number of reputable free colored people, of industry, and upward aspirations, were regular attendants upon the services of St. George's Methodist Church. They took a lively interest in religion, and generously contributed of their means for the improvement, and support, of this Church. Says the "Annals."

"They had comfortable seats on the lower floor of that building to which there were no objections made, until the increasing numbers of the congregation, afforded a plea on the part of those invested with power, for desiring their removal to the gallery. But as they had contributed their mites towards paying for the building in which all the seats were free, they did not readily yield to the unfair proposal. Their protest against the measure was given by subsequently taking a position near about where they usually occupied. But at length an expressed desire rose to an imperious order, and the pressure was so great, that they considered it useless to contend any longer against the odds that opposed them. The stern command was followed by a forcible act resorted to by one of the officials; and to the lasting shame

of those who sanctioned the measure, it was enforced at a time when the assembly were invoking the blessings of the common Father of all, who "is no respecter of persons, and willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

This shameful transaction took place on Sunday morning. To use the words of a venerated man—"Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we took our seats, the Elder said "Let us Pray." We had not been long on our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees having hold of Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him off his knees, and saying, "you must get up—you must not kneel here." Mr. Jones replied, "wait until prayer is over." Mr. H. M—— said, "no, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and force you away." Mr. Jones said, "wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more."

This assurance of Mr. Jones was made good. They all walked out in a body together, and before the close of that eventful Lord's day, the solemn and deliberate purpose, the noble determination, was formed to worship the Lord henceforth under their "own vine and fig tree," without molestation from any."

From the 12th day of April, 1787, to the present time, 137 years, the records of the organization effected that day have continued, practically, without interruption. The same body of individuals simply changed its name, on one or two occasions, but its identity can not be questioned or doubted. On the 28th of July, 1791, the Free African Society changed its status, and, afterwards was known as "The Elders and Deacons of the African Church." This phase of existence continued until the 12th day of August, 1794, when it was "to be henceforth known and called by the name and title of **St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church of Philadelphia.**" As such, it was regularly incorporated under the laws of the State of Pennsylvania, in the year 1796, and, most likely, is the oldest incorporated body of persons of African descent in the United States.

The Free African Society

Being, practically, ejected from the white Methodist church, this little company of "Free Africans" got together, in a private house, on the 12th of April, 1787, and organized "The Free African Society." It should be noted just here that this Society had its monthly meetings at the house of Richard Allen up until May, 1788. The growth of the Society necessitated a larger room, and such was secured in the house of Sarah Dougherdy. Here the Society met until the close of that year. Afterwards, the meetings were held in the Friends Free African School.

On the day of its organization, a Preamble and Articles of Association were adopted. This ancient "preamble" is as follows:

"Whereas, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, two men of the African race, who, for their religious life and conversation, have obtained a good report among men, these persons, from a love to the people of their complexion whom they beheld with sorrow, because of their irreligious and uncivilized state, often communed together upon this painful and important subject in order to form some kind of religious society, but there being too few to be found under the like concern, and those who were, differed in their religious sentiments; with these circumstances they labored for some time, till it was proposed, after a serious communication of sentiment, that a society should be formed, without regard to religious tenets, provided, the persons lived an orderly and sober life, in order to support one another in sickness, and for the benefit of their widows and fatherless children."

In the articles adopted, is this interesting statement: "No drunkard nor disorderly person be admitted as a member, and if any should prove disorderly after having been received, the said disorderly person shall be disjoined from us if there is not an amendment."

A committee was appointed "to inspect the conduct of the members in the interim, and to report the same at one of the meetings of the Society."

The following resolution was adopted at one of the meetings: "No man shall live with any woman as man and wife without she is lawfully his wife, and his certificate must be delivered to the clerk to be put on record."

At the meeting of the Society, November 15, 1788, the following report of a Committee, with respect to devotional exercises, was adopted:

"The Committee appointed in the ninth month report, that having taken into their serious consideration, the manner in which this Institution comes together, they have agreed to propose that each member should take his seat at 7 o'clock, and then all be silent till fifteen minutes, after which time the meeting shall proceed to business. The meeting, after some time in considering the proposal, unites with and recommends it to all our members."

Commenting upon this action, the Reverend author of "The Annals," observes as follows:

"Considering the previous predilections of a large number of the members composing this Society in favor of an unconstrained outburst of the feelings in religious worship, it is not to be wondered at, that "some time was spent in considering the proposal": the only matter of surprise is, that it was adopted at all. That the first meeting held after the adoption of the proposal, was marked with solemn silence during the fifteen minutes agreed upon, is very questionable indeed."

The author of "the Annals" further observes, "It is worthy of notice, that at no succeeding monthly meeting of the Society, does the name of Richard Allen appear as an active member among them. The first record of his name after the meeting last mentioned, is made six months afterwards. It is contained in a report of the Committee to the Society, "held in Philadelphia, at Friends Free African School

House, the 16th of the 5th month, 1789." The following is a copy of said report:

"The Committee brought in a report concerning Richard Allen so abruptly leaving the Society, and rashly calling, or convening the members together, contrary to the rules of the Society, but as some tenderness appeared towards him, it was concluded to pay him another visit in brotherly love, and report their sense thereof at the next meeting."

At the very next meeting of the Society, the 20th of June, 1789, the Committee brought in a testification against Richard Allen, which, being twice deliberately read, was approved, and is as follows:

"We, the Society of Free Africans in the city of Philadelphia, having, according to discipline established among us, long treated with Richard Allen, one of our members, for attempting to sow division among us, and endeavoring to convince him of his error in so doing, and of the breach of good order which he has thereby committed, but finding him refractory, and declaring that he no longer considers himself a member of our Society, do find it our duty to declare that he has disunited himself from membership with us by refusing to submit himself to the rules of the Society, and to attend our meeting, and he is accordingly disunited until he shall come to a sense of his conduct, and request to be admitted a member according to our discipline.

Signed by the Committee:

WM. WHITE,
CAESAR WORTHINGTON,
CAESAR THOMAS,
HENRY STEWART,
PETER MILLER,
NATHAN GRAY,
MARK STEVENSON.

In Boston, Mass., and Newport, R. I., were Free African Societies, and the correspondence between these African Societies is exceedingly interesting and informing. Possibly, the leading spirit in the Boston Society, was "Prince Hall," the first colored Grand Master of Masons in the United States. These letters reveal both the intelligence and the sincere endeavor of the Free Africans of that early period on behalf of our entire group, both bond and free. They also show independence of thought on the part of the respective groups. The Newport Society, in its epistle to the Philadelphia Society, sounds a strong note with respect to "emigration to Africa"; while the Philadelphia Society, in its answer to this epistle, in a very few words, dismisses the subject from consideration, in these words: "With regard to the emigration to Africa you mention, we have at present but little to communicate on that head, apprehending every pious man is a good citizen of the whole world."

The letters here given were read at a meeting of the Philadelphia Society, October 17, 1789:

FROM THE UNION SOCIETY, NEWPORT, R. I.

Dear Friends and Brethren:

"We, the members of the Union Society, being forty in number, in the town of Newport, consisting of free Africans, have lately had the pleasure of being informed of the formation of your Society in Philadelphia, for the good purposes therein mentioned, by one of your members, Mr. Henry Stewart, who comes recommended by your committee. We, taking into consideration the calamitous state into which we are brought by the righteous hand of God, being strangers and outcasts in a strange land, attended with many disadvantages and evils which are likely to continue on us and our children, while we and they live in this country, and yet more wretched state of thousands of our brethren who are in the most abject state of slavery in the West Indies and in the American states, many of whom are treated in the most inhuman and cruel manner, and are sunk down in ignorance, stupidity and vice. And considering the unhappy state and circumstances of our brethren, the nations in Africa from whom we sprung, being in heathenish darkness and barbarity, and that it hath pleased God of late to raise up many to compassionate and to befriend the Africans, not only in promoting their freedom and using means for their instruction, but by proposing and endeavoring to effect their return to their own country, and their settlement there, where they may be *more happy than they can be here*, and promote the best good of our brethren in that country. We, taking all this into view, think there is a special and loud call to us, and all the blacks in America, to seek God by extraordinary fasting and prayer, and do therefore request all who are disposed, to join in fasting and prayer to Almighty God, by meeting together for that purpose, privately or in public, as shall be most convenient, on the first Tuesday in July, and on the first day of every year, humbly to confess the sins of our fathers, and our own sins, and to acknowledge the righteousness of God in bringing all these evils on us and on our children and brethren; and earnestly to cry to God for the pardon of our sins, and that He would of His great mercy deliver us and our brethren, and the nations in Africa, from the sins and miseries in which we and they are now involved, and pour down His Holy Spirit upon us, and cause us and them to become a wise, virtuous, and Christian people. And that He would in His wise and good Providence prosper the way for our returning to Africa, and direct, assist, and prosper all our friends who are engaged in this cause, that he would give us favor in the eyes of our brethren in Africa, and raise up friends and benefactors in this land, who shall be willing and able to promote this important affair, and that God would, in His great mercy, succeed them and us in all our endeavors for this end; that the Father of Mercies would bless all the nations who enjoy the gospel, and cause them to conduct themselves agreeable to it, by doing to all men as they would others should do unto them, that the light of it may spread over all the world."

ANTHONY TAYLOR, President,
KINGSTON PEASE, Vice,
PRINCE AMY,
ZINGO STEVENS,
SALMAR NUBIA,
THOMAS FERGUSON.

These black gentlemen are at present Freeholders and members of the Union Society, chosen at our annual meeting the 13th August, 1789, in Newport, R. I.:

JAMES DYRE,
BACCUS OVERING,
WILLIAM HENSHAW,
BACCUS COGGESHALL,
BESS BROWNING,
REBECCA FOLGER.

Freeholders, and not belonging to the Union Society, Newport, September 1, 1789.

P. S.—Gentlemen:

The above and foregoing persons are all the Freeholders of blacks belonging to the town of Newport. Mr. Henry Stewart having paid us a visit, on his way to Boston, with your certificate, it appears to us he is well deserving."

Reply To The Foregoing By The Committee

Respected Friends:

We read your epistle dated the 1st of the 9th mo. (called September), 1789, which claimed our serious attention, and we are apprehensive that a lively and religious correspondence would be conducive to our religious improvement. With regard to the emigration to Africa you mention, we have at present but little to communicate on that head, apprehending every pious man is a good citizen of the whole world. Therefore, let us, as with the heart of one man, continue daily in fasting and prayer—fasting from sin and iniquity and the corrupt conversation of the world, that the Lord thereby may be pleased to break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free. And it is a certain prophecy that swords shall be beat into plough-shares, and spears into pruning hooks, that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. A happy day that will prove to us of the African race, and mankind in general; then captivity shall cease, and buying and selling mankind have an end; we have a well-grounded hope that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.

Now we have to behold with humble admiration, that this prophecy is fulfilling daily for us (O, that we may be sensible of so great a favor), seeing the Lord is raising up many to promote this peaceable kingdom with no other weapons than that of giving glory to God, and breathing peace and good-will towards men, persons who are sacrificing their own time, ease and property for us, the stranger and the fatherless, in this wilderness, these persons declare in the expressive language of conduct, that they are followers of Him who taught His disciples to do unto all men as we would they should do unto us. Howbeit, if any apprehend a divine injunction is laid upon them to undertake such a long and perilous journey in order to promote piety and virtue, that such may meet with encouragement is the sincere desire of a remnant, and that the arm of divine protection may continually hover over them."

Mr. Henry Stewart, of the Philadelphia Society, visiting in Newport, continues his journey to Boston; whereupon the Newport Society recommends him to the brethren in Boston, by means of the following note:

Certificate to H. Stewart

Newport, August 22nd, 1789.

These are to certify, that the bearer, Mr. Henry Stewart, one of the members of the Freeholders, African Society, established in the city of Philadelphia for the benefit of the sick of said Society, and other commendable purposes, has been with us as a traveler, and has behaved himself as a truly worthy member, and as such we recommend him to all our friends, more particularly to the African Company now in the town of Boston.

This certificate bears the signature of: "Anthony Taylor, President; Kingston Pease, Vice, of the Union Society in Newport."

Upon Mr. Stewart's return from Boston to his home in Philadelphia, he brought with him the epistle following. "Prince Hall" was the first Grand Master of Colored Masons in the United States.

The Boston Letter

"Boston, Sept. 16, 1789.

Dear Brethren of the African Society:

These lines come to acquaint you that we have your recommended brother, Mr. Henry Stewart, and am happy to hear that you have such a society built on so laudable a foundation. May God prosper you in this and all your undertakings for the good of your African brethren. I hope you will go on and prosper. I shall always be happy in hearing of your welfare. We here are not idle, but are doing what we can to promote the interest and good of our dear brethren that stand in so much need at such a time as this. We shall be glad therefore to hear of your proceedings, by letters of correspondence with us.

Your brother Stewart will inform you by word of mouth of some proposals we made to him, which I do not care to write at this time. No more at present, but remain,

Your loving brother,

Farewell, PRINCE HALL."

The Reply To The Boston Letter

"Dear Brethren:

We read your epistle by the hand of Henry Stewart, one of our members, who visited you. It afforded us matter of satisfaction to find that you are united with us in laboring in the same vineyard, we seriously hope to the honor of God and the benefit of mankind.

May you steadily continue in this labor, for the harvest is truly great but the sincere and disinterested laborers are few. Notwithstanding, let none be discouraged, however low their station among men may be—for we find in Holy Writ, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; but that one who has on the shield of faith, shall chase a thousand, and put ten thousand to flight. Here is encouragement for us of the African race. The Scriptures declare that, God is no respecter of persons. We beseech you, therefore, in much brotherly love, to lay aside all superfluity of naughtiness, especially gaming and feasting; a shameful practice, that we as a people are particularly guilty of. While we are feasting and dancing, many of our complexion are starving under cruel bondage; and it is this practice of ours that enables our enemies to declare that we are not fit for freedom—and at the same time, this imprudent conduct stops the mouths of our real friends, who would ardently plead our cause. Let us, therefore, dear brethren, learn to be wise by fearing the Lord, and show that we have a good understanding by forsaking our foolish practices.

Now unto him who is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Read and approved at our monthly meeting, and signed by the committee and clerk on behalf of the same."

Extracts From The Minutes

January 15, 1790. It is noted "The treasurer reports his having lodged the Society's money at the Bank of North America, which has opened an account with him as treasurer to this institution."

March 3, 1790. "The stranger's burial ground in this city, usually called the Potter's field, being offered to let by the corporation of the city," the Society, through an appropriate committee, petitioned the Mayor and City Council on behalf of the same. Their application was "indorsed" by a number of reputable citizens of Philadelphia, among which number were Dr. Benjamin Rush and William White."

April 17, 1790. "The report concerning marriage was received, and the most stringent measures were adopted to safeguard and protect the institution and register the names of parties between whom such marriages are celebrated."

Certain members of the "Society for the gradual abolition of Slavery" appeared before the Society, revealing their plan "for the improvement of the condition of the free blacks" and soliciting the co-operation of the African Society.

May 15, 1790. "The committee named last month to assist the deputation from the Society for the gradual abolition of Slavery in endeavoring to ascertain the num-

ber of free blacks in this city, having paid a close attention to their appointment, and procured lists of families, etc., in the districts of the city, and Liberties, they furnished the deputation with them, and believing the service sufficiently completed, it is now concluded to release them."

This committee reported, "about 250 families in the city, Northern Liberties and Southwalk, making nearly 1,000 persons of both sexes, almost 400 of whom were miners."

September 18, 1790. "The committee having been thoughtful respecting a religious meeting being established by this Society, propose that, as the Society is bound in gratitude to the Divine Being by many obligations, a religious meeting for the performance of divine worship and grateful acknowledgement be opened on the third first day in every month, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, at such place as may be procured; and that no approved minister be prohibited from attending or speaking at it.

Although this proposal met with general approbation, yet the measure, being important, the subject is agreed to remain under consideration till next meeting."

October 16, 1790. "The overseers report that a visit had been paid to the members generally, and that no breach of good order was observed. This account is satisfactory to the meeting, and they are desired to continue their care in visiting and strengthening the members in a virtuous life."

February 17, 1791. "By a minute of the committee, it appears that a religious meeting was held at the time mentioned last month, and was attended with much satisfaction; they likewise mention that although they have not succeeded in obtaining a place to meet in which promises a long continuance, yet there is a great probability that the present place may be made use of for a considerable time hence. It is now agreed that the said meeting be held on the first day of the week, immediately following the meeting of this Society, until otherwise directed."

February 17, 1792. It appears from the title deed that the lots on which St. Thomas' Church edifice now stands were purchased "by William Gray, Absalom Jones, William White, William Wiltshire, William Gardiner and Henry Stewart of Joseph B. McKean and Hannah, his wife," on the day and date above written "for the sum of four hundred and fifty pounds, lawful money of the State of Pennsylvania, each lot containing in breadth, north and south, twenty-six feet and in length and depth, east and west, one hundred and ninety-eight feet and six inches." The bona fide title to these lots was vested in the above named individuals; but, that they acted for and were regarded by the congregation as their trustees only, will hereafter be seen.

February 18, 1792. "The committee delivered the following report: That no member should interrupt another in speaking, but to speak *mildly*, one at a time, and that the overseers should sit at the desk with the clerk, and command order if necessary."

March 23, 1792. "The representatives of the African Church met together, and after communication of sentiments, agreed to take the cash in hand and get some subscription papers drawn up and to collect as fast as possible."

May 19, 1792. "At a monthly meeting of the Free African Society, held in Philadelphia, for the benefit of the sick, the committee appointed in a difficult case, brought in a report, which being read, signifying that they had agreed that one hundred dollars should be handed out of the treasury for the use of the African Church, was approved by the meeting, and Absalom Jones was appointed to call on the treasurer for the same."

July 21, 1792. "At a monthly meeting of the Free African Society, one of the overseers reported the following, which was adopted:

"Whereas, some difference of opinion has subsisted between some of the members respecting the powers of this Society to appropriate a sum of money towards pur-

chasing a lot for the purpose of erecting a place of worship for the use of this Society, which difference having arisen from the omission of entering the minutes of the 28th of the seventh month, 1791; and as the subject has obtained the deliberate consideration of this Society for some meetings past, as well as several well wishers to our Society, it is now agreed that the said minute of the 28th of the seventh month, 1791, be annexed to the minutes in its proper place and that our future transactions be conducted conformable thereto.' The minutes being as follows:

At a special meeting of the Free African Society, convened by direction of the standing committee, a plan of church government and articles of faith and practice suited to the establishment of a religious society being read, the Society concluded to unite therewith, and also with an address to the friends of liberty and religion in Philadelphia, and to appoint Absalom Jones to prepare said address."

The Rev. William Douglass, in his "Annals," makes the following comment at this juncture:

"The sayings and doings of the old "Free African Society," as such, now come to a close, and that Association might be left to stand by itself as a solitary but pleasing reminiscence of the past, were it not so intimately connected with what still remains in active operation, and into which it so beautifully merges. Watching the progressive movements of this Society has been exceedingly gratifying to our feelings. Its noble aim in the first place was to call out in active operation the humane and tender sympathies of the heart towards the sick and needy. It soon afterwards became alive to the importance of the intellectual and moral improvement of the race and finally it reorganizes for the purpose of promoting the interests of that divine scheme which is the only true elevator of mankind—the gospel of Christ. . . . The officers of this new organization are styled "elders and deacons of the African Church"; and the first business attended to was to satisfy all such members who preferred to withdraw the money they had invested in the old Society, to having it transferred to the funds of the new enterprise."

Subsequent meetings, immediately following, were occupied in adjusting claims, etc., and paying over to such members as desired to withdraw from the enterprise recently entered upon.

The committee, consisting of Absalom Jones, William Gray and Caesar Worthington, made report with respect to building operations, and the following action was taken:

"Resolved, That the above report of the committee be, and is hereby unanimously agreed to by the members present, and that the said loans be perfected as soon as possible in order that the work may be forwarded with all reasonable despatch.

Resolved, That Absalom Jones, William Gray and Caesar Worthington be, and they are hereby appointed a committee to negotiate for the above sum of three thousand dollars, so that the work intended may be brought to perfection as soon as possible."

February 10, 1793. "The trustees of the African Church think it a duty incumbent upon them to make known to the congregation the result of their proceedings in regard to what they have done towards building the church.

1. They take this mode of informing the congregation at large that they have borrowed a sum of money for the purpose of erecting the building, for which there is an annual interest to be paid quarterly, and for which there is no fund as yet provided.

2. They therefore make the following proposals: That (if agreeable to the congregation) a monthly collection be made for the above mentioned purpose of paying said interest.

3. That should there be an overplus after paying said interest, the sum shall go towards paying the principal debt, and the other expenses of the church.

4. There shall be a fair and regular account kept of the expenses attending the erecting of the building; likewise of all the moneys received for the support and use of the church.

5. There shall be a fair statement of the same made out when the building is finished, for the satisfaction and inspection of the congregation, or sooner, if it be found necessary.

6. They therefore appoint Sunday the 17th instant, to make the first collection, and on each and every first Sunday in each succeeding month.

The Elders and Deacons also desire that a decent decorum may be observed at the time of public worship, for which reason they recommend the following rules, viz:

1. That at the time of singing, praise, etc., to our Maker, the congregation shall stand or keep seated, as they may find freedom.

2. They recommend the congregation to supply themselves with such books as are necessary so that they may read, sing and praise the Lord in harmony, with universal heart and voice."

Further details of reports, etc., are unnecessary. Sufficient have been given to indicate the great prudence, energy, zeal, faithfulness and perseverance those humble but noble pioneers displayed in entering upon and carrying on to its completion the great and good work they had in hand.

The first church building in the United States erected by and for "free Africans" was ready for the first public service of worship to the Almighty God on July 17th, 1794.

Inasmuch as Episcopalians, as well as Quakers, had been specially helpful in rendering material assistance for the enterprise, it should not be surprising that two clergymen of the Episcopal Church were called upon to officiate at the opening and dedication of this "First African Church" in America. The Rev. Dr. Samuel Magaw, rector of St. Paul's, Philadelphia, delivered the discourse, and the Rev. James Abercrombie, A. M., second assistant minister of Christ Church and St. Peter's, performed divine service. Says the "Annals": "The venerable clergy of almost every denomination and a number of other very respectful citizens were present."

The Sermon

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light."—Is. 9-2.

Dr. Magaw, in beginning his discourse, said: "As I passed by, soon after the walls of this building were carried up, and beheld the marble on the eastern front, inscribed with these words, my attention was exceedingly attracted by them; for I was struck with the propriety of such a choice."

In that section of the discourse which offered advice to the congregation, the speaker, among other things, said:

"2. The next duty is gratitude to your earthly benefactors, who planned your emancipation from slavery.

There are certain evils, which, when once they have obtained footing, and become epidemic, as it were, are scarcely seen as evils; no wonder then if they be slow and difficult to remove; so it hath been with slavery. A few humane, considerate persons at an early period of our settlement in this country—yes, in Pennsylvania particularly, were moved by the Divine Spirit, to open light upon this darkness. Their testimony was treated as visionary for a while, but in time it gained upon the judgment and consciences of men.

Here you will recollect the names of Lay, of Woolman—and above all, Anthony Benezet—whose labors were unwearied in your behalf; whose works of benevolence and love have followed them to the regions of peace and blessedness beyond the grave. There are also living characters not a few in this city and throughout the United States heartily engaged in the same business of humanity. Behold, how intent they are to do your people good?

You owe much likewise to those persons who planned schools for the instruction of your children. This instruction is as the door introducing the young people to the great light. Knowledge is the best foundation for integrity and usefulness: and it is the element and life of Freedom.

You owe much to the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, and the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in bondage. The memory of Franklin here rises before you. He was its President. With the like views in which it originated, may it persevere till its work be completed.

But, especially, do you owe a large debt of gratitude to the citizens of Philadelphia, who assisted you by donations and loans, in the building of this handsome, spacious and very commodious church. You thought that to have a house of your own to assemble in for public worship was, in consideration of your increased numbers, now desirable and expedient. In the same view have your patrons and friends regarded the matter and countenanced your proceedings? And, as with brotherly kindness and complacency, they leave it to yourselves to fix upon or adopt such system, order and mode of worship as may be most agreeable to you; so have they found a perfect freedom in helping you to prepare a place where that system, order and mode may peacefully reside and operate.

On the pleasing ground marked out above, I could go farther, indulging your feelings and my own, by particularly mentioning some characters in this place, pre-eminent for generous actions, whenever they have opportunity; and who truly have been so with regard to you—but we are restrained in that satisfaction. There is, however, what will be infinitely more acceptable to them; namely, to see that their acts of kindness do good.

Most favorably assisted, the pious labors of your hands hath prospered thus far; and you are now happily assembled for the first time within these walls; we offering our congratulations, and cheerfully uniting with you to worship the God of All.

3. Another duty is compassionate love to your brethren, who are yet in darkness or bondage in other parts of the world. Be tenderly affectioned towards their condition. Pray publicly and privately that "the Lord may hear your voice and look

upon their affliction and their labor and their oppression."

O, mighty God! Thou dost encourage us in this thing. For notwithstanding the confusion of nations and the corruption and madness of human passions, there is some prospect that the general cause of justice, of freedom and of peace on earth, will at last prevail!

4. Humility is the next duty. Remember your former condition. Pride was not made for man, in any, even in the highest stations in life; much less for persons who have just emerged from the lowest. It is said, there is a great deal of this among your people, already; and that it is increasing extremely fast. I wish this might be no more than a surmise; and then, that even the surmise itself might be dropped; for your friends meet with discouragements on this head. Will you, my brethren, guard against pride? Will you reflect on the nature of the evil itself; the offenses that come by it; and other unhappy consequences?

It was a custom among the Jews, as you find recorded by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy (chapter 26:5), when the priest received the basket of first fruits from them; for each person to declare in the house and presence of the Lord, the history of the mean and wretched origin of his family: "A Syrian ready to perish was my father."

In like manner, when you are tempted to cherish the least pride in your freedom—in dress—in your favorable reception among your fellow-citizens, and even in this stately building; or in any of your civil, as well as religious privileges; then check yourselves by confessing privately and publicly that 'a slave ready to perish was my father': or, if all cannot say this, you may unite in expressions still more humbling, and say 'a sinner—a fallen man—a rebel against God—an heir of wrath; and, until redeemed, a child of hell, was my father.'

5. Circumspection in your conduct and intercourse with the world is another duty that you are specially concerned in. 'See that ye walk circumspectly; not as fools, but as wise.' Remember, that you have enemies as well as friends; that you will be narrowly watched, and that less allowance will be made for your failings than for those of other people. This circumspection will be more necessary as you have become a religious society.

Peaceableness among yourselves and with all men is indispensable to a fair character; as also truth in your dealings, in your words and in your inner man; diligence in providing things honest: temperance and sobriety; an obliging, friendly, meek conversation.

Here a particular thought occurs to me, which is not to be suppressed: with regard to those of you who *are not free*, you must not be cast down, nor discontented. It is a dispensation of Providence, as I hinted already, to which you should submit in quietness, for conscience sake; and in so doing, you shall certainly meet with good. I give you St. Paul's advice, adapted exactly to your situation: 'Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor: that the name of God, and His doctrine be not blasphemed.'

To proceed: You have built an house for the public worship of God; and this day, solemnly dedicate it unto Him.

O may the Lord our God accept of the dedication! Let Him not leave this people, nor forsake them! 'Hear thou in Heaven their prayers and their supplications, and maintain their cause!'

Come then, ye people, highly favored! Your house is Holiness unto the Lord! Let none who ever worship in it dishonor it at any time or in any way. You have here, in the most public manner, named the name of Christ and told us you 'have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him'; depart then—depart from all—yea, even from the shadow of iniquity.

It is not a small matter to have even heard of the true God. It is still a greater to have been taught His pure religion: But, together with the above—for you to be encouraged in the course of events to build a temple to that God, wherein His name may be adored—this is indeed an honor bestowed upon you. Here then, be assured, is a period in your progress and profession, which will prove very remarkable: For, according as your conduct henceforth turns out well or ill, your example will be a praise in the view of all around you, or a reproach. Yes, this very house, or rather, the conversation of those belonging to it, 'is set for the fall or rising again of many'—of the people of your color. On the right improvement of your present advantages depends, perhaps, the fate of your brethren in bondage in every part of the world. Strengthen the hands of your friends everywhere by your pure and unexceptionable

conduct. This will be to 'let your light shine' in favor of the multitudes yet covered with darkness. This will be encouraging the deliverance of those who are bound.

A contrary behavior will certainly increase their darkness, and tend only to rivet still closer their chains. It may render the yet existing reproach of your country perpetual.

To conclude—strive to escape from the darkness of sin. O let it not be 'your condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that you have chosen darkness rather than light, because your deeds are evil.' With your own eyes, behold the great light that has been described and walk ye in it. Prize beyond all things the instructive, renovating grace of the Gospel. Reflect on the consideration now offered for that purpose. Attend, I beseech you, to the admonitions of your own consciences; to the calls of Providence; to the word of the Lord; to the teachings of the Divine Spirit; to the terrors of neglecting so great a salvation; to the hopes and joys of obtaining it; to the sure prospects of glory, honor and immortality in the life to come.

Thus we have asked, O great God! for the counsel and light and blessing we need. Thus have we opened these doors for Thy sacred worship and to Thine honor. Thus, with Thy permission, have I spoken to this people whom we take by the hand as brethren in Christ Jesus. Who can doubt that Thou wilt look down from Heaven and cast upon us the bright beams of Thy Mercy?"

Immediately following the delivery of the discourse the preacher continued with the following words:

"My Respected Audience:

What if now, before we part, some free-will offering should be made in favor of this dedicated house. Prayers never come up more acceptably before God for a memorial than when united with alms. And I am inclined to believe that there are very few occasions, if any, on which such an union could, with more propriety than the present, take place.

Under some difficulties, though highly favored, after considerable delay and apprehensions, at times much greater, it hath pleased Providence to permit this goodly building to be brought on to its present state. There is more must be done to it yet, you see, ere it will be quite safe and convenient to assemble in, and very probably, notwithstanding the economy of the managers or trustees, a share of the past account

The people of the congregation may, by easy contributions from time to time, help themselves in this laudable business. Yes, and it may be reasonably expected that each of you now present—I speak to those of the congregation—will, this day, give something for that purpose. And, for your encouragement, these respectable citizens, a number of your benefactors—your fellow-Christians also—will cheerfully go on to encourage and assist you.

Will you then (I address myself to such benefactors), will you allow me to solicit a present contribution in the generous view intimated above?—and then we shall depart with satisfaction.

To press this matter much, is totally unnecessary: For it has ever appeared to me a trait in the Philadelphia character that the citizens looked not for pressing solicitations to do beneficent actions, but for opportunities.

And God is not unrighteous, that He will forget your works and labor that proceedeth of love."

Within less than a period of thirty days, from this grand opening of the African Church, its founders and trustees, by a deliberate vote, transferred themselves and their building to the jurisdiction of the Bishop and the Episcopal Church in the State of Pennsylvania. The historic document stating the causes and motives leading thereto is worthy of preservation, and it is as follows:

Causes And Motives

"Whereas, a few of our race did in the name and fear of God, associate for the purpose of advancing our friends in a true knowledge of God, of true religion, and of the ways and means to restore our long lost race, to the dignity of men and of Christians; and

Whereas, God in mercy and wisdom, has exceeded our most sanguine wishes in blessing our undertaking, for the above purposes, and has opened the hearts of our white brethren to assist in our undertakings therein; and

Whereas the light of the glorious Gospel of God, our Savior, has begun to shine into our hearts, who were strangers to the true and living God, and aliens to the commonwealth of this spiritual Israel; and having seen the dawn of the Gospel day, we are zealously concerned for the gathering together our race into the sheep-fold of the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; and as we would earnestly desire to proceed in all our ways therein consistent with the Word of God or the Scriptures of the revelation of God's will, concerning us and our salvation; and

Whereas, through the various attempts we have made to promote our design, God has marked out our ways with blessings. And we are now encouraged through the grace and divine assistance of God opening the hearts of our white friends and brethren, to encourage us to arise out of the dust and shake ourselves and throw off that servile fear, that the habit of oppression and bondage trained us up in. And in meekness and fear we would desire to walk in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. That following peace with all men, we may have our fruit unto holiness, and in the end, everlasting life.

And in order the more fully to accomplish the good purposes of God's will, and organize ourselves for the purpose of promoting the saving health of all, but more particularly our relatives, the people of color. We, after many consultations and some years' deliberation thereon, have gone forward to erect a house for the glory of God, and our mutual advantage to meet in for edification and social religious worship. And more particularly to keep an open door for those of our race who may be induced to assemble with us, but would not attend divine worship in other places; and

Whereas, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, we are the more encouraged thereto, believing God will bless our works and labor of love; and

Whereas, for all the above purposes, it is needful that we enter into, and forthwith establish some orderly, Christian-like government and order of former usage in the Church of Christ; and, being desirous to avoid all appearance of evil, by self-concetedness, or an intent to promote or establish any new human device among us.

Now be it known to all the world, and in all ages thereof, that we the founders and trustees of said house, did on Tuesday the 12th day of August, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four.

RESOLVE AND DECREE

To resign and conform ourselves to the Protestant Episcopal Church of North America. And we dedicate ourselves to God, imploring his Holy protection; and our house to the memory of St. Thomas, the Apostle, to be henceforth known and called by the name and title of St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church of Philadelphia; to be governed by us and our successors forever as follows. * * *

Given under our hands this 12th day of August, 1794.

Founders and Trustees.	{	WILLIAM GRAY,	ABS. LOM JONES,
		WILLIAM WHITE,	WILLIAM GARDINER,
		HENRY STEWART,	WILLIAM GRAY
		FOR	WILLIAM WILTSHIRE."

The first self-governing body of Colored People in the United States to deliberately select for themselves an ecclesiastical home, indicated their own wisdom and judgment in choosing the Protestant Episcopal Church and, in so doing, they have left on record the weightiest of reasons.

They did not arrive at such conclusion all at once, but through years of deliberation. Nor did they blindly and un-

conditionally attach themselves to the Episcopal Church. In this particular case we have, possibly, the first instance of "collective bargaining" on the part of the African people. They had sustained certain religious experiences which had firmly impressed them with the importance of looking before leaping. Hence, when they had about settled on the Episcopal Church, in their application and interview, they specified **three conditions**. First, they were to be received as an organized body. In the second place, local self-determination of their own affairs should be guaranteed to them forever. And, in the third place, one of their own number should be licensed as a Reader of Divine Service, and, if found fit, ordained as their immediate pastor. Thus, by means of the wisdom and forethought of our early forebears, within eight years from the memorable occurrence in St. George's Church, the very man pulled off his knees while at prayer in that building, Absalom Jones, was as a regularly ordained minister of the Episcopal Church at the head of a congregation of free Africans in the City of Philadelphia in a commodious and stately building erected by themselves, the very first of its kind in this country.

And it is most significant, these men entered the communion of the Episcopal Church, not as paupers but as self-respecting men, as worthy exemplars, for all time, to those of the race who should follow them. They carried with them in the Episcopal Church their own building; and, when Bishop White told them, previous to the ordination of Jones, that he could not ordain him unless a proper support was provided, they did not "grin" and "fawn," and beg the white people to furnish the money for the support of their own minister, but promptly themselves pledged and raised the necessary support that, without delay, Jones might be ordained as their minister.

Action Of Church Authorities

Philadelphia, September 9, 1794. The Council of Advice and Standing Committee of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in Pennsylvania, met in the Bishop's house to consider the application of the people of St. Thomas'.

The Bishop laid before the Council "the Constitution of the African Church of Philadelphia, a congregation of the people of color, who, having lately erected a building for the public worship of God, do now in consequence of *free and mature deliberation*, propose and request to be associated with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States; and in particular to commit all their ecclesiastical affairs to the rule and authority of the Bishop and Church in this State of Pennsylvania."

The action taken in the matter cannot better be expressed than in words taken from the minutes of that meeting:

"The Bishop and Council are pleased with the application made as above, and are willing to accept the terms. Resolved and declared, therefore, that as soon as the Trustees or Deputies of the said congregation, being duly authorized, shall sign the Act of Association of the said Church in this State, they shall be entitled to ALL the privileges of the other congregations of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Agreed, that Dr. Samuel Magaw and Dr. Robert Blackwell be a committee to meet the Trustees or Deputies of the African Church, and see them ratify the Act of Association."

"On Sunday, October 12, 1794, our being received into the fellowship and communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Philadelphia was most cordially and fully announced from the pulpit by the Rev. Robert Blackwell."

During the same month, October, 1794, the trustees, formally, made application for the ordination of Absalom Jones as the pastor of the church, and requested, on his behalf, dispensation from a knowledge of the learned languages. "Whereupon, the Council being heartily disposed to favor the address and application as above, and entirely satisfied as far as doth to them appear, of the moral and religious character of the person recommended, do agree in opinion and respectfully advise that the most regular mode of proceeding is for the Bishop to give his sanction and approbation to Absalom Jones to officiate as a Reader of Divine Service, etc., in the said church, and a candidate for Deacon's orders, till the meeting of the Convention of the Church in this State, which will be in the month of May next. The Seventh Canon, ratified in General Convention, requiring with regard to the learning of those to be ordained that the requisition of an acquaintance with Latin and Greek, is only to be dispensed with by two-thirds of the Convention of the State to which the candidate belongs, and for good causes moving thereunto; the recommendation to the Bishop to the effect foregoing, to have the signature of the names of a majority of such Convention."

It is well to note just here that up to this time St. Thomas' Church had received **every privilege** given to any other congregation. All the other congregations were white. This, the first and only colored congregation was treated as though there were no such thing as a "color-line." Now comes a change. The occasion of the change is the inability of this congregation, in its proposed minister, to meet the educational qualifications demanded of the clergy who shared in the legislation for the diocese. Not being able to meet such requirements, the people of St. Thomas' knocked at the doors of the Convention with a request for a dispensation. The Convention granted the dispensation; but on such terms as it thought proper. Here is the record of the matter:

Extract from the Journal of the Convention of the Episcopal Church of the State of Pennsylvania, held in Christ Church June 2, 1795:

"It was moved and seconded, that the knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, in the examination for Holy Orders of Absalom Jones, a black man, belonging to the African Church of St. Thomas', in this city, be dispensed with, agreeably to the Canon in such cases made and provided. Resolved, That the same be granted, *provided*, it is not to be understood to entitle the African Church to send a Clergyman or Deputies to the Convention, or to interfere with the general government of the Episcopal Church, this condition being made in consideration of their peculiar circumstances *at present*.

JAMES ABERCROMBIE, Secretary."

Says the "Annals": "In the year 1795, the names of persons recorded as members, in the aggregate, are four hundred and twenty-seven, almost twice the number of the preceding year. In addition to the regular members of the Church, we may reasonably suppose that a floating congregation of at least a hundred or more persons were attracted thither from various motives, thus filling it to its utmost capacity. For St. Thomas', at that time, was THE African Church. There were none then of the same class to emulate her noble example, excepting the small company collected together in the blacksmith shop, fitted up for a place of worship by the venerable Richard Allen, aided by the active benevolence of a Christian community. This frame building, from all that we have learned, could scarcely seat one hundred and fifty persons."

School Established

"In 1804, a day school for the instruction of youth was established by the Vestry, to be under their direction and control. They appointed a board of eleven trustees, eight of whom were selected from their own body, and three from the congregation. The duty of this board was to visit the school once in every month, to examine the scholars, note the progress made by them in their studies, and propose such improvements to the Vestry, in regard to the order and government of the school, as they might deem advisable. Each member of this educational society was required to pay into the hands of either of the trustees the sum of one dollar annually. The Bishop, or any of his Council, had the prerogative of visiting the school, and of proposing amendments to existing regulations. All proposed amendments were reported by the trustees to the Vestry at their ensuing monthly meeting.

The following named persons constituted the Board of Trustees appointed by the Vestry:

Robert Gordon,	James Forten,
Cato Collins,	Randall Shepherd,
James Harding	William Thomas,
Robert Douglass,	Joseph Randolph,
Peter Richmond,	John Bowers.
William Gray,	

For quite awhile this school was aided through a charity instituted by the Rev. Dr. Bray, Commissary of the Bishop of London.

In 1809 the parish came in possession of a parsonage on Powell street through a legacy of William Bradford, Esq.

Absalom Jones, The First Negro Priest

At the Diocesan Convention of 1850, when the matter of the admission of the parish of St. Thomas' was under discussion, the Rev. Henry E. Montgomery, who championed such admission, in referring to Absalom Jones, said:

"But what were the 'peculiar circumstances' to which the restriction, passed in 1795, refer? The words 'at present' ought, in charity, to be strictly limited.

The Rev. Absalom Jones, the first minister of St. Thomas' Church, though very deficient in literary qualifications for the ministry, was a 'man of good report and godly conversation.' He was held in great reverence and esteem by the colored people of the city. *Zealous for the prosperity of the Church, and unwearied in doing good,* he was especially beloved in consequence of his devotion to the sick and dying at the time of the prevalence of that awful scourge, the yellow fever. Administering to the bodily as well as spiritual wants of many poor sufferers, and soothing the last moments of many departing souls among his people, he became greatly endeared to the colored race.

Hence, when they formed a congregation, in order that they might worship God according to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of their choice, they fixed their hearts upon having their kind friend and helper for their minister. He who had already won his way to their hearts by labors and sacrifices of Christian love that no one can hear of without emotion, must be the shepherd of their souls in Christ Jesus. So that they could succeed in this their darling wish, they were content to submit to inconvenience and to loss; for him, their friend and brother, bound so closely to their hearts by the sympathy of past afflictions, they were ready to be placed, for the time being, in a position of inferiority.

They were fully sensible that he did not possess the literary qualifications requisite for the ministry, but they knew and loved his self-sacrificing spirit, and consistently religious life. When, therefore, the great difficulty in the way of his ordination was removed, by the dispensing vote of the Convention, the condition on which, in this case, the dispensation depended was agreed to, the congregation of St. Thomas' had succeeded in their great desire. In their feebleness they surrendered to the far stronger power, the right which the Church had already given them, in order that their little flock might be watched and ministered to by a shepherd whom they loved."

An English woman, Dorothy Ripley, visiting the United States, being in Philadelphia during the month of May, 1803, and very desirous of coming into contact with people of our group, said she: "Naming my concern to some of my solid friends to have a meeting with the Africans, I influenced them to send for Absalom Jones, the Black Bishop, and Richard Allen, the Methodist preacher, who also was a colored man and the principal person of that congregation. Absalom Jones complied with my request, and appointed a meeting for me on first day evening, which was a solid time where many were deeply affected with the softening power of the Lord, who unloosed my tongue to proclaim of his love and goodness to the children of men, without respect to person or nation. There was a respectable number of colored people, well dressed and very orderly, who conducted themselves as if they were desirous of knowing the mind of the Lord concerning them. The first and greatest commandment of Jesus Christ, the Lawgiver, came before me: 'Thou shalt love the Lord

thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind,' which I endeavored to enforce as their duty to their Creator Who alone could make them happy by his blessing through their obedience to his lawful command. My own experience of thus loving Him, I thought would illustrate it, therefore added it to show the possibility of pleasing Him and of obtaining His divine favor, which was our interest and duty, as soon as we were able to distinguish right from wrong. To see them have this good house for worship, I told them rejoiced me much, and encouraged such as were servants present to be faithful in their situation and seek the blessing of God, that at the last they might be happy in the enjoyment of his love forever. Supplicating the Throne of Mercy in their behalf, my spirit was deeply humbled and I felt power to plead with the Father on account of the Africans everywhere, who were captivated by the oppressive power of men. When we had separated, my mind was much relieved from the weight which pressed my spirit while I had contemplated the matter, desiring to move by special direction of God."

On the return of this lady to New York, she wrote Absalom Jones. In the volume giving "The Extraordinary Conversion and Religious Experience of Dorothy Ripley with her Frist Voyage in America," the following letter, from Absalom Jones, is printed:

"Letter from Absalom Jones, Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church, in Philadelphia, addressed to Dorothy Ripley, at New York, dated Philadelphia, June 3, 1803:

Dear Friend:

It is with pleasure that I now sit down to inform you that your kind and very affectionate letter came safe to hand, and am happy to hear that kind Providence has conducted you so far on your journey in health of body as well as of mind; and I trust that the Lord will continue to be your Guide, and that your labors may prove as great a blessing to the inhabitants of New York, as they have been to numbers in this city.

Your letter I read with care and attention, as well as many others of my congregation, and I heartily thank you for your friendly advice and godly admonitions; believing them to have been given in that love which purifies the heart. I am very sensible that the charge committed to my care is very great; and am also fully convinced of my own inability for so great an undertaking. And I do assure you that when I was called to the task, I trembled at the idea, and was ready to say, 'Who am I?' But when I consider that God can send by whom He will, and as you very justly have observed, He sometimes makes use of the feeblest instruments for the promotion of Truth; I say under these considerations, I was led to believe that the Lord would perfect strength in my weakness; and glory be to his ever adorable Name for it. I have cause to believe my labor has not been altogether in vain.

You wish to know the number I consider to be under my care. Our list of members contains about five hundred, although we have a great many more who constantly

attend worship in our church, of whom I have a comfortable hope that they will be brought unto the knowledge of the Truth.

My wife joins me in love. I remain, with sentiments of high esteem and respect.
Your esteemed friend,

ABSALOM JONES."

Absalom Jones, at the head of the African Church of St. Thomas, in the city of Philadelphia, occupied, in the minds of the colored population, the very highest station of honor, and it was not at all surprising that he should be known among them as "The Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church." Inasmuch as Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were life-long and affectionate friends, and it is said that, two years before his death, he was present and took part in the "making" of Richard Allen a "Bishop," it is easy to understand how the rumor got afloat that Absalom Jones, with the consent of Bishop White, was present and validated the "consecration" of Allen as Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

But, upon the assumption that he was present, and took part in the ceremony, not being a Bishop, he could effect no more with Allen, then did Wesley with Coke, when he commissioned him superintendent of the Methodist societies in America.

Absalom Jones was a real leader. He was interested in everything which concerned the well being of his race. In 1799 and 1800, under his leadership, the Negroes of Philadelphia petitioned the State Legislature, praying the immediate abolition of slavery. At the same time, they sent a petition to Congress against the Fugitive Slave Law, and in favor of prospective emancipation for all Negroes. Jones and Allen, a little later, were supported in their endeavors by one of the most prosperous and public-spirited colored layman of that day. This man was James Forten, an honored member of St. Thomas' Church. He was a sail-maker, and a man of education and considerable means, having been educated in the school of the Quaker abolitionist, Anthony Benezet, and is described as "a gentleman by nature, easy in manner, and easy in intercourse." In 1814 he assisted Jones and Allen in raising 2,500 volunteers for the protection of the city of Philadelphia, which was then threatened by the English warships. A battalion was also formed for service in the field, but, before it reached the front, the war with Great Britain had come to

an end. In 1817 Mr. Forten was chairman of the first convention of free Negroes held in Philadelphia. It is said that he drew up the first resolutions of protest against the work of the Colonization Society, which declared "that we never will separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country. They are our brethren by the ties of blood, of suffering and of wrong, and we feel that there is more virtue in suffering privations with them than in gaining fancied advantages for a season." Mr. Forten was a great friend of William Lloyd Garrison and the poet Whittier. He rendered substantial financial succor to Garrison in several emergencies, and Garrison refers to him as "the greatly esteemed and venerated sail-maker of Philadelphia." Mrs. Charlotte Forten Grimke, of Washington, the estimable wife of Rev. Dr. F. J. Grimke, is a grandchild of Mr. Forten.

Let Richard Allen, himself, tell the story. Said he: "We held an election to know what religious denomination we should unite with. At the election it was determined. There were **two** in favor of the Methodist, the Rev. Absalom Jones and myself, and a large majority in favor of the Church of England."

Absalom Jones, overruled by the expression of the majority of the Free African Society, yielded to such expression. On the other hand, Richard Allen refused to yield to the will of the majority, and parted company with the Society. Says he: "I informed them that I could not be anything else but a **Methodist**, as I was born and awakened under them, and I could go no further with them, for I was a Methodist, and would leave them in peace and in love. I would do nothing to retard them in building a church, as it was an extensive building, neither would I go out with a subscription paper until they were done with their subscription. I bought an old frame that had formerly been occupied as a blacksmith shop from Mr. Sun, and hauled it on the lot on Sixth, near Lombard street, that had been formerly taken for the Church of England. I employed carpenters to repair the old frame and fit it for a place of worship. In July, 1794, Bishop Asbury being in town, I solicited him to open the church for us, which he accepted."

Now this was in 1794. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1816, and Allen elected the first Bishop. From this humble beginning has evolved the present A. M. E. Church.

Two things about Richard Allen all men must honor and admire, his courage and his philanthropy. In the face of the organized Free African Society, and all that it represented; in the face of the opposition of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the overwhelming majority of colored people attached to that Church, he, with a few others of his kind, had the courage, yea, the audacity, to found a new connection, to be controlled **wholly** by persons of the African race.

Richard Allen was a noble philanthropist. In this phase of his life he teaches the leaders of our own day the needful lesson. He was born a slave. He became possessed of freedom. By industry and hard labor he made money. He became well-to-do. He spent his money for the glory of God and the improvement of his brethren. Says Bishop Payne, the historian of the African Methodists, speaking of Bishop Allen:

"All that he ever did receive was the sum of \$80, not per year, but for all his services. The balance due him in this direction he bequeathed to the Church. 'I have,' says Brother Proctor, 'a knowledge of \$1,400 being so bequeathed or given by him to the Church at one time, when the house of worship was sold and bought by us. This claim of \$1,400 against Bethel in Philadelphia, which the Bishop had served as pastor, is confirmed by the testimony of Jonathan Tudas, one of the most intelligent of Bishop Allen's lay advisers. At one time the Bishop loaned Bethel the sum of \$4,000. At another time his claims against Bethel amounted to \$6,300, and once, \$11,700. At the time that Robert Green sold it Mr. Allen bought it in for the congregation at the sum of \$10,500.'"

Says Bishop Payne: "In his latter years the Bishop carried on a boot and shoe store, which trade and business he had learned in the earlier part of his life. He retired from this business two or three years prior to his death, at which time his estate was worth between thirty and forty thousand dollars, all of which was accumulated by his own intellect, industry and thrift."

The early days of the A. M. E. Church constituted a period of the keenest self-denial and struggle. Bishop Payne gives the following statistics at the close of the first decade: "There were reported two stations, ten circuits and seventeen pastors, or itinerants. The total amount of money raised for all purposes was \$1,151.75. Of this amount \$448.30 comprised the salaries of six preachers in Baltimore, \$614.20 made up the salaries of ten pastors in the city of Philadelphia."

The amazing wonder is that the organization survived until its heaven-sent leader, and re-constructor, Daniel Alexander Payne, came to the helm. It is always a difficult, exceedingly difficult, task for an intellectually blind leader to lead an aggregation of ignorance into light and order. In this particular case the organization was not only cut off from any direct connection, and sympathy, with any white organization, but it was looked upon with fear and suspicion on the part of the white public. The laws in most of the states operated with severity towards any organization made up **exclusively** of Negroes. It is scarcely necessary to enter into particulars since a general knowledge of the "slave code," and the stringent laws governing free colored people intimate some idea of the formidable difficulties attending the extension of any Negro organization.

The early days of African Methodism reveal the immense power and blessing of **righteous character**. Illiterate and deficient in worldly knowledge, the chief promoters of African Methodism were **godly** and **righteous** men, and, expecting great things from God, were not disappointed. It could hardly have been otherwise, when an humble people, fully conscious of their lack of qualifications, were crying mightily to Him for guidance, that He would fail them in such dire extremity.

Richard Allen, in a letter to an English woman, under date of June 24, 1803, among other things, says, respecting himself:

"O! my abounding weakness! I would hide it from my friends, but they are too eagle-eyed not to discover it; yet they have the charity to bear with me. I often bow at the foot-stool of divine mercy, that I may obtain strength to overcome corrupt nature. None knows but myself my strivings to walk in the narrow way, in which the poor worm has no desire to rob God of his honor. I see the beauty of nakedness to be far superior than to be clothed with rags of self-righteousness."

God raised up men with such a spirit "to hold the fort" until it pleased Him to send mightier re-enforcement. And, it so happened, when, by reason of certain "insurrections," the work in the State of South Carolina was "closed up," a number of colored men, with fair education for those times, being compelled to leave Charleston, they came to the free states and enlisted in the work of African Methodism. And, by and by, the man of genius and destiny came to the front to rescue, preserve and improve the good work of the illiterate founders

of African Methodism, to the glory of God and the uplift of black humanity.

The necessities of the people of African descent, at that time, despite the remarkable success of the people of St. Thomas' and the earnest strivings of the sober-minded in the Methodist Episcopal Church, to do all that was within their power for the elevation of the black people, we say, the necessities of the case urgently demanded just such provision as was anticipated by the founders of African Methodism. Just about the same time the A. M. E. Church came into existence, the African Colonization Society was organized. Here was a great movement upon the part of a section of the white race to remove the people of African descent from their own native land. The great subject of the restriction of slavery, in this country, as voiced in the "Missouri Compromise," and the dawn of the "black code," having for their object the further humiliation of our people, were all to be considered and determined apart from any expression of the black man in the premises. The A. M. E. Church was the vital thing needed. It immediately became somewhat of a racial "clearing house," and the only forum for gathering the heart-convictions of the oppressed race. It became the much needed "training school" for the black men and women, who, under God, were to be the chief means of awakening the nation to the exceeding sinfulness, and wickedness of human bondage. It was this medium which inspired the idea of annual conventions of "free Negroes" to consult and devise means for the preservation of their own liberties and the final destruction of slavery itself. The Negro Church was the theatre for the testing and drawing out the powers and gifts of Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnett, James W. C. Pennington, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and a great number of men and women of the black race, whose personalities and powers, stimulated the Abolitionists and increased the white friends of freedom, both in this country and in Europe.

Taking the lowest possible view, despite the dense general ignorance of the masses of the people, of this organization-

During its early days, and the intellectual insufficiency of their leaders, still, it must be confessed that if the organization accomplished nothing else save to warm and inflame the hearts of the masses of the people, and preserve among them a deep reverence and fear of the Almighty, that alone justified its birth. Unquestionably this was pre-eminently accomplished.

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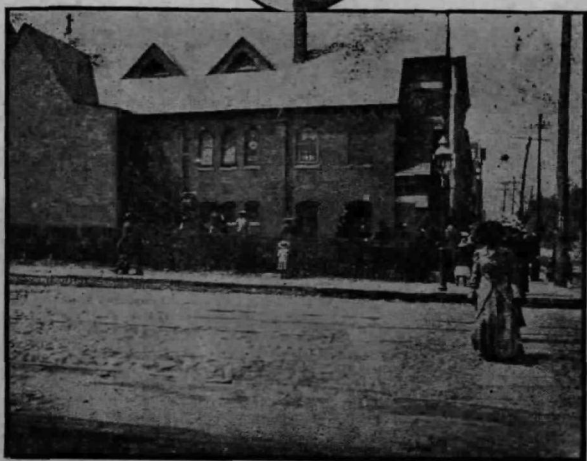
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