IV

The Black Clergy

It is probable that the earliest black pastors were exhorters in the slave quarters, preachers without churches—like two who turn up in advertisements for the return of fugitive slaves in Virginia: "Run away [in 1772] . . . a likely Virginia born Mulatto Lad named Primus, about nineteen or twenty Years of Age. . . . He has been a Preacher ever since he was sixteen . . . and has done much Mischief in his Neighborhood. . . ." Or: [in 1775] "Run away . . . a dark mulatto man named Jemmy . . . a very artful fellow . . . he is very fond of singing hymns and preaching. . . ." As late as the spring of 1793, a notice in the Baltimore *Maryland Journal* sought the return of a "Young negro man slave . . . named Sam. . . . He was raised in a Family of religious persons, commonly called methodists and has lived with some of them for years past, on terms of perfect equality; the refusal to continue him on these terms . . . has given him offence, and is the sole cause of his absconding. Sam is about twenty-three years old, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, pretty square made, has a down look, very talkative among persons whom he can make free with, but slow of speech; he has been in the use of instructing and exhorting his fellow creatures of all colors in matters of religious duty. . . ."

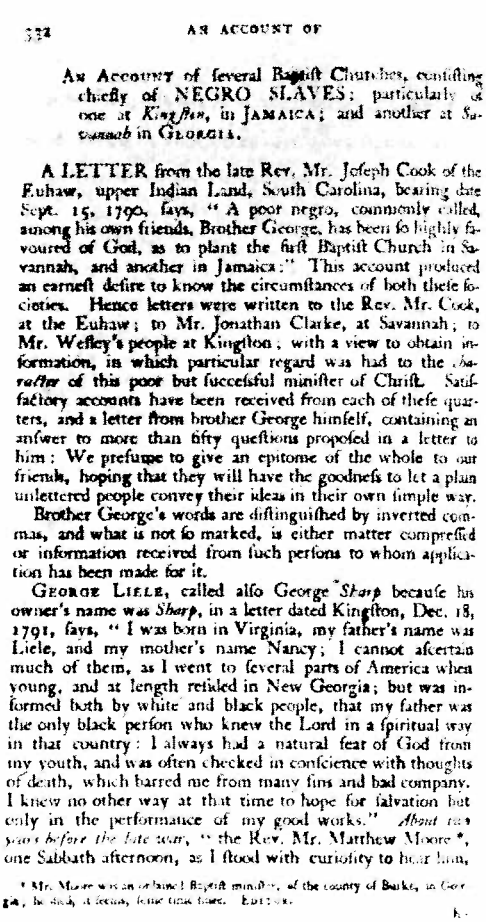
The formation of the African-American church, north and south, under the tutelage of a handful of black apostles during the era of the revolution, was not solely a religious milestone. "I entreat you to consider the obligations we lie under to help forward the cause of freedom," cried Richard Allen, who in his old age was to be the country's first black bishop, in his "Address to the People of Colour" in 1794. As Charles H. Wesley has observed, the rise of the black church during the birthing time of the nation was an early assertion of "organized independence and self-expression" in the total life of revolutionary black America.

Founders of the African Baptist Church: David George, George Liele, Andrew Bryan

The determination of the southern slave to live his own religious life and to exploit the available forms of Christian association in order to construct a black solidarity beyond the slave quarters of a single plantation may be seen in the careers of three pioneer black Baptist preachers: David George, George Liele, and Andrew Bryan. At the close of the revolution, the first two stayed in the king's camp: George continued his work in Canada and Africa and Liele in the West Indies. Bryan built a church in Georgia [fig. 70].*

David George

The first black Baptist church in America was gathered among the slaves at Silver Bluff in South Carolina between 1773 and 1775 by David George. The lineaments of its first pastor, born in Virginia in 1742, must be discerned in his eventful life. A runaway to South Carolina, he eluded the



332 AN ACCOUNT OF

An Account of ſeveral Baptiſt Churches, conſiſting chiefly of NEGRO SLAVES; particularly of one at *Kingſton*, in JAMAICA; and another at *Savannah* in GEORGIA.

A LETTER from the late Rev. Mr. Joſeph Cook of the Euhaw, upper Indian Land, South Carolina, bearing date Sept. 15, 1790, ſays, "A poor negro, commonly called, among his own friends, Brother George, has been ſo highly favoured of God, as to plant the firſt Baptiſt Church in Savannah, and another in Jamaica:" This account produced an earneſt deſire to know the circumſtances of both theſe ſocieties. Hence letters were written to the Rev. Mr. Cook, at the Euhaw; to Mr. Jonathan Clarke, at Savannah; to Mr. Weſley's people at Kingſton; with a view to obtain information, in which particular regard was had to the *character* of this poor but ſucceſsful miniſter of Chriſt. Satisfactory accounts have been received from each of theſe quarters, and a letter from brother George himſelf, containing an anſwer to more than fifty queſtions propoſed in a letter to him: We preſume to give an epitome of the whole to our friends, hoping that they will have the goodneſs to let a plain unlettered people convey their ideas in their own ſimple way.

Brother George's words are diſtinguiſhed by inverted commas, and what is not ſo marked, is either matter compreſſed or information received from ſuch perſons to whom application has been made for it.

GEORGE LIELE, called alſo George *Sharp* becauſe his owner's name was *Sharp*, in a letter dated Kingſton, Dec. 18, 1791, ſays, "I was born in Virginia, my father's name was Liele, and my mother's name Nancy; I cannot aſcertain much of them, as I went to ſeveral parts of America when young, and at length reſided in New Georgia; but was informed both by white and black people, that my father was the only black perſon who knew the Lord in a ſpiritual way in that country: I always had a natural fear of God from my youth, and was often checked in conſcience with thoughts of death, which barred me from many ſins and bad company. I knew no other way at that time to hope for ſalvation but only in the performance of my good works." *About two years before the late war*, "the Rev. Mr. Matthew Moore *, one Sabbath afternoon, as I ſtood with curioſity to hear him,

* Mr. Moore was an ordained Baptiſt miniſter, of the county of Burke, in Georgia, he died, it ſeems, ſome time ſince. EDITOR.

70. John Rippon, "An Account of Several Baptist Churches, consisting chiefly of NEGRO SLAVES . . . ," excerpt, *The Baptist Annual Register* . . . (London, 1793). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

bloodhounds for two years and then hid out with the Indians, first as a servant to Creek chief Blue Salt, later to Natchez chief King Jack, who in the early seventies sold him to a plantation on the Savannah River, twelve miles from Augusta. A Baptist slave, one Cyrus, awakened him to Christ and, helped by his master's children, he learned to read and write using the Bible as primer and text. Not long after, a few slaves baptized by a white minister formed a church. "Then I began to exhort in church, and learned to

*Black Baptists were active in Virginia as well as in Georgia, as is shown by three advertisements for runaway slaves in the *Virginia Gazette:* "formerly the property of Rev. John Dixon . . . Nat . . . pretends to be very religious, and is a Baptist teacher . . ." [1778]; "Tim, about thirty . . . has a very smooth way of speaking . . . and pretends to be a Baptist preacher . . . lately seen near Williamsburg . . ." [1783]; and "a Negro man named Samuel . . . Virginia born, speaks plain . . . about twenty-six. . . . He is a Baptist preacher and very fond of what he calls preaching . . ." [1786].

Benjamin Quarles notes that black Peter Willis, born in South Carolina in 1762, moved westward in the 1790s, and as a licensed Baptist preacher delivered the first Protestant sermon west of the Mississippi at Vermilion, a village forty miles southwest of Baton Rouge in 1804.

sing hymns," George later recorded. "I was appointed to the office of an elder. . . . I proceeded in this way till the American War was coming on. . . . I continued preaching at Silver Bluff, till the church, constituted with eight, increased to thirty or more. . . ." When the British occupied Savannah in 1778 and his patriot owner abandoned the plantation at Silver Bluff, George with his black flock—they had doubtless pondered Dunmore's offer of emancipation—took off for the British lines and freedom.

In Savannah during the next few years, George joined Liele and Bryan in preaching the word, but at the end of the war the three went their separate ways—Liele to establish the Baptist Church in Jamaica, Bryan in Savannah. George never returned to Silver Bluff but after the revolution his old church revived under the guidance of the slave pastor Jesse Peter. Instead, George and hundreds of his brothers sailed with the defeated British to Nova Scotia, where, for ten years, barely surviving lynch threat and arson ("they came one night and stood before the pulpit and swore how they would treat me if I preached again"), he exhorted Baptist congregations, at first made up of black and white. He opened the first Baptist church in Shelburne.

After a decade of selfless labor in the Canadian vineyard, George's story merges with that of Thomas Peters, the Tory corporal who with his Black Pioneers migrated in 1792 from Halifax to Freetown. David George also voyaged to Africa, where with Peters he became a founding father of Sierra Leone and planted the first Baptist church in West Africa.

George Liele

Of his origins, George Liele wrote: "I was born in Virginia, my father's name was Liele, and my mother's name Nancy; I cannot ascertain much of them, as I went to several parts of America when young, and at length resided in New Georgia; but was informed both by white and black people, that my father was the only black person who knew the Lord . . ." [fig. 71]. In 1773 Liele moved with his master, a Baptist deacon by the name of Henry Sharp, to Burke County in Georgia, where a white minister brought him into the Baptist fold. He felt a call to preach. "Desiring to prove the sense I had of my obligations to God, I endeavoured to instruct the people of my own color in the word of God: the white brethren seeing my endeavours gave me a call at a quarterly meeting to preach before the congregation." Licensed as a probationer, for two years he carried the word to the slave quarters of the plantations on the Savannah River from Silver Bluff, where he exhorted David George's newly gathered church, to the suburbs of Savannah.

Sometime before the revolution, Deacon Sharp liberated the black preacher. In 1778, after Sharp had lost his life as a Tory officer, Liele joined the stream of black folk on their way to Savannah. There he met trouble when Sharp's heirs tried to reenslave him, but the British officer he served backed him up. Wasting no time, he began immediately to gather a church and for three years, during the British occupation of Savannah, he inspired a growing congregation of black Baptists, slave and free. David George and Andrew Bryan listened to George Liele and learned.

When the British evacuated Savannah in 1782, Liele sailed with them to Jamaica, paying his passage as an indentured servant. Two years later, settled in Kingston with his family and fully free, he began again to preach, at first in a private home. Then, as he recalled, "I formed the church with four brethren from America." The preaching went well "with the poorer sort, especially

71. The Reverend George Liele, illustration in Joel A. Rogers, *Africa's Gift to America* (New York, 1961).

the slaves," although whites "at first persecuted us both at meetings and baptisms." He fought back, drew up a "petition of our distresses," and wrung a promise of toleration from the Assembly. The church prospered. "I have baptized four hundred in Jamaica," he wrote in December 1791. "At Kingston I baptize in the sea, at Spanish Town in the river, and at convenient places in the country. We have nigh *three hundred and fifty members;* a few white people among them. . . ."

There is little protest against slavery in Liele's letters to his white Baptist colleagues. He is candid if joyless about the concessions he had been forced to make for the sake of survival. To guarantee that he was no fomenter of revolt, he submitted to the authorities for their inspection every scrap of prayer used in his service. The "chiefest part of our society are poor, illiterate slaves, some living on sugar estates, some on mountains, pens, and other settlements . . . the free people in our society are but poor. . . . We receive none into the church without a few lines from their owners of their good behaviour towards them and religion. . . ." It is hard to decode the piety; the records are sparse. Is it significant that one of Liele's main interests was the promotion of "a *free school* for the instruction of children, both free and slave . . ."?

Looking back when he was forty, ten years after he had left Georgia with the British, George Liele, building a church on his own three acres at the east end of Kingston, seems to have been marking time: "I have a wife and four children. My wife was baptised by me in Savannah. . . . My occupation is a farmer. . . . I also keep a team of horses, and waggons for the carrying goods from one place to another, which I attend to myself, with the assistance of my sons. . . . I have a few books, some good old authors and sermons, and one large bible . . . a good many of our members can read, and are all desirous to learn. . . ."

Liele kept in touch with other pioneer black Baptists whom the stir of revolution had brought together. In his tally of their successes, is there a note of just pride in a collective enterprise, however limited by the powers that still ruled, as they struggled to pierce the white fog of slavery to a clearer day?

> The last accounts I had from Savannah were, that the Gospel had taken very great effect both there and in South Carolina. Brother Andrew Bryan, a black minister at Savannah, has two hundred members. . . . Also I received accounts from Nova Scotia of a black Baptist preacher, Brother David George, who was a member of the church at Savannah; he had the permission of the Governor to preach

> in three provinces. . . . Brother Amos is at Providence [Bahamas], he writes me that . . . he has about three hundred members. Brother Jessy Gaulsing, another black minister, preaches near Augusta, in South Carolina, at a place where I used to preach . . . has sixty members; and a great work is going on there.

Andrew Bryan

Andrew Bryan was born a slave at Goose Creek, South Carolina, about sixteen miles from Charleston, in 1737. In Savannah, during the war, he harkened to the words of George Liele, who baptized him and his wife, Hannah, in 1782. Nine months after Liele had departed for Jamaica, Bryan took up his work and began to preach to small groups—mostly blacks with a few whites—at Yamacraw on the outskirts of Savannah. His master encouraged him, thought his influence on the slaves was "salutary," and allowed him to build a shack for worship, but hostile whites "artfully dispossessed" him. With the help of his brother Sampson, he gathered his flock in the swamps. On January 20, 1788, a white Baptist minister, Abraham Marshall of Kiokee, and the black minister Jesse Peter of Silver Bluff certified the congregation as "the Ethiopian church of Jesus Christ" and ordained "beloved Brother Andrew to the work of the ministry . . . to preach the Gospel, and administer the ordinances, as God in his providence may call." Thus was formed the First Bryan Baptist Church, which lives today in Savannah [figs. 72 and 73].

The organization of this church was an unhappy event for Georgia masters who feared slave uprisings. They quickly forbade their slaves to listen to Bryan's sermons. Even when a slave carried a pass, the whip of the patrol fell on his back; he was jailed and abused; meetings were heckled. In July 1790, Marshall wrote from Savannah: "The whites grew more and more inveterate; taking numbers of them before magistrates [about fifty, including Sampson]—they were imprisoned and whipped . . . particularly *Andrew, who was cut and bled abundantly* . . . he held up his hand, and told his persecutors that he rejoiced not only to be whipped, but *would freely suffer death for the cause of Jesus Christ.*" After his owner, Jonathan Bryan, protested to the magistrates, Andrew was released and resumed preaching at Brampton, three miles from Savannah, in a barn on the plantation. By the end of 1791 he had brought hundreds into his church, although he had been forced to confront a critical problem: there were, in fact, three hundred and fifty slaves, already "converted," who could not be baptized because their masters did not think Christianity "salutary" for blacks.

Bryan was a stubborn saint. In 1792 he appointed four deacons, while his brother Sampson, still a slave, helped as an assistant preacher. His church flourished: fifty of its members could read, three could write. When his master died, he bought himself free for fifty pounds, supported himself by his own labor, and built himself a home. In 1794, with the help of white Baptists, he raised enough money to erect a house of prayer.

A few days before Christmas 1800, the Reverend Andrew Bryan wrote to a white Baptist colleague:

> With much pleasure, I inform you, dear sir, that I enjoy good health, and am strong in body, tho' 63 years old, and am blessed with a pious wife, whose freedom I have obtained, and an only daughter and child, who is married to a free man, tho' she, and consequently, under our laws, her seven children, five sons and two

72. The First African Baptist Church of Savannah, established in 1788, photograph by James M. Simms, *The First Colored Baptist Church in North America . . .* (Philadelphia, 1888).

> daughters, are slaves. By a kind Providence I am well provided for, as to worldly comforts, (tho' I have had very little given to me as a minister) having a house and a lot in this city, besides the land on which several buildings stand, for which I receive a small rent, and a fifty-six acre tract of land, with all necessary buildings, four miles in the country. . . .

He owned "eight slaves"—members of his family—"for whose education and happiness, I am enabled thro' mercy to provide." His congregation now numbered about seven hundred blacks who "enjoy the rights of conscience to a valuable extent, worshiping in our families and preaching three times every Lord's-day, baptizing frequently from ten to thirty at a time in the Savannah, and administering the sacred supper, not only without molestation, but in the presence, and with the approbation and encouragement of many of the white people." Soon Andrew Bryan was writing about his "large church," which was "getting too unwieldy for one body." Before long there would be branches—the Second and Third Baptist churches in Savannah. The latter was guided by Henry Francis of Augusta, who had been purchased and liberated so that, as Bryan put it, he could come to Savannah "to exercise the handsome ministerial gifts he possesses amongst us, and teach our youth to read and write."

When Bryan died in 1812 at a ripe seventy-five, the white Savannah Baptist Association eulogized the "pastor of the First Colored Church in Savannah": "This son of Africa, after suffering inexpressible persecutions in the cause of his divine Master, was at length permitted to discharge the duties of the ministry among his colored friends in peace and quiet, hundreds of whom, through his instrumentality, were brought to a knowledge of the truth as 'it is in Jesus.'"

THIS brief account of the three founders can give only passing notice to other men of mark who were also present during the birthing time of the African Baptist Church in the new nation. In Virginia—at Petersburg, Richmond, Charles City, Williamsburg, Gloucester, Isle of Wight—from 1776 to 1800, Baptist churches, some of them black and white, some all white, sprang up under the tutelage of black preachers. Of them little more is known

73. The Reverend Andrew Bryan, stained glass. First African Baptist Church, Savannah.

than their names: the Reverend Mr. Moses, Gowan Pamphlet, William Lemon, Uncle Jack, Thomas Armstead, and Josiah Bishop. Often even the name has been lost. Johann David Schoepf, traveling in Florida in 1784, noted in his journal as he stopped at St. Augustine: "Not far off an association of Negroes have a cabin, in which one of their own countrymen, who has set himself up to be their teacher, holds services. They are of the sect of the Anabaptists." Sometime before the turn of the century, Joseph Willis, a licensed black preacher born in South Carolina in 1762, headed for the western frontier. In November 1804, at Vermilion, a hamlet about forty miles southwest of Baton Rouge, he preached the first Baptist (and Protestant) sermon west of the Mississippi.

Founders of the African Methodist Church: Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Peter Williams

A catalytic moment in the early struggle for black religious independence in the United States occurred on a Sunday morning in Philadelphia during the fall of 1792.* Years later the venerable Richard Allen, bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, musing over his "trials and sufferings" in behalf of "Adam's lost race," recorded that moment:

> A number of us usually attended St. George's Church in Fourth Street; and when the colored people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door, and told us to go in the gallery. He told us to go, and we would see where to sit. We expected to take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seats, the elder said, "Let us pray." We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H—— M——, having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him off of his knees, and saying, "You

*Gary B. Nash's recent chapter on the origins of the black church in Philadelphia is a valuable contribution to the subject ("'To Arise Out of the Dust': Absalom Jones and the African Church of Philadelphia, 1785–95," in his *Race, Class, and Politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society* [Urbana, 1986]).

> 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." With that he beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L—— S—— to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up.

"By this time prayer was over," Allen recalled, "and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church." After that proud exit, "We were filled with fresh vigor to get a house erected to worship God in." It was not easy. They hired a storeroom in which to pray by themselves, but "bore much persecution" from white Methodists. "We will disown you all," the elder threatened again and again. "We told him we were dragged off our knees in St. George's church, and treated worse than heathens, and we were determined to seek out for ourselves, the Lord being our helper."

Richard Allen

He was born a slave in Philadelphia ten years before the Boston Massacre. His master was the Quaker lawyer Benjamin Chew, chief justice of Pennsylvania during the revolution. Chew sold the Allen family—father, mother, and four children—into Delaware, near the town of Dover, to one Stokeley, who, as Allen remembered, was "an unconverted man," but "a good master" and a "father" to his slaves. In 1777 seventeen-year-old Richard was converted to Methodism along with his mother, sister, and elder brother. Shortly after, he joined the Methodist Society in his neighborhood and began to attend class meetings in the forest:

> Our neighbors, seeing that our master indulged us with the privilege of attending meeting once in two weeks, said that Stokeley's negroes would soon ruin him; and so my brother and myself held a council together . . . so that it should not be said that religion made us worse servants; we would work night and day to get our crops forward. . . . At length, our master said he was convinced that religion made slaves better and not worse, and often boasted of his slaves for their honesty and industry.

When the Reverend Freeborn Garrettson, the Methodist circuit rider who had liberated his own slaves in 1775, preached from the text, "Thou art weighted in the balance, and art found wanting," Stokeley, conscience-stricken, "proposed to me and my brother buying our times" for sixty pounds hard cash or two thousand dollars in Continental paper. Somehow the Allen brothers raised their ransom: "I had it often impressed upon my mind that I would one day enjoy my freedom; for slavery is a bitter pill, notwithstanding we had a good master. But when we would think that our day's work was never done, we often thought that after our master's death we were liable to be sold to the highest bidder, as he was much in debt; and thus . . . I was often brought to weep between the porch and the altar."

Richard Allen now went to work for himself, sawing cordwood and making bricks. "I was after this employed in driving of wagon in time of the Continental war, in drawing salt from Rehobar, Sussex county, in Delaware. I had my regular stops and preaching places on the road. . . . After

74. Unknown artist, *Richard Allen*, pastel and chalk, 1784. Howard University Gallery.

peace was proclaimed, I then travelled extensively. . . ." From Delaware he made his way into west Jersey, preaching the Gospel at night and on Sundays, cutting wood for his bread on the weekdays. Like the Quaker abolitionist John Woolman, Allen wandered about the countryside. In east Jersey he was lamed by rheumatism; in Pennsylvania, "I walked until my feet became so sore and blistered the first day, that I scarcely could bear them to the ground." At Radnor, twelve miles from Philadelphia, strangers took him in and bathed his feet. "I preached for them the next evening" and "on Sabbath day to a large congregation of different persuasions." Staying on in Radnor for "several weeks," he inspired a small revival. "There were but few colored people in the neighborhood—the most of my congregation was white. Some said, 'this man must be a man of God; I never heard such preaching before.'"

At the end of December 1784, when sixty preachers gathered in Baltimore for the first organizing conference of American Methodism, it is probable that Allen was present and that in 1785 he accompanied Bishop Asbury as a "helper" on the Baltimore circuit. "My lot was cast in Baltimore," he remembered, "in a small meeting-house called Methodist Alley . . . I had some happy meetings in Baltimore. . . . Rev. Bishop Asbury sent for me. . . . He told me he wished me to travel with him. He told me that in the slave countries, Carolina and other places, I must not intermix with the slaves, and I would frequently have to sleep in his carriage, and he would allow me my victuals and clothes. I told him I would not travel with him on

these conditions." Is there a hint of this precious alloy of firm spirit and plain dignity in the chalk and pastel portrait of twenty-five-year-old Richard Allen limned by an unknown artist at about this time [fig. 74]? A later black Methodist bishop cherished this portrait and passed it on to his son, Henry Ossawa Tanner, the fine painter of scriptural themes who was Thomas Eakins's best pupil.

Rejecting Bishop Asbury's flawed offer, Allen continued to ride and preach on his own: "I received nothing from the Methodist connection. My usual method was when I would get bare of clothes, to stop travelling and go to work. . . . My hands administered to my necessities." It is possible to think of him at this time, wrote Charles H. Wesley, as "an unordained Methodist preacher . . . who could travel and preach without ministerial orders or authority from a conference." In the autumn of 1785 he returned to Radnor: "I killed seven beeves, and supplied the neighbors with meat; got myself pretty well clad through my own industry—thank God—and preached occasionally." The following year was a turning point. When, in February 1786, the Methodist elder in charge sent for him, he gave up his wanderings and journeyed to Philadelphia—where he would meet Absalom Jones.

Absalom Jones

He was born a slave in Sussex, Delaware (where Allen hauled salt) on November 6, 1746. As a child he learned to read, and with the pennies he managed to save he bought a speller and a Testament. When he was sixteen, his master took him to Philadelphia and put him to work in a shop where his job was "to store, pack up and carry out goods." A clerk taught him to write, and in 1766 he was permitted to study in night school. Four years later he married one of his master's slaves and bought her freedom with money the couple earned working evenings for wages. (Since a child's status followed its mother's, it was proper to liberate a wife first.) Working hard, they acquired a home. In 1784, while Allen was preaching in Pennsylvania and Maryland, Absalom Jones bought his own freedom. The couple continued in the employ of their old master and in time built two houses and rented them. When Richard Allen rode into Philadelphia to begin his historic work, Absalom Jones was already prominent among the black members of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church.

For the next thirty-odd years, although they would seek the independence of the black church on different paths, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones would be coworkers and leaders in the striving of black people to achieve justice and equality.

When Allen arrived in Philadelphia, the Methodist elder in charge assigned him to preach at St. George's Church—at five in the morning. "I strove to preach as well as I could, but it was a great cross to bear. . . ." He had planned "to stop in Philadelphia a week or two," but his "labor was much blessed": "I soon saw a large field open in seeking and instructing my African brethren, who had been a long forgotten people and few of them attended public worship." He spread the Gospel all over the city, in the commons, and in the suburbs; "it was not uncommon for me to preach from four to five times a day." He "established prayer meetings" and "raised a society in 1786 of forty-two members," who "subscribed largely towards finishing St. George's church, in building the gallery and laying new floors. . . ."

Yet Allen felt "cramped." "I saw the necessity of erecting a place of worship for the colored people," he wrote, with a restraint that understated the historic nature of the

decision. Indeed, no fanfare hailed the great idea. Ironically, when he proposed it to "the most respectable" blacks of the city, only three—all members of St. George's—agreed with him. One of them was Absalom Jones. The main opposition, however, came from the white Methodist clergy. The minister-in-charge in Philadelphia "was much opposed to an African church, and used very degrading and insulting language to us, to try and prevent us from going on." When the small group persisted in their desire for a separate place of worship and continued to recruit blacks for Methodism, the minister grew frantic and soon barred their meetings: "We viewed the forlorn state of our colored brethren . . . destitute of a place of worship. They were considered a nuisance."

It was at this point, even as they remained a harassed part of the Methodist Church, that Allen and Jones made a critical decision: it was also necessary to organize the blacks of Philadelphia outside the church. The decision, of course, was primarily a maneuver in the battle for religious autonomy, but it really went further and broke new ground. The Free African Society in Philadelphia, which came into being during the spring of 1787, was "the first evidence which history affords," wrote Wesley, "of an organization for economic and social cooperation among Negroes of the western world." Indeed, the opening sentence of its Articles of Association had the feeling of a great beginning: "We the free Africans and their descendants . . . do unanimously agree, for the benefit of each other. . . ." And the preamble rang out:

> 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 . . . often communed together . . . 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 sentiments, 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.

RICHARD ALLEN'S radical vision—"to seek out for ourselves"—was already the organized aim of the Free African Society, a wider sodality of the black community. Among its charter members were the first citizens of black Philadelphia—including Cyrus Bustill, once a slave but by then a prosperous baker. Bustill began as a Quaker and later joined the flock of Absalom Jones in the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. After his retirement from business, he built a house for his family and in it organized a free school in which he was a teacher. Somewhat fatalistic in his religious ideas—as is evident in the manuscript of his address to "the Blacks in Philadelphia" in September 1787—he would nonetheless be a vigorous abolitionist for the rest of his life.

As time went on, the society, whose members "differed in their religious sentiments," seemed slow to inaugurate a separate black church. Allen grew restive, absented himself from meetings, and in June 1789 the society voted (Jones abstaining) to "discontinue" him as a member.

But Allen's view was really winning out. By the end of 1790, encouraged by Ben-

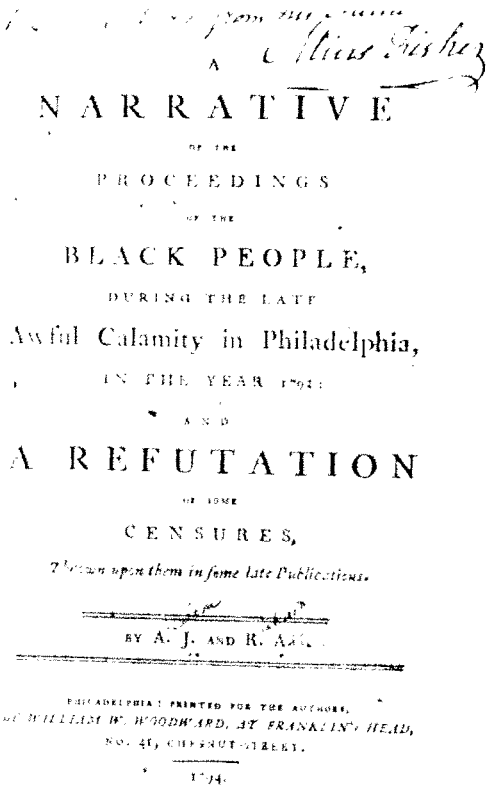
jamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush, the society was ready to appoint a committee including Jones and a reinstated Allen to work on the problem. Writing to the abolitionist Granville Sharp in London, Rush told him of a plan to form "The African Church of Philadelphia," whose organizers had drawn up articles "so general as to embrace all and yet so orthodox in cardinal points as to offend none." Rush was right. The burgeoning black church belonged as yet to no sect. In August 1791, addressing "the Friends of Liberty and Religion," the "Representatives of the African Church in Philadelphia," terming themselves "the scattered and unconnected appendages of most of the religious societies of the city," sent out an appeal for funds. Allen was happy. "The first day the Rev. Absalom Jones and myself went out we collected three hundred and sixty dollars." Before long "[a] day was appointed" to break ground for the new church. "I arose early in the morning and addressed the throne of grace" and "as I was the first proposer of the African church, I put the first spade in the ground to dig a cellar for the same."

It was one thing to build a separate "African preaching-house," another to agree on what its doctrine should be. The question was debated at length in the Free African Society. "We then held an election, to know what religious denomination we should unite with." For Allen the vote was a disappointment—"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." Nor was his chagrin diminished when the "large majority" offered him the pastorate of a Protestant Episcopal church. He could not accept the call: "I was confident there was no religious sect or denomination would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodist; for the plain and simple gospel suits best for any people. . . . The Methodist were the first people that brought glad tidings to colored people." When the majority made the same offer to Absalom Jones, he put aside doctrinal preference and accepted the pastorate.

IT was in this period of troubled groping for the correct religious way that an epidemic of yellow fever swept through the city during the summer of 1793 and ultimately killed five thousand Philadelphians, black and white, about a tenth of the population. In spite of their religious differences, the two black leaders got together (as they always would) to rally the city's blacks to fight the plague. Fifty physicians of Philadelphia, led by Dr. Rush, labored to stem death and panic. When, in early September, Rush published an appeal to the colored people of the city to assist in treating the sick and in burying the dead, Allen and Jones quickly responded: "We and a few others met and consulted how to act on so truly alarming and melancholy an occasion." After a conference with the mayor, they proceeded to their perilous tasks—Jones in charge of organizing the nursing of the sick, Allen of supervising the burial of the dead.

In their jointly written classic of 1794, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia* [fig. 75], a magnificent rebuttal of slanderous misrepresentations of the black role during the crisis, Allen and Jones described the heroic service of the black community with a kind of laconic eloquence:

> Soon after, the mortality increasing, the difficulty of getting a corpse taken away, was such, that few were willing to do it, when offered great rewards. The black people were looked to. We then offered our services in the public papers, by advertising that we would



A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

BLACK PEOPLE,

DURING THE LATE

Awful Calamity in Philadelphia,

IN THE YEAR 1793:

AND

A REFUTATION

OF SOME

CENSURES,

Thrown upon them in some late Publications.

BY A. J. AND R. A.

PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED FOR THE AUTHORS,

BY WILLIAM W. WOODWARD, AT FRANKLIN'S HEAD,

NO. 41, CHESNUT-STREET.

1794.

75. [Absalom Jones and Richard Allen], *A Narrative . . .* (Philadelphia, 1794). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

> remove the dead and procure nurses. Our services were the production of real sensibility;—we sought not fee nor reward. . . . It was very uncommon at this time, to find anyone that would go near, much more, handle a sick or dead person.

Of the group of prisoners in the town jail who "voluntarily offered themselves as nurses," two-thirds were "people of colour, who, on the application of the elders of the African church," had been liberated "to attend the sick at Bush-hill." When the

> sickness became general, and several of the physicians died, and most of the survivors were exhausted by sickness or fatigue; that good man, Dr. Rush, called us more immediately to attend upon the sick. . . . This has been no small satisfaction to us; for, we think that when a physician was not attainable, we have been the instruments, in the hand of God, for saving the lives of some hundreds of our suffering fellow mortals. . . . We have bled upwards of eight hundred people. . . .

There are unforgettable vignettes of the selfless "exercise of the finer feelings of humanity": an "elderly black woman nursed . . . with great diligence and attention; when recovered [her patient] asked what he must give for her services—she replied 'a dinner master on a cold winter's day. . . .' Caesar Cranchal, a black man, offered his services to attend the sick, and said, 'I will not take your money. I will not sell my life for money.' It is said he died with the flux."

The white delusion that blacks were immune to the contagion—initially advanced but later retracted by Dr. Rush—exasperated Allen and Jones:

> Few have been the whites that paid attention to us while the blacks were engaged in the other's service. We can assure the public we have taken four and five black people in a day to be buried. In several instances when they have been seized with the sickness while nursing, they have been turned out of the house . . . they have languished alone, and we know of one who even died in a stable . . . as many coloured people died in proportion as others. In 1792, there were 67 of our colour buried, and in 1793 it amounted to 305; thus the burials among us have increased fourfold, was not this in a great degree the ef-

fects of the services of the unjustly vilified black people?

Outraged by such ingratitude—"It is unpleasant for us to make these remarks, but justice to our colour demands it"—the authors of *Narrative* seized the opportunity to castigate the racist ideology from which it flowed. Their "Address to those who keep Slaves, and approve the Practice," a short but powerful blast, is a green leaf from the early scripture of black liberation: "The judicious part of mankind will think it unreasonable, that a superior good conduct is looked for, from our race, by those who stigmatize us as men, whose baseness is uncurable, and may therefore be held in a state of servitude, that a merciful man would not doom a beast to; yet you try what you can to prevent our rising. . . ." Allen and Jones would have none of this slaveholder logic: "We can tell you . . . that a black man, although reduced to the most abject state . . . can think, reflect, and feel injuries. . . ." Try "the experiment of taking a few black children, and cultivate their minds with the same care, and let them have the same prospect in view, as to living in the world, as you would wish for your own children, you would find upon the trial, they were not inferior in mental endowments. . . . We wish you to consider, that God himself was the first pleader of the cause of slaves. . . . If you love your children, if you love your country, if you love the God of love, clear your hands from slaves, burden not your children or country with them."

The final note is portentous: "Will you, because you have reduced us to the unhappy condition our colour is in, plead our incapacity for freedom . . . as a sufficient cause for keeping us under the grievous yoke! . . . we appear contented . . . but the dreadful insurrections they [slaves] have made, when opportunity was offered, is enough to convince a reasonable man, that great uneasiness and not contentment, is the inhabitant of their hearts."

To far off Boston Allen's and Jones's fame would spread; in the *Massachusetts Magazine* of December 1793 an unknown admirer would publish a three-stanza "Eulogium in Honour of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, Two of the Elders of the African Church, who Furnished Nurses to the Sick during the Late Pestilential Fever in Philadelphia":

> Brethren of man, and friend to human kind,
> Made of that blood which flow'd in Adam's vein!
> A muse who ever spurn'd at adulation's strains;
> Who rates not colour, but th'immortal mind,
> With transport guides the death redeeming plume;
> Nor leaves your names a victim to the tomb.

When five years later, in 1797 and 1798, the plague broke out again in Philadelphia, Richard Allen and his friend William Gray once more played an important part in fighting it. The Quaker philanthropist Samuel Coates wrote: "These two black men render'd very great Services . . . and I always thought it was reproachful to our City that they had not a *Reward* for their Labor—a thous'd dollars would have been a very Moderate Compensation for Grays labor—he died very poor & broken hearted."

THE plague at an end, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones turned their attention once more to the question of building the black church.

Rebuffed for the moment, Allen did not waiver in his conviction that the Methodist was the only right way for his people.

Working as a master shoemaker with journeymen and apprentices in his employ, he put enough aside to buy a lot for his church. In early May 1794 a goodly number of the city's blacks met with him "in order to consult together . . . to provide for ourselves a house to meet in for religious worship . . . separate from our white brethren."—"I bought an old frame," Allen recalled, "that had been formerly occupied as a blacksmith shop . . . and hauled it on the lot. . . . 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. . . . The house was called Bethel"—its new pulpit the work of Richard Allen's hands [fig. 76].

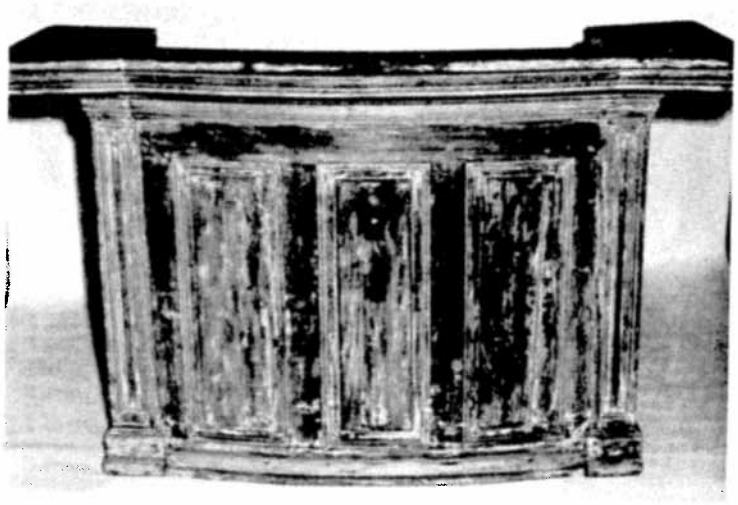
The house was called Bethel, but it would require more than a score of years to guarantee its independence, years of vigilance for Allen as he tried to cope with the hostility of Methodist "white preachers and trustees." His gift of wise leadership was soon recognized beyond the limits of his church. In 1795 he opened a day school for sixty pupils, and in 1804 he organized the "Society of Free People of Colour for Promoting the Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent." While the country mourned the death of Washington, the *Philadelphia Gazette* printed Allen's Bethel sermon in which he stressed the patriot who at the last had felt uneasy about the sin of slavery: "If he who broke the yoke of British burdens from the neck of the people of this land, and was called his country's deliverer, by what name shall we call him who secretly and almost unknown emancipated his bondmen and bondwomen, and became to them a father, and gave them an inheritance?" The Bethel Church prospered and Allen was ordained deacon and elder by Bishop Asbury. By 1810 there were almost five hundred worshippers in his congregation; five years later there were more black than white Methodists in Philadelphia. Meanwhile Allen's message had spread.

Peter Williams

In New York City there was a black man named Peter Williams who had been born in a cow shed—"in as humble a place as my Master," he would say with a smile [fig. 77]. His owner was a tobacco merchant; the slave became an expert cigar maker. As a youth, converted to Methodism, he listened to white preachers. Early in 1778 the trustees of the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church purchased him for forty pounds sterling and made him sexton of the church. In the spring, as the British took over the city, he made off to New Brunswick in Jersey, lived with a patriot family, and met his wife, Molly, who later presented him with a son, Peter Junior (who would make his own mark in black religious history). Local record has it that he saved an outspoken white clergyman from a British officer.

Williams was always proud of his patriotism. During the 1850s, his son sent Nell a few reminiscences for his book:

> In the Revolutionary War, my father was a decided advocate of American Independence, and his life was repeatedly jeopardized in its cause. . . . He was living in the State of Jersey, and parson Chapman, a champion of American liberty of great influence throughout that part of the country, was sought after by the British troops. My father immediatly mounted a horse and rode round among his parishioners to notify them of his danger, and to call on them to help in removing him and his goods to a place of safety. He then carried him to a private place, and as he was returning, a British officer rode



76. Pulpit constructed by the Reverend Richard Allen. Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia.

up to him, and demanded, in a most peremptory manner,—

"Where is parson Chapman?"

"I cannot tell," was the reply.

On that, the officer drew his sword, and, raising it over his head, said,—"Tell me where he is, or I will instantly cut you down."

Again he replied,—"I cannot tell."

Finding threats useless, the officer put up his sword, and drew out a purse of gold, saying,—"If you will tell me where he is, I will give you this."

The reply still was, "I cannot tell."

The officer cursed him and rode off.

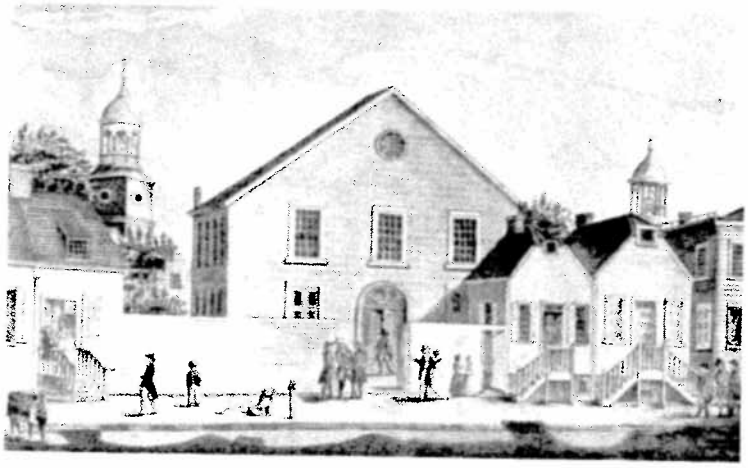
This attachment to the country of his birth was strengthened and confirmed by the circumstance, that the very day on which the British evacuated New York was the same on which he obtained his freedom by purchase, through the help of some republican friends of the Methodist Church; and to the last year of his life, he always spoke of that day as one which gave double joy to his heart, by freeing him from domestic bondage, and his native city from foreign enemies.

In the fall of 1780, after the British evacuated New York, Williams and his wife returned to the John Street Church. They adopted an infant daughter. For the next sixteen years he performed the duties of sexton to the black and white congregation. He was a favorite of the white Methodists, for he was a hardworking and gentle man. Observe the black sexton standing "at his post" in the door of the John Street Church, as sketched in Joseph B. Smith's watercolor of 1817 [fig. 78].

Two years after Richard Allen opened the Bethel in Philadelphia something happened inside Peter Williams. There was no dramatic incident—nobody dragged him from his knees as he knelt in prayer—but one day, with a few of his black friends of the church, among them the future Bishop James Varick, he asked for a conference with Bishop Asbury. The blacks in the church had a "desire for the privilege of holding meetings of their own, where they might have an opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts among themselves and thereby be

77. Unknown artist, *Peter Williams*, oil, ca. 1815. Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society, New York City.

more useful to one another." The bishop consented, and for the next three years they held separate meetings. Meanwhile Peter Williams, no longer sexton, was making good in his own tobacco business, acquiring a home and even some property. The legend is that he would not permit the racist name of a popular tobacco to be uttered in his shop. By 1799 the black Methodists of New York were ready to build their own house of



78. Joseph B. Smith, *The First Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, watercolor, 1817. Museum of the City of New York.

worship, and on July 30, 1800, Peter Williams laid the cornerstone of the new church, called Zion. In his portrait, painted some time later by "a Frenchman from St. Domingo," he seems to exhibit a certain pride in the part he had played in planting the seed of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of the future.

The Zion Church of Peter Williams was not the only offshoot of Richard Allen's Bethel. African Methodist Episcopal congregations would spring up in Baltimore, Maryland, and Wilmington, Delaware, as well as in Salem, New Jersey, and Attleboro, Pennsylvania, all of them suffering white Methodist harassment even as they flourished. In April 1816 the leaders of these congregations met with Allen in Philadelphia to launch the first fully independent black church in the United States. Elected as its first bishop, he composed a hymn to celebrate the event:

> The God of Bethel heard her cries,
> He let his power be seen;
> He stopp'd the proud oppressor's
> power. . . .

In the portrait of middle-aged Richard Allen engraved around this time, we can discern the black divine whom a later bishop of the same church, Daniel Payne, would describe as "a far-sighted churchman, modest without timidity, and brave without rashness. A lover of liberty, civil and religious . . ." [fig. 79].

DURING that summer of 1794 when Allen opened Bethel, Absalom Jones dedicated the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church of Philadelphia [fig. 80]. Ten years later, the rector of St. Thomas's would be the first black to be ordained an Episcopal priest in the United States. Although the church was always his base, Jones's interests and energies during the next quarter-century would be broadly enlisted in behalf of the welfare of his people. He would help organize a school for the black children of the city, found a society for the suppression of vice, create and direct an insurance company, and organize protest against the violation of black civil rights.

On December 30, 1799, the black community of Philadelphia, angered by kidnappings of free blacks on the coasts of Maryland and Delaware, made known their grievances to the president and Congress—"guardians of our rights, and patrons of equal and rational liberties." Signed by Absalom Jones and seventy-five other "people of Colour, free men" of Philadelphia, the petition argued that the "solemn compact"

79. Unknown artist, *Reverend Richard Allen, Founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, 1779, engraving, published by J. Dainty, 1813. Library Company of Philadelphia.

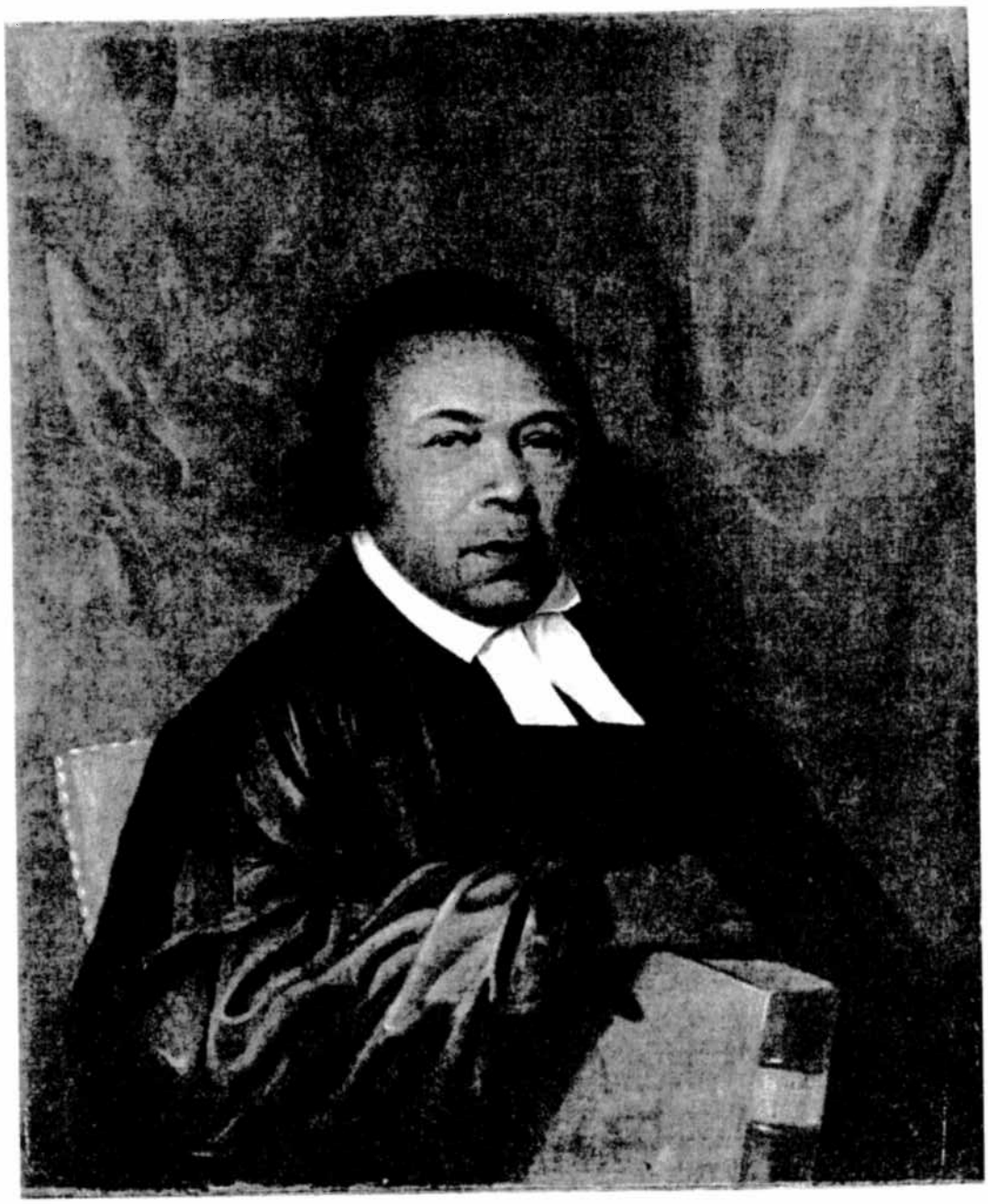
80. W. L. Breton, *The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia*, lithograph, 1829. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

embedded in the preamble to the federal constitution was being "violated" by the slave trade—"poor helpless victims, like droves of cattle, are seized, fettered, and hurried into . . . dark cellars and garrets" and "transported to Georgia." Root out the evil, Jones admonished: "Undo the heavy burdens" of this "grossly abused part of the human species, seven hundred thousand of whom . . . are now in unconditional bondage in these states. . . ." Was the revolution real?—"if the Bill of Rights or the Declaration" is "of any validity, we beseech, that as we are men, we may be admitted to partake of the liberties and unalienable rights therein held forth." (Such anguish hardly touched the House, which saw in the petition a "tendency to create disquiet & jealousy.") Eight years later, in a sermon preached on January 1, 1808—when the African slave trade came to its legal end—Jones proposed that the day "be set apart in every year, as a day of publick thanksgiving," so that the children might remember the crime that dragged their "fathers from their native country, and sold them as bondmen in the United States of America." It was two years after this sermon during the winter of 1810 that Charles Willson Peale, the painter of the patriot fathers, visiting his son Raphaelle's studio, was happy to find that the younger man had "painted a Portrait in oil of Absalom Jones a very excellent picture of the Rev'd. Gentleman" [fig. 81].

Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, as they grew older, seemed to come even closer together and, with the revolutionary veteran James Forten, would form a kind of committee of leadership for the blacks of the city. When Jones and Forten decided to organize a Masonic Lodge for Pennsylvania, the local group of "white masons . . . refused to grant us a Dispensation, fearing that black men living in Virginia would get to be Masons, too." It was Prince Hall, founder of black Masonry during the revolution, who journeyed from Boston in June 1797 to install Jones as Worshipful Master and Allen as treasurer of the new lodge. In 1808, marking its tenth birthday, the members of the lodge marched to St. Thomas's, where Richard Allen, occupying the pulpit of his good friend Absalom Jones, preached a sermon to the black Masons [fig. 82]. It is probable that the elegant Liverpoolware pitcher graced by Jones's silhouette and the mystic marks of Freemasonry was created to celebrate this anniversary [fig. 83].

Once again when Philadelphia was in the grip of crisis, Allen and Jones—long after they had collaborated to fight the yellow fever in 1793—were importuned to muster the aid of the black community. In 1814, as the British were threatening Philadelphia, the city's Committee of Defence called upon the two ministers to mobilize assistance. From the State House yard, twenty-five hundred black citizens marched to Gray's Ferry and toiled on the defenses for two days. A battalion of black troops—with revolutionary memories—was ready to march to the front when peace was declared.

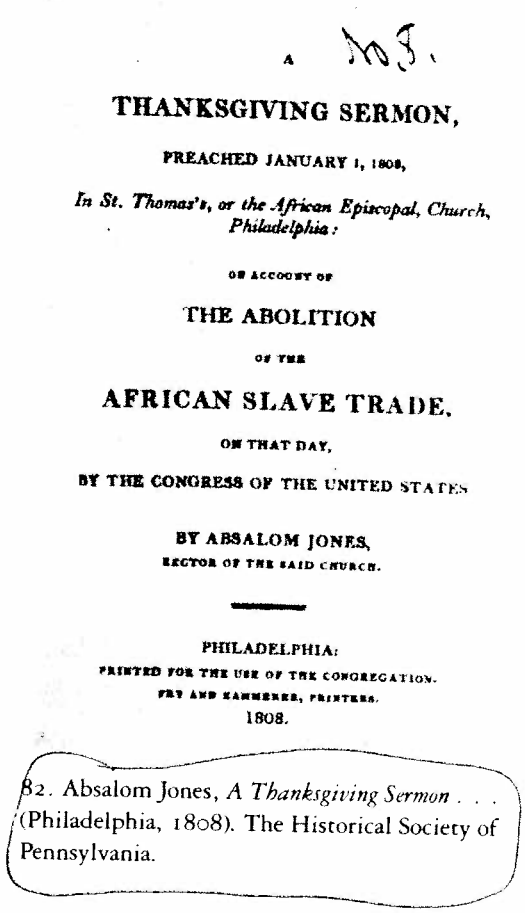
THE Reverend Absalom Jones died in 1818. His friend Richard Allen lived on and worked for a dozen busy years as the antislavery movement gathered force. In November 1827, in the columns of *Freedom's Journal*, the country's first black newspaper, the "aged and devoted Minister of the Gospel" castigated the colonizationists who would ship free blacks to Liberia because their presence in America made "the slaves uneasy." Wrote Allen: "This land which we have watered with our *tears* and *our blood* is now our *mother country*. . . ." Three years later, the pioneer "Convention of the People of Colour of the United States"—the first of



81. Raphaelle Peale, *Absalom Jones*, oil, 1810. Delaware Art Museum.

many to follow—met in Bethel Church, presided over by Richard Allen, "Senior Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Churches" [figs. 84 and 85]. The convention recommended to the nation that the Fourth of July be observed as a day of fasting and prayer.

Side by side with Absalom Jones in the pantheon of early Afro-American history stands Richard Allen. Two years before his



A

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED JANUARY 1, 1808,

In St. Thomas's, or the African Episcopal, Church, Philadelphia:

ON ACCOUNT OF

THE ABOLITION

OF THE

AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE,

ON THAT DAY,

BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

BY ABSALOM JONES,

RECTOR OF THE SAID CHURCH.

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED FOR THE USE OF THE CONGREGATION.

FRY AND KAMMERER, PRINTERS.

1808.

82. Absalom Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon* . . . (Philadelphia, 1808). The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

death, he was immortalized in David Walker's prophetic *Appeal:* "See him and his ministers in the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland, carrying the gladsome tidings of free and full salvation to the coloured people."

Three Black Ministers: John Marrant, John Chavis, Lemuel Haynes

David George, Andrew Bryan, George Liele, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Peter Williams—these six were the founders of the African-American church and shapers of the "organized independence and self-expression" of black people in America at the time of the revolution. But there were hundreds of others, nameless and faceless for the most part, charismatic preachers of the slave quarters, potential Gabriel Prossers and Nat Turners, or loners, like wayfaring John Marrant, missionary to the Indians and chaplain of the African Masons. Some felt the impulse to mold the Christian story into a message for their black brethren but, by accident of time and place, became stalwarts of the white church, where, by sheer force of their talent, they achieved eminence, even fame, and paid a price for it, perhaps. Such were the Reverend John Chavis, a Presbyterian in the south, and the Reverend Lemuel Haynes, a Congregationalist in the north.

John Marrant

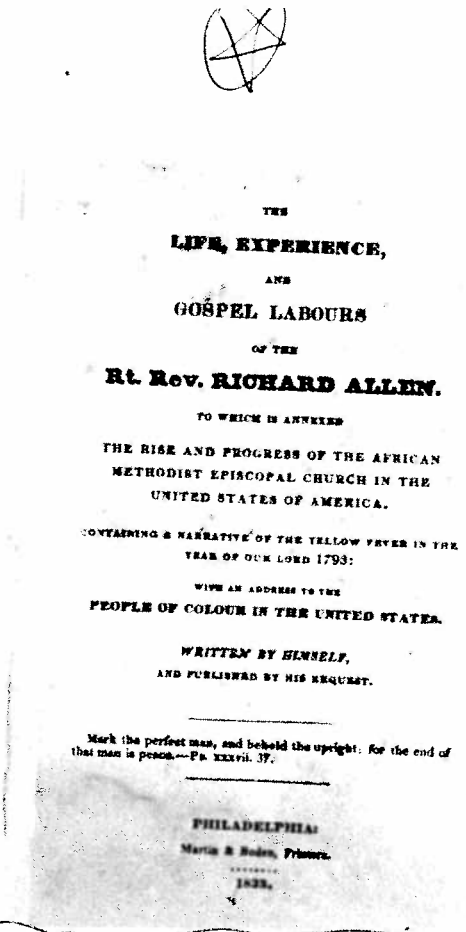
"I, John Marrant, born June 15, 1755, in New-York, in North-America, wish these gracious dealings of the Lord with me to be published, in hopes they may be useful to others": so begins the autobiography of this black minister whose short life was full of remarkable happenings. "My father died when I was little more than four years of age," he continues, "and before I was five my mother removed from New York to St. Augustine. . . . Here I was sent to school, and taught to read and spell. . . ." Eighteen months later the family moved to Georgia. His schooldays over at eleven, John was then apprenticed to a trade. His mother packed him off to Charleston. One day, he wrote, "I passed by a school, and heard music and dancing. . . . I went home and informed my sister, that I had rather learn to play upon music than go to a trade." His mother objected, to no avail. After a year of study, the twelve-year-old boy could play the violin and French horn. He was "invited to all the balls and assemblies that were held in the town, and met

83. Masonic pitcher, Liverpoolware, presented to Absalom Jones, ca. 1808. National Portrait Gallery, Washington.

with the general applause of the inhabitants."

One evening, two years later, the Reverend George Whitefield came to town. Planning some mischief—the scheme was to break up Whitefield's meeting by a blast on the horn—young Marrant "was struck to the ground . . . speechless and senseless" by Whitefield's eloquence and could not deny the preacher's words: "Jesus Christ has got thee at last." He now began to "read the Scriptures very much." When his family ridiculed his happy faith, he "took up a small pocket Bible and one of Dr. Watts' hymn books" and ran away from home, wandering in field and forest, starving himself into religious ecstasy.

In the woods he met an Indian who befriended him. Hunting with the boy for ten weeks, the red man taught the black youth some of his language, and after the season was over the two headed for a village of the Cherokee Nation. Here there were trials in store for Marrant, who at moments seemed to hunger for Christian martyrdom. Jailed, strung up for torture, he turned to God: "I prayed in English a considerable time, and



THE

LIFE, EXPERIENCE,

AND

GOSPEL LABOURS

OF THE

Rt. Rev. RICHARD ALLEN.

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED

THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

CONTAINING A NARRATIVE OF THE YELLOW FEVER IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1793:

WITH AN ADDRESS TO THE

PEOPLE OF COLOUR IN THE UNITED STATES.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF,

AND PUBLISHED BY HIS REQUEST.

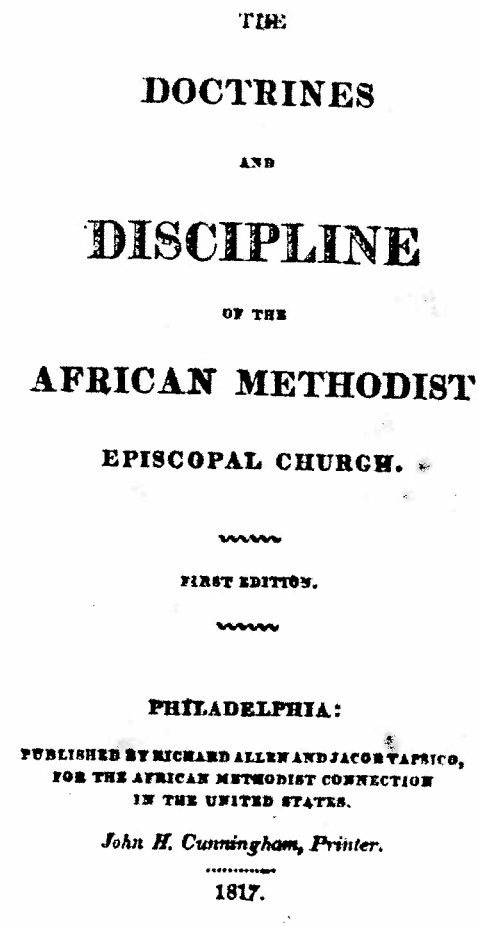
Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.—Ps. XXXVII. 37.

PHILADELPHIA:

Martin & Boden, Printers.

1833.

84. *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen . . . Written by Himself (1793)* (Philadelphia, 1833). Library Company of Philadelphia.



THE

DOCTRINES

AND

DISCIPLINE

OF THE

AFRICAN METHODIST

EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

FIRST EDITION.

PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY RICHARD ALLEN AND JACOB TAPSICO, FOR THE AFRICAN METHODIST CONNECTION IN THE UNITED STATES.

John H. Cunningham, Printer.

1817.

85. Richard Allen and Jacob Tapisco, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia, 1817). Allegheny College Library, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

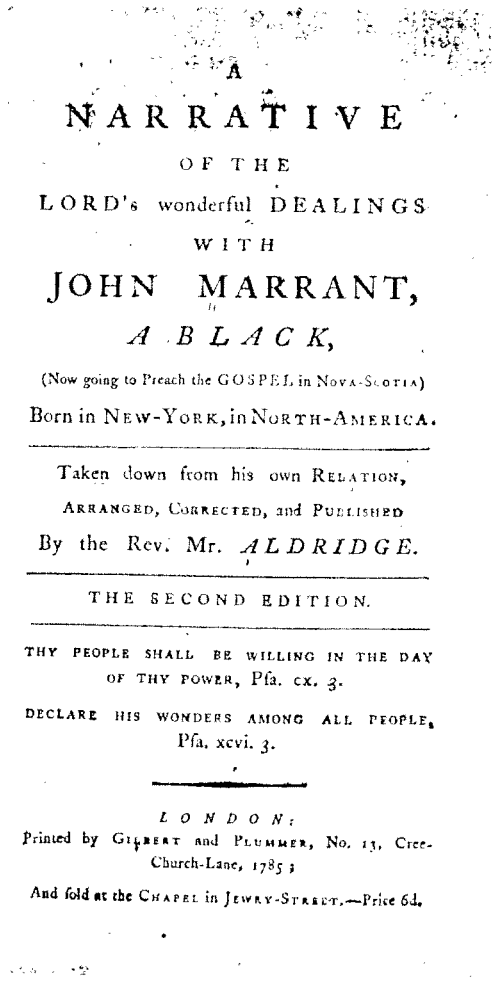
about the middle of my prayer, the Lord impressed a strong desire upon my mind to turn into their language, and pray in their tongue." A miracle occurred—the king of the Cherokees and his daughter were instantly converted. Cut down from the stake and bedecked in fine garments, Marrant lived well for nine weeks in the king's palace, where he "learnt to speak their tongue in the highest stile."

Unattached, unordained, a prophet in the wilderness, he now embarked upon his mission to the Indians, accompanied by a guard of fifty warriors, seeking out the Creeks, the Catawars, and the Howsaws. But the Indians he exhorted failed to respond to his Christian pleas: "When they recollect" that Christians "drove them from the American shores [they] have often united, and murdered all the white people in the back settlements. . . ." After six months of failure, he returned to the Cherokees and, against the will of his friend the king, made up his mind to return to Charleston. Back home, at first no one recognized him: "My dress was purely in the Indian stile; the skins of wild beasts composed my garments, my head was set out in the savage manner, with a long pendant

down my back, a sash around my middle, without breeches, and a tomahawk by my side."

In Charleston he lived with his family "till the commencement of the American troubles." Then chance placed him on the British side: "I was pressed on board the Scorpion sloop of war, as their musician. . . . I continued in his majesty's service six years and eleven months. . . . I was at the siege of Charles Town and passed through many dangers." In August 1781 he was "in the engagement with the Dutch off the Dogger Bank, on board the *Princess Amelia*, of 84 guns," a bloody affair in which he was wounded so that he ended up in the hospital at Plymouth. Discharged from the navy, he found his way to London where he worked for a "pious" cotton merchant for the next three years.

During this time in England, he saw his "call to the ministry fuller and clearer" and began to feel a concern for his black "countrymen." One day he received a letter from his brother in Nova Scotia urging him to come over and preach, and he showed it to the evangelical, antislavery countess of Huntingdon, who had been a friend and sponsor of Phillis Wheatley, the black poet of Boston. He was not idle: in London he continued to exercise his "gifts . . . in prayer and exhortation." When the countess counseled him to carry the word to Canada and invited him to join her independent group of Calvinist Methodists, he gladly consented and was ordained a minister of the sect in the spring of 1785. For the next few months, preaching "many sermons in Bath and Bristol . . . many precious souls experienced great blessings" from his labors. In August, before he sailed, he told the story of his life to the Reverend William Aldridge, who "arranged, corrected, and published" it. "John's narrative," commented the *Monthly Review* of London with a patronizing flourish, "is embellished with a good deal of *adventure*, enlivened by the *marvellous*, and a little touch of the *miraculous*. . . ." *The Narrative of the Life of John Marrant* would be reprinted nineteen times during the next forty years [fig. 86].



A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

LORD's wonderful DEALINGS

WITH

JOHN MARRANT,

A BLACK,

(Now going to Preach the GOSPEL in NOVA-SCOTIA)

Born in NEW-YORK, in NORTH-AMERICA.

Taken down from his own RELATION,

ARRANGED, CORRECTED, and PUBLISHED

By the Rev. Mr. *ALDRIDGE.*

THE SECOND EDITION.

THY PEOPLE SHALL BE WILLING IN THE DAY OF THY POWER, Pfa. cx. 3.

DECLARE HIS WONDERS AMONG ALL PEOPLE, Pfa. xcvi. 3.

LONDON:

Printed by GILBERT and PLUMMER, No. 13, Cree-Church-Lane, 1785;

And fold at the CHAPEL in JEWRY-STREET.—Price 6d.

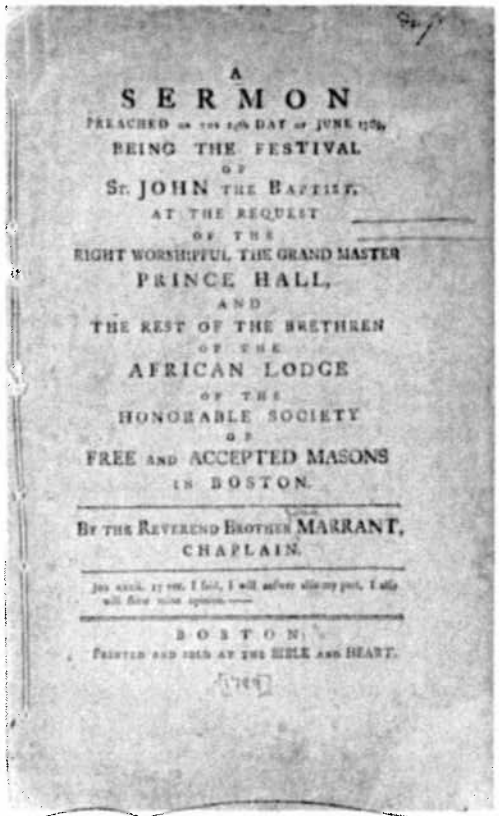
86. *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black*, 2d ed. (London, 1785). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

So, like David George, John Marrant went to Nova Scotia to spread the Gospel among his own people. At Birch Town he assembled a Huntingdonian congregation of forty members and carried the Bible to the wigwams of the Canadian Indians. Mar-

rant's *Journal*, printed in London in 1790, is a chronicle of his selfless toil in Nova Scotia—of endless journeyings to remote places, of passionate sermons to gatherings of black, white, and red. After four years of spiritual wrestling and physical hardship, Marrant apparently felt that he had done his work in Canada, and in the winter of 1789 he embarked for a new field of endeavor in New England.

In Boston, resuming his preaching without delay, he at first had a hard time of it, although the liberal Baptist minister Dr. Samuel Stillman came to his aid. "I was preaching at the west end of the town," the *Journal* relates, "to a large concourse of people, there were more than forty that had made an agreement to put an end to my evening preaching . . . they came prepared that evening with swords and clubs. . . ." He was not deterred (a Boston judge admonished the hoodlums) but opened a school and went off preaching to black and white groups as far as Bridgewater and Shoreham. Meanwhile, he had struck up a friendship with Prince Hall, "one of the most respectable characters in Boston," and in the spring the black civic leader invited him to fill the post of chaplain to the African Lodge of the Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons of Boston, the first black lodge in America, of which Hall, its founder, was Grand Master.

On June 24, 1789, the Reverend Chaplain John Marrant, in celebration of the festival of St. John the Baptist, delivered a memorable sermon to the black Masons of Boston—a discourse studded with passages of such uncommon beauty and power, one wonders how and when this self-taught wanderer ever mastered the eloquence that suffuses it [fig. 87]. A jeremiad aimed against the "monsters" of white racism, it summons its hearers to a new sense of black worth and dignity:


A
SERMON
PREACHED ON THE 24th DAY OF JUNE 1789,
BEING THE FESTIVAL
OF
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST,
AT THE REQUEST
OF THE
RIGHT WORSHIPFUL THE GRAND MASTER
PRINCE HALL,
AND
THE REST OF THE BRETHREN
OF THE
AFRICAN LODGE
OF THE
HONORABLE SOCIETY
OF
FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS
IN BOSTON.
BY THE REVEREND BROTHER MARRANT,
CHAPLAIN.
BOSTON:
PRINTED AND SOLD AT THE BIBLE AND HEART.
1789

87. John Marrant, *A Sermon Preached on the 24th Day of June 1789 . . .* (Boston, 1789). Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

> Man is a wonderful creature, and not undeservedly said to be a little world, a world within himself, and containing whatever is found in the Creator.—In him is the spiritual and immaterial nature of God, the reasonableness of Angels, the sensitive power of brutes, the vegetative life of plants, and the virtue of all the elements he holds converse with in both worlds.—Thus man is crowned with glory and honour, he is the most remarkable workmanship of God. And is man such a noble creature and made to converse with his fellow men that are of his own order, to maintain

> mutual love and society, and to serve God in consort with each other?—then what can these God-provoking wretches think, who despise their fellow men, as tho' they were not of the same species with themselves, and would if in their power deprive them of the blessings and comforts of this life, which God in his bountiful goodness, hath freely given to all his creatures to improve and enjoy? Surely such monsters never came out of the hand of God. . . .

To his black audience he counsels a just pride in their African forebears—"Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom . . . and many others." There are some, he tells them, who "despise those they would make, if they could, a species below them, and as not made of the same clay with themselves":

> but if you study the holy book of God, you will there find that you stand on the level not only with them, but with the greatest kings on the earth, as Men and as Masons. . . . Ancient history will produce some of the Africans who were truly good, wise, and learned men, and as eloquent as any other nation whatever, though at present many of them are in slavery, which is not a just cause of our being despised; for if we search history, we shall not find a nation on earth but has at some period or other of their existence been in slavery, from the Jews down to the English Nation, under many Emperors, Kings, and Princes. . . .

The Reverend John Marrant's sermon, preached to the black Masons of Boston when he was thirty-four years old, may be the high point of his checkered career. He had not much longer to live, missed his English friends, and yearned to return to London. For the next six months he prayed and exhorted in Massachusetts. On February 5, 1790, a company of black Bostonians headed by Prince Hall walked with him "down to the ship, with very heavy hearts." A year later his coffin was lowered into a grave of the Burial Ground on Church Street in Islington, a borough of London.

John Chavis

The case of John Chavis, a black Presbyterian preacher and schoolmaster, is one of brilliance and aspiration thwarted and choked, then perhaps betrayed, as white racism fastened itself firmly on the south after the revolution. A recent study sees him as a perplex of unbearable social and psychic tensions [fig. 88].

Chavis was born free about 1763 in the West Indies or North Carolina and grew to manhood in Virginia. Almost nothing has been discovered to cast light on his early youth. When he was an old man, slighted by a few of his former pupils, he would declare proudly that he had been a "free born American and a revolutionary soldier." For ten years after the war the record is silent. Then, in September 1792, a brief entry on the rolls of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) reveals that "John Chavis a free Black man" of Virginia has been recommended for admission as a student by a Reverend John B. Smith. Tradition has it that Chavis's career was "the result of a wager that a Negro could not be educated" and that a few whites who perceived the extraordinary intellectual power of the man—he was now going on thirty—sent him to Princeton, which had permitted a few blacks and Indians to enter its classrooms. Chavis, it seems, became the pupil of old President John Witherspoon, who tutored him privately. For reasons unknown

88. Unknown artist, *John Chavis*, reproduced in Joel A. Rogers, *Africa's Gift to America* (New York, 1961), 239.

he never graduated from Princeton but continued his studies at an academy that after the Civil War was transformed into Washington and Lee University. There he completed a "regular course of Academical Studies."

Apparently he had been preparing himself in the usual subjects, classical and theological, for a career in the church; at its regular meeting in the fall of 1799 the Presbytery of Lexington, Virginia, was asked to ponder the request of "John Chavis, a black man, personally known . . . of unquestionably good fame, & a communicant" to be ordained to the ministry. The reply was favorable and careful: "considering that they, like their heavenly Father, should be no respecter of persons, being satisfied with his narrative," the Presbytery "agreed, notwithstanding his colour, to take him under their care, for further trials in the usual form." In November 1800, at Timber-Ridge Meetinghouse, Chavis preached a sermon on the assigned text: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ & thou shalt be saved." Later the same year, the Presbytery saw fit "to license him to Preach the Gospel . . . hoping as he is a man of colour he may be peculiarly useful to those of his own complexion." Accordingly, in 1801, using cautious phrases that exude a sense of anxiety, the Presbytery directed that "Mr. John Chavis, a black man of prudence and piety . . . be employed as a missionary among people of his own colour; and that for his better direction in the discharge of duties which are attended with many circumstances of delicacy and difficulty, some prudential instructions be issued to him by the assembly, governing himself by which, the knowledge of religion among that people may be made more and more to strengthen the order of society. . . ." It is quite clear that the Presbyters had no consuming desire to send abroad another Gabriel Prosser, who, during the summer of the previous year, with his brother Martin, a people's preacher, had organized an insurrection at religious gatherings and planned to take over Richmond for the slaves.

For the next thirty years, on and off, John Chavis rode his horse up and down country roads in Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina as a Presbyterian missionary "under the Direction of the General Assembly," repeatedly instructed "to employ himself chiefly among the blacks and people of colour," and always performing to the satisfaction of his superiors, who praise him for

executing his mission with "great diligence, fidelity and prudence." He was also an "acceptable preacher" now and then to white congregations, one of whose members recollected that his sermons abounded "in strong common sense views and happy illustrations, without any effort at oratory or sensational appeals to the passions of his hearers."

In 1805 or thereabouts, settled in North Carolina as a minister of the Orange Presbytery and continuing his work as a riding missionary, Chavis decided to open a school where he could employ his correct English, good Latin, and fair Greek for the collegiate preparation of the sons of the white gentry. Recalling his own struggle for an education, it is probable that at the start he admitted to his classes the children of free blacks. That he could not for long resist the mounting intolerance of the times is evidenced by a notice he placed in the *Raleigh Register* during the summer of 1808: "John Chavis takes this method of informing the citizens of Raleigh" that he will "open an evening school for the purpose of instructing children of colour; as he intends, for the accomodation of some of his employers, to exclude all children of colour from his day school." And that he was still compelled to employ the strategy of "accomodation," doubtless behind a mask of irony, is evidenced again twenty years later in the same newspaper. "On Friday last," wrote Joseph Gales, its Whig editor, in an issue of April 1830, "we attended an examination of the free children of colour, attached to the school conducted by *John Chavis*, also colored, but a regularly educated Presbyterian minister. . . ."

> To witness a well regulated school, composed of this class of persons—to see them setting an example both in behavior and scholarship, which their *white* superiors might take pride in imitating, was a cheering spectacle to a philanthropist. The exercises throughout, evinced a degree of attention and assiduous care on the part of the instructor, highly creditable, and of attainment on the part of his scholars almost incredible.

Gales was much pleased with Chavis's "sensible address," which closed the examination: "The object of the respectable teacher, was to impress on the scholars, the fact, that they occupied an inferior and subordinate station in society, and were possessed but of limited privileges; but that even *they* might become useful in their particular sphere by making a proper improvement of the advantages afforded them." One shudders at the anguish Chavis must have suffered as he paid the price of protecting his black school from destruction. Years later—long after the school had ceased to exist—he would implore his white friend Senator Willie P. Mangum to refute the charge that "in going to Raleigh to Teach the children of the free people of colour" he had really intended to preach the abolitionist creed.

The uprising led by the self-taught black preacher, Nat Turner, in Southampton County, Virginia, during the summer of 1831 put an end to John Chavis's career as Presbyterian minister and classical schoolmaster. In North Carolina an "act for the better regulation of the conduct of Negroes" prescribed "thirty-nine lashes on his bare back" for any black "under any pretense" who preached to his brothers. When Chavis complained of the "difficulties and embarassments" he suffered by this law, the Presbyters counseled him to comply "until God in his Providence" showed another way and at the same time discouraged him from publishing—since he could no longer speak—an exegesis on the reconciliation of God and man by the sufferings of Christ.

As Sterling Brown has observed, "It is ironic that at the moment of John Calhoun's epigram, 'If a Negro could be found who could parse Greek or explain Euclid, I should be constrained to think that he had human possibilities'—a classically trained Negro schoolmaster was operating a private academy for boys of aristocratic white families of North Carolina." Indeed, in the official history of North Carolina the Reverend John Chavis retains a certain fame as the greatly gifted teacher of the sons of the slavocracy—of future statesmen, among them a governor and a senator. He seemed to cherish a relationship of intimacy with some of the first families of the state. "In my boyhood life at my father's home," recalled a judge's son, "I often saw John Chavis . . . he was received by my father and treated with kindness and consideration, and respected as a man of education, good sense and most estimable character." A Granville County lawyer remembered: "I have heard him read and explain the Scriptures to my father's family repeatedly. His English was remarkably pure . . . his manner was impressive, his explanations clear and concise, and his views . . . entirely orthodox." With Willie Mangum, Chavis maintained a long friendship, as his letters to the senator, full of family news and sharp political counsel, demonstrate. But again, it would seem, at the high price of a grim accommodation. Writing to Mangum in April 1836 he declared his annoyance with the abolition petitions then stirring up the House and the country; but as he goes on, the tense rhetoric discloses the complex artifice of his uncomfortable position: "That Slavery is a national evil no one doubts, but what is to be done? It exists and what can be done with it? All that can be done, is to make the best of a bad bargain. For I am clearly of the opinion that immediate emancipation would be to entail the greatest earthly curse upon my brethren according to the flesh that could be conferred upon them especially in a country like ours." And he concludes with tragic candor: "I suppose if they knew I said this, they would be ready to take my life, but as I wish them well I feel no disposition to see them any more miserable than they are." Perhaps, as John Hope Franklin has noted, "Chavis had no counterparts during the ante-bellum period. . . ."

When he was seventy, the Presbytery resolved to support him as a "superannuated licentiate." In 1837, a year before his death, although barred from preaching, he managed to publish on his own an undelivered sermon, *The Extent of the Atonement.*

Lemuel Haynes

A few years after the death of that eminent divine, the Reverend Lemuel Haynes, A.M., the first black minister of the Congregational Church in America—an octogenarian whose years had stretched from the French and Indian War to the presidency of Andrew Jackson—Harper's published a full-scale memoir of his life and thought. His biographer, Timothy Mather Cooley, D.D., a white colleague in the church, drawing on the Abbé Henri Grégoire's history of illustrious Negroes, began his account with a eulogy that linked his hero to history: "In various periods of time there have been Africans whose intellectual powers and attainments would be an ornament to any age or country. Among warriors few have held a higher rank than Hanno and Hannibal. The poetic works of Terence were admired in the Augustan age, and have survived the devastations of two thousand years. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, whose memory is dear to all Christendom, and Augustine, bishop of Hippo, the successful defender of the church from Pelagius and his heresies, were sons of Africa." It was in this distinguished company that the Reverend

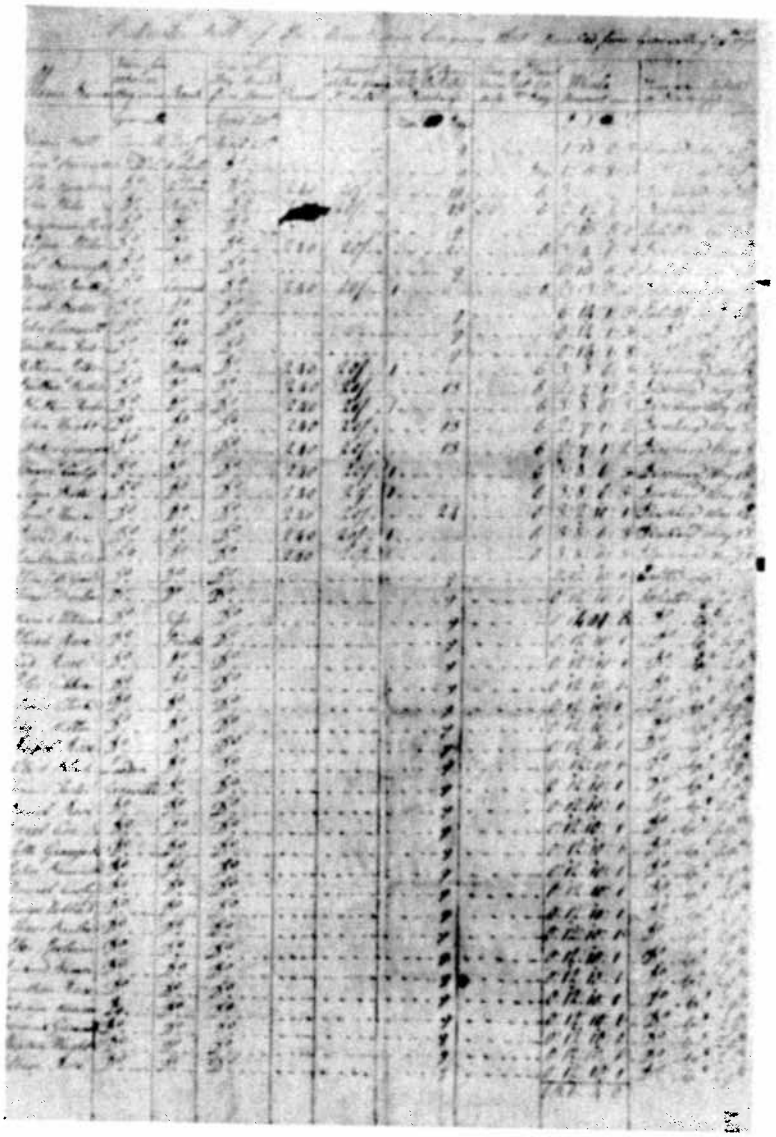
Lemuel Haynes belonged—a "sanctified genius" whose life story could "hardly fail to mitigate the unreasonable prejudices against the Africans in our land" [fig. 89].

Lemuel Haynes was born in 1753 at West Hartford, Connecticut. His father (whom he never knew) was "of unmingled African extraction"; his mother, "a white woman of respectable ancestry in New England." Someone gave him a name. "When I was five months old," Haynes wrote, "I was carried to Granville, Massachusetts, and bound out as a servant to Deacon David Rose till I was Twenty-one. He was a man of singular piety. I was taught the principles of religion. His wife, my mistress, had a peculiar attachment to me: she treated me as though I was her own child." (One painful day the lad had met his mother by accident in a nearby town. She had tried to elude him. "Vexed and mortified at such an instance of unnatural contempt," observed Dr. Cooley, "he accosted her in the language of severe but merited rebuke.") The deacon, one of Granville's pioneers, had to carve a farm out of the forest; for him Lemuel wielded the ax and guided the plow. There was a little time left over for education. "As I had the advantage of attending a common school equal with the other children," he remembered, "I was early taught to read, to which I was greatly attached, and could vie with almost any of my age." People said that "Lemuel Haynes got his education in the chimney-corner," where by the light of blazing pine knots he devoured speller, psalter, and Bible. "At the age of fifty," a friend recalled, "he could repeat nearly the whole of Young's *Night Thoughts*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Watts's *Psalms and Hymns*, and large unbroken passages from different authors, and more of the sacred Scriptures than any man I ever knew." When Haynes was an old man, he often used to say, "If I were to live

89. Lemuel Haynes, frontispiece in Timothy Mather Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Reverend Lemuel Haynes, A.M.* (New York, 1837).

my life over again, I would devote myself to books."

Theology fascinated the Bible-struck youth. One evening, "greatly alarmed by the *Aurora Borealis*" as a "presage of the day of judgment," he experienced conversion. In the deacon's family on Saturday nights—a time of religious instruction—Lemuel usually read aloud a sermon by some worthy of the church. "One evening being called upon to read . . . he slipped into the book his own sermon . . . and read it to the family." The deacon was highly edified: "Lemuel, whose work is that which you have been reading? Is it Davies's sermon, or Watts's, or Whitefield's?" When the youth answered, "It's Lemuel's sermon," that moment was the start of a career. Since the parish at this time lacked a minister, Lemuel was frequently called upon to conduct the

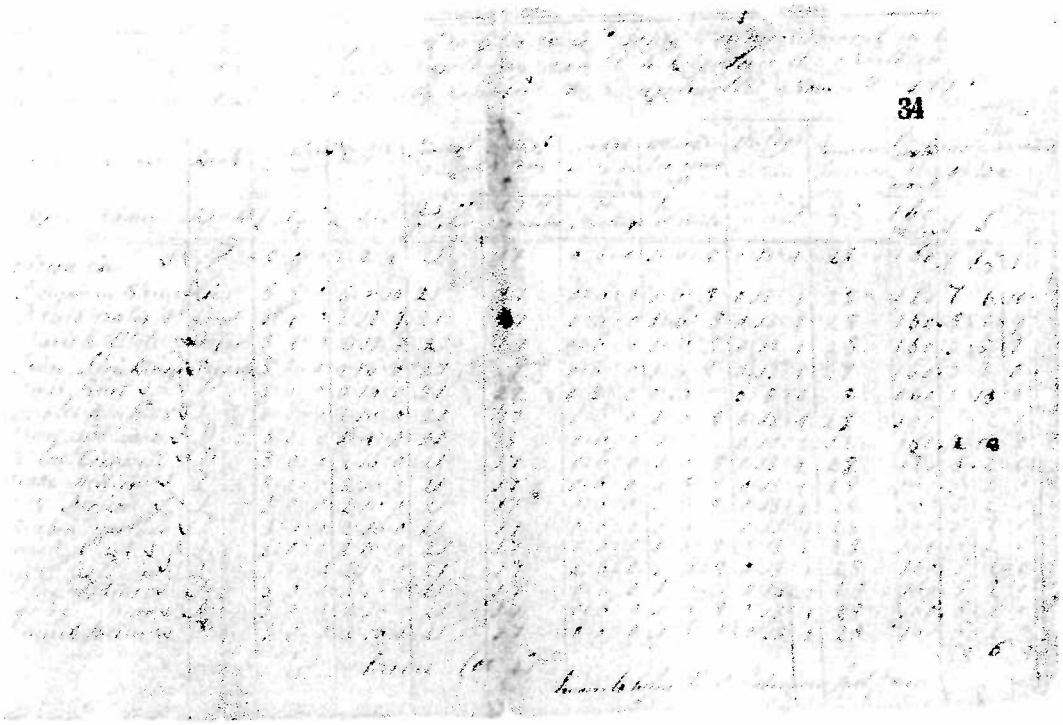


90. *A Muster Roll of the Minutemen that Marched from Granville ye 29th Apr. 1775.* Massachusetts Archives, Revolutionary Rolls, 14: 40.

service and to read an approved sermon. Sometimes he read one of his own.

In 1774, at the age of twenty-one, his period of service to the deacon completed, Lemuel enlisted as a minuteman and spent a day a week training on the village green. Soon after the skirmish at Lexington, he joined the army at the siege of Boston with Captain Lebbeus Ball's militia company [figs. 90 and 91].

It was about this time that the revolutionary soldier wrote a ballad-sermon of thirty-seven quatrains. This has survived in the manuscript he was still revising, possibly intended for a printed broadside [fig. 92]. There is a certain pride in these stanzas by the patriot and former indentured servant in arms against British tyranny, which can be seen in his title and epigraph:



91. *Pay Role for Capt Aaron Coe's Company of Militia . . . Granville Novemb^r 1776.* Massachusetts Archives, Revolutionary Rolls, 18:34.

THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON
A POEM on the *inhuman* Tragedy perpetrated on the 19th of April 1775 by a Number of the British Troops under the Command of Thomas Gage, which Parricides and Ravages are shocking Displays of ministerial & tyrannic Vengeance. . . .

At the center of the poem is the clash between freedom and slavery:

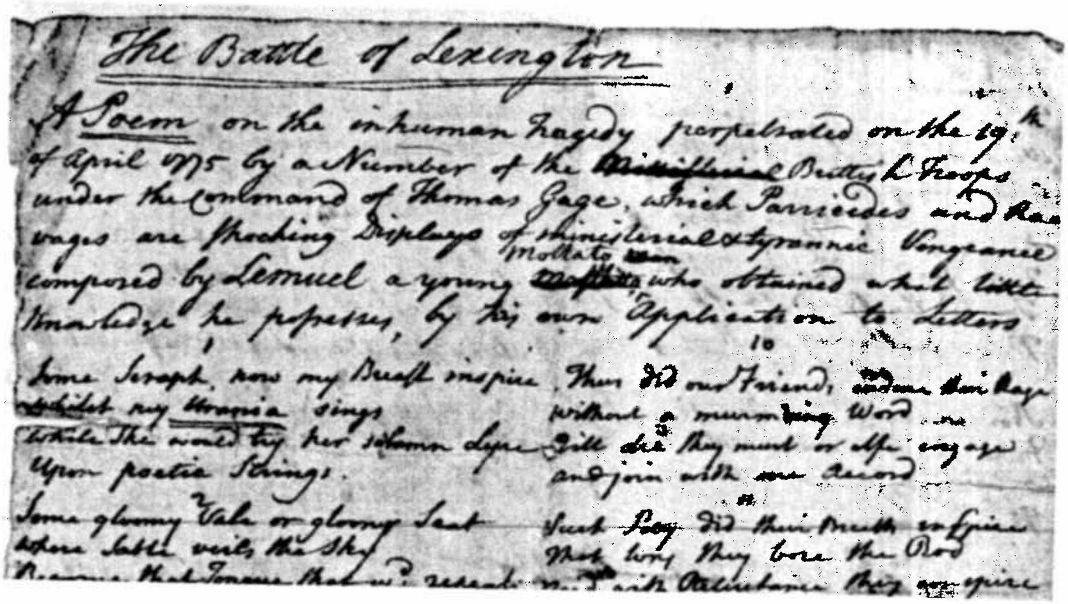
For liberty each Freeman strives
As its a Gift of God
And for it, willing yield their Lives
And Seal it with their Blood.

Twice happy they who thus resign
Into the peacefull Grave
Much better those in Death Consign
Than a Surviving Slave.

This Motto may adorn their Tombs
(Let Tyrants come and view)
"*We rather seek these silent Rooms*
"*Than live as Slaves to You.*"

Although Haynes does not yet explore the paradox implicit in the struggle of slaveholders against "ministerial tyranny," he surely touches on it when he names himself "Lemuel a young Mollato" as the poet, "who obtained what little knowledge he possesses, by his own Application to Letters."

A document in Haynes's hand has come to light which confirms that toward the end of the war he wished to speak out boldly against black slavery. The manuscript of forty-six small pages, apparently a draft of a "Small *Treatise*"—unfinished, never printed



The Battle of Lexington

A Poem on the inhuman Tragedy perpetrated on the 19th of April 1775 by a Number of the Brittish Troops under the Command of Thomas Gage, which Parricides and Ravages are shocking Displays of ministerial & tyrannic Vengeance composed by Lemuel a young Mollato who obtained what little knowledge he possesses, by his own Application to Letters

Some Seraph now my Breast inspire
whilst my Urania sings
while she would try her solemn Lyre
Upon poetic Strings.

Thus did our Friends endure their Rage
without a murmuring Word
Till die they must or else engage
and join with one Accord.

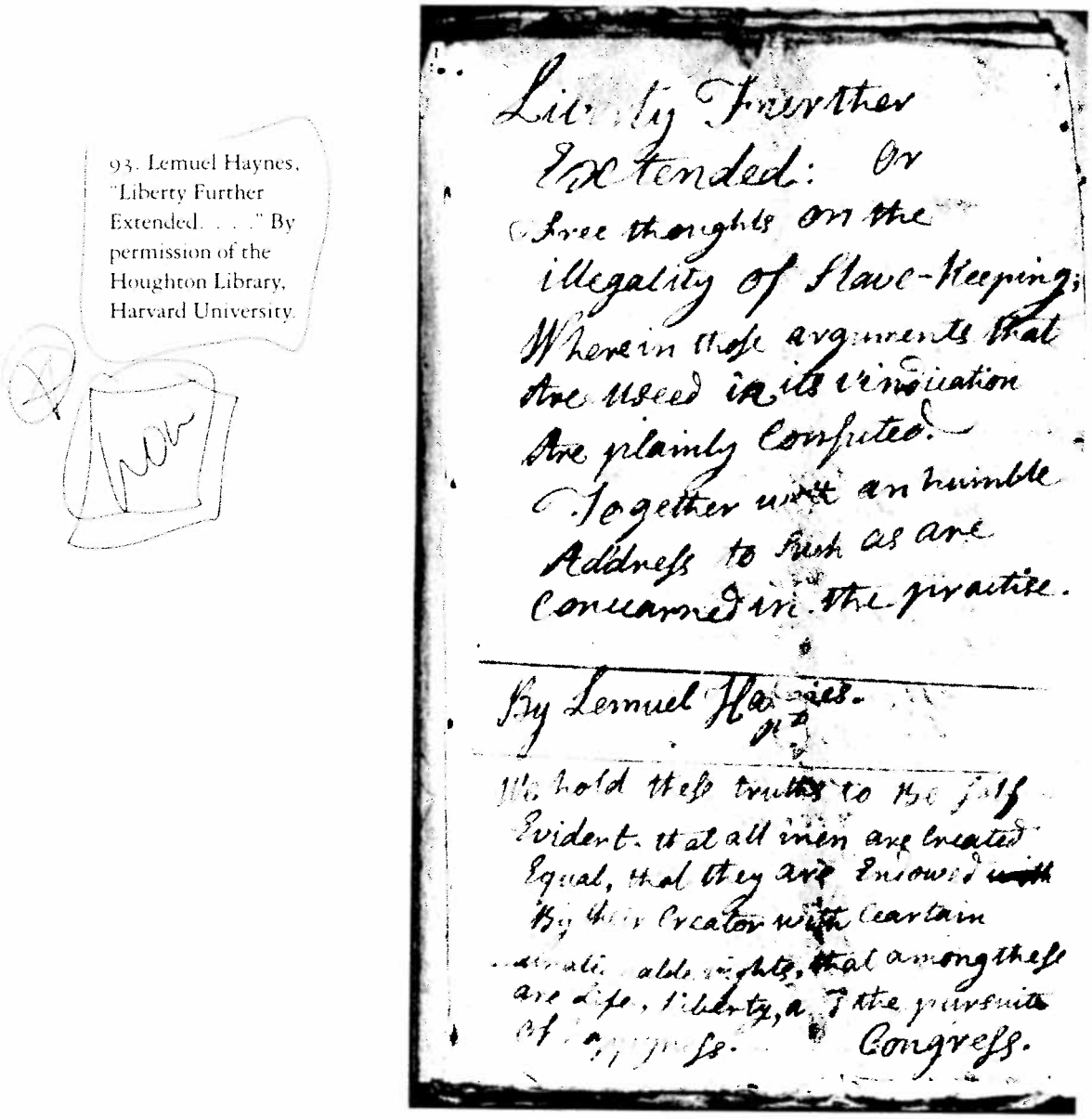
92. Lemuel Haynes, *The Battle of Lexington*, excerpt. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

or uttered—is one of the earliest, most passionate and astute sociotheological statements in our history, ranking high with those of Samuel Sewall, John Woolman, and Anthony Benezet. Its title page, citing the Declaration of Independence, rings out: "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free thoughts on the illegality of Slave-keeping; Wherein those arguments that Are used in its vindication Are plainly confuted. Together with an humble Address to such as are Concearned in the practise." The author's name is now plainly written out: "Lemuel Haynes" [fig. 93].

Haynes's "main proposition" is "That an *African*, or, in other terms, *that a Negro may Justly Chalenge, and has an undeniable right to his Liberty:* Consequently, the practise of Slave-keeping, *which so much abounds in this Land is illicit.*" And his conclusion, pointing up slavery as a sin, exposes the irony of men fighting for their own political freedom while they themselves own slaves as a portent of blood and doom: "for this is God's way of working, Often he brings the Same Judgements or Evils upon men as they unriteously Bring upon Others. . . . Some gentlemen have Determined to Contend in a Consistant manner: they have *Let the oppressed go free*. . . ."*

In 1775 Haynes marched in the expedition to Ticonderoga, where, with Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, he helped take the fort from the British. Over forty years later, in a sermon preached on George Washington's birthday, he would remind his listeners of his service in the revolution: "Perhaps it is not ostentatious in the speaker to observe, that in early life he de-

*Ruth Bogin, who a few years ago discovered the manuscript, notes its "virtuosity of argument" and raises a valid question: "Future appraisals of Haynes must consider not only his reluctance to speak out publicly on slavery and race prejudice but also his vigorous arguments for the extirpation of slavery as well as the circumstances that may have influenced his decision to suppress his views . . ." (" 'Liberty Further Extended': A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript of Lemuel Haynes," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 40 [January 1983]: 85–105). The text of Haynes's "Small *Treatise*" is printed in the above article.



Liberty Further
Extended: Or
Free thoughts on the
Illegality of Slave-Keeping;
Wherein those arguments that
are used in its vindication
are plainly confuted.
Together with an humble
Address to such as are
concerned in the practice.

By Lemuel Haynes.

We hold these truths to be self
Evident. that all men are created
Equal, that they are endowed with
By their Creator with certain
unalienable rights, that among these
are life, liberty, & the pursuits
of happiness. Congress.

93. Lemuel Haynes, "Liberty Further Extended. . . ." By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

voted all for the sake of freedom and independence, and endured frequent campaigns in their defence. . . ."

Back home from the front, white friends in Granville encouraged him to consider a life in the church. "I was solicited by some to obtain a collegiate education with a view to the gospel ministry. A door was opened for it at Dartmouth College, but I shrunk at the thought." At last he was persuaded to study "the learned languages" and in 1779 was invited by a clergyman in Canaan, Connecticut, to live with him and learn Latin. Now he felt a "quenchless ardor" to master Greek as well, so that he might read the New Testament in the original. A well-wishing pastor got him a position as a teacher in Wintonbury, and after school

hours he tutored Haynes in Greek. In the fall of 1780 the pastor thought he was ready; several ministers of "high respectability," after examining him "in the languages and sciences, and with respect to his knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, and practical and experimental religion, recommended him as qualified to preach the gospel." His first official sermon was on the text "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice," preached in a new house of worship to a white congregation in Middle Granville, which had unanimously invited him to supply its vacant pulpit. Three years later he married a young white schoolteacher of the town, Elizabeth Babbit, whom he had helped to convert. "Looking to Heaven for guidance," remarked Dr. Cooley, "she was led with a consistent and justifiable delicacy, to make him the overture of her heart. . . . He consulted a number of ministers and . . . received their unanimous advice and sanction." (There were ten children, seven daughters and three sons: at the time of Elizabeth's death in 1836, two sons lived in New York, one a farmer, the other a physician; the third son was a law student in Massachusetts.) In November 1785 Haynes was officially ordained by an Association of Ministers in Litchfield County, Connecticut, in response to the unanimous request of his Granville congregation signed by Deacons Aaron Coe and Timothy Robinson, the latter his commander ten years earlier in the war and later a governor of Vermont.

Haynes's first call to fill a pulpit came from Torrington, Connecticut—the town in which fifteen years later John Brown was born—and after a preaching tour of Vermont during the summer of 1785 he settled down to his work. Although his sermons soon began to pack the meetinghouse, there were intolerant diehards in the congregation who were less than pleased with his dark skin. Dr. Cooley has preserved the memoir of one churchgoer who did not at first approve:

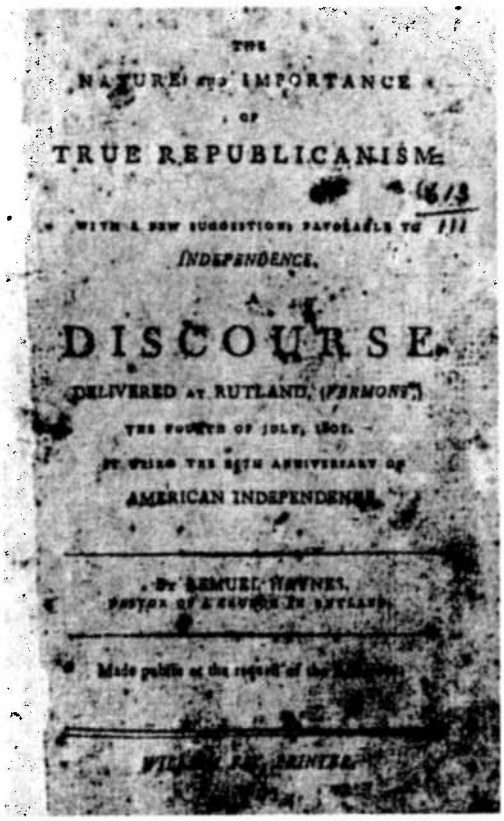
> He was disaffected that the church should employ him, and neglected meeting for a time. At length curiosity conquered prejudice. . . . He took his seat in the crowded assembly, and, from designed disrespect, sat *with his hat on*. Mr. Haynes gave out his text, and began with his usual impassioned earnestness, as if unconscious of anything amiss in the congregation. "The preacher had not proceeded far in his sermon . . . before I thought him the *whitest* man I ever saw. My hat was instantly taken off and thrown under the seat, and I found myself listening with the most profound attention."

Others in Haynes's flock did not conquer their prejudice, and the "designed disrespect" of a clique forced him to leave Torrington after two years to seek another pulpit.

In March of 1788, he received his second call, from a church in the west parish of Rutland, Vermont, which probably had a few "poor Africans" enrolled in its congregation. Here for the next thirty years he would try to save souls, preserve doctrine untainted by liberal theology, and enlighten the backward on political questions. In Vermont, where freethinkers "extensively circulated Allen's 'Oracle of Reason,' and other infidel books," the thirty-five-year-old black minister would achieve a transatlantic reputation as a ruthless polemicist in theological dispute. Writing from Rutland in 1796 he observed that he had never known "infidelity more prevalent. . . . Paine has advocates. I have attended to all his writings on theology, and can find little else but invective and the lowest kind of burlesque."

The years of the turn of the century, when the animated frontispiece portrait in Cooley's memoir was probably executed, seem his most vigorous and productive. "Many, on seeing him in the pulpit," the biographer records, "have been reminded of the inspired expression, 'I am black, but comely' . . . the remarkable assemblage of graces which were thrown around his semi-African complexion, especially his eye, could not fail to prepossess the stranger in his favour." The papier-mâché tray that shows Haynes exhorting from the pulpit of his white church might illustrate this passage. During these years, he defended the gospels according to Jonathan Edwards and George Washington in a barrage of eloquent discourse. In 1798 two of his sermons were printed for wider notice, one religious, the other political—although these blend at times. The first was a manifesto, *The Important Concerns of Ministers*, the second, an anti-Jeffersonian defense of the quasi-war with "atheistical" France. "I am preparing another political discourse for the press," he informed a friend in September 1801. Its title is imposing: *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism: with a Few Suggestions Favorable to Independence. Delivered at Rutland, Vermont, the Fourth of July, 1801. It Being the 25th Anniversary of American Independence* [fig. 94]. What is remarkable in this oration is not so much its passionate praise of the revolution and "the rights of men" as its castigation of "monarchal government," where the "people are commonly ignorant . . . and know but little more than to bow to despots, and crouch to them for a piece of bread," for the truth of his argument is illustrated by the sin of American slavery:

> The propriety of this idea will appear strikingly evident by pointing you to the poor Africans, among us. What has reduced them to their present pitiful, abject state? Is it any distinction that the God of nature hath made in their formation? Nay—but being subjected to slavery, by the cruel hands of oppressors, they have been taught to view themselves as a rank of beings far below others, which has suppressed in a degree, every principle of manhood, and so they become despised, ignorant, and licentious. This shows the effects of despotism and should fill us with the utmost detestation against every attack on the rights of men. . . .

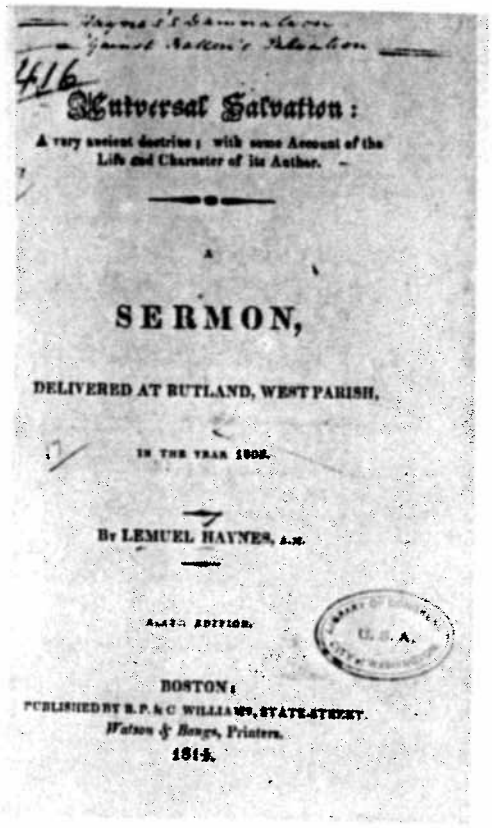

THE
NATURE AND IMPORTANCE
OF
TRUE REPUBLICANISM:
WITH A FEW SUGGESTIONS FAVORABLE TO
INDEPENDENCE.
A
DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED AT RUTLAND, (VERMONT)
THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1801.
BEING ALSO THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.
BY SAMUEL HAYNES,
PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN RUTLAND.
Made public at the request of the Hearers.
PRINTED BY

94. Lemuel Haynes, *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism . . .* (Rutland, 1801). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

A few lines later, he asks: "On the whole, does it not appear that a land of liberty is

favourable to peace, happiness, virtue, and religion, and should be held sacred by mankind?" The answer is a resounding yes—and that is all. Nowhere else during the next thirty years of utterance from pulpit or press does Lemuel Haynes make a public statement on the subject of race or slavery.

His fame flourished. He had close friends on the faculty of Middlebury College, whose trustees in 1804 conferred on him the honorary degree of Master of Arts—the first ever bestowed on a black in America. It was in the following year that his name became known beyond rural Vermont. The scene had a certain drama. Unknown to Haynes, who had planned to visit a remote part of his parish on that day, Hosea Ballou, the distinguished champion of the doctrine of universal salvation, had been invited to preach from his pulpit in the west parish of Rutland. When Ballou learned that Haynes would not be present for his sermon, he remarked that "the orthodox gentry generally *scud*" when he appeared to preach. Haynes decided to attend. He "had been repeatedly solicited to hear and dispute" with the Universalist, he tells us, "and had been charged with dishonesty and cowardice for refusing. He felt that some kind of testimony, in opposition to . . . error, ought to be made. . . ." Ballou lectured and Haynes—with little or no preparation—immediately replied. The result was the sermon called *Universal Salvation, a Very Ancient Doctrine (of the Devil)*, which, during the next quarter century, as Dr. Cooley relates, was "printed and reprinted, both in America and Great Britain, till no one pretends to give any account of the number of editions" [fig. 95]. If the gentle Ballou felt that Haynes had identified him with the Serpent, he had every reason to think so, and in the sharp exchange of letters of the following two years Haynes does not abate a jot. His wrath was leveled against a Universal-


Universal Salvation:

A very ancient doctrine; with some Account of the Life and Character of its Author.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT RUTLAND, WEST PARISH,

IN THE YEAR 1805.

By LEMUEL HAYNES, A.M.

THIRD EDITION.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY B. P. & C. WILLIAMS, 69, STATE-STREET.

Watson & Bangs, Printers.

1814.

95. Lemuel Haynes, *Universal Salvation* . . . (Boston, 1814). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ism that he saw as a doctrine that preached heaven for all and hell for none.

> Blest all who hunger and who thirst
> to find
> A chance to plunder and to cheat
> mankind;
> Such die in peace—for to them God
> has given,
> To be unjust on earth, and go to
> heaven.

So runs a parody of Ballou's creed which Haynes appended to his sermon. Would the sin of slavery be rewarded rather than punished? The sermon is silent on this question.

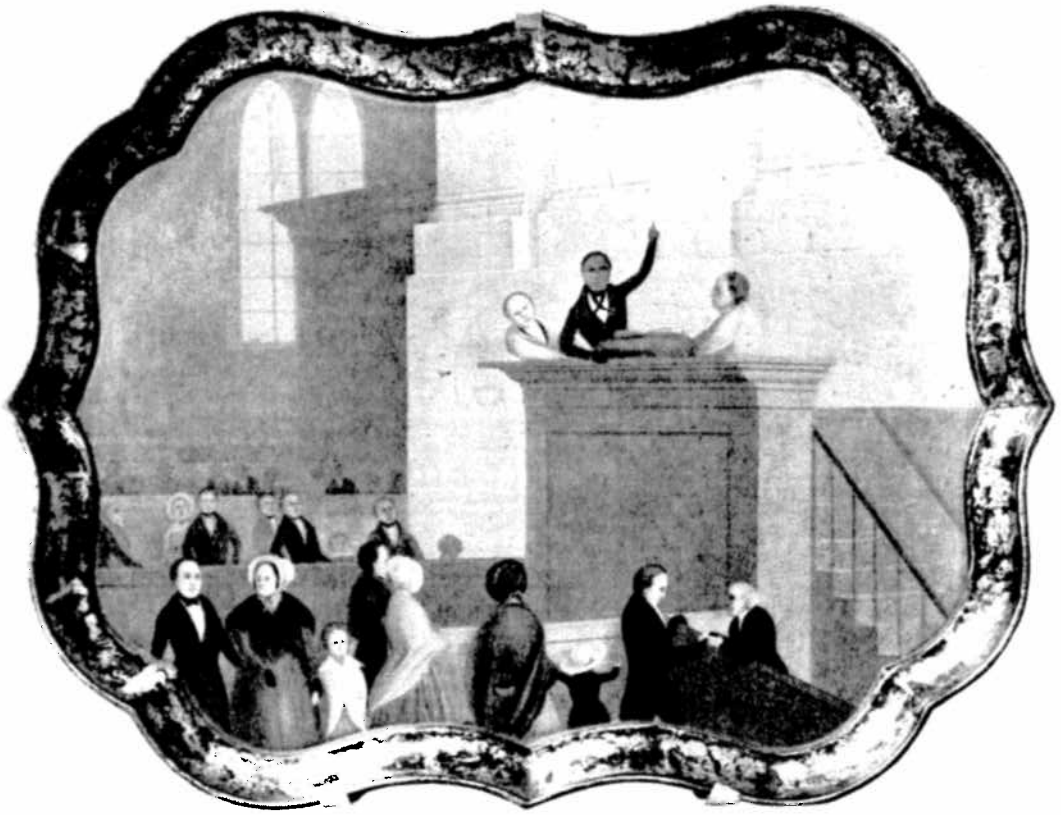
MEANWHILE, life went on in a routine way. Haynes found himself in great demand as a speaker at ordinations, dedications, and funerals [fig. 96]. He proved himself from time to time a magnetic revivalist. "His very colour," thought a brother cleric, "which marks the neglect and servitude of his race in this country, associated, as it was . . . with his high qualifications to entertain and instruct, became the means of increasing his celebrity and enlarging the sphere of his influence." In 1809 he was appointed field secretary of the Vermont Missionary Society. And all the while he labored on his farm, his early training standing him in good stead, in order to feed his large family.

The year 1814 was memorable for Haynes. As delegate of the General Convention of Ministers in Vermont, he attended the meeting of the General Association of Connecticut which gathered at Fairfield. On the way, there was an opportunity to visit New Haven and stop for a talk with the Reverend Doctor Timothy Dwight, president of Yale. Haynes's fame had in fact preceded him. In the Blue Church of New Haven, he preached to a full house. Professor Silliman was impressed with his "dignity and feeling," and President Dwight was moved to tears. At Fairfield, addressing one hundred ministers, the Reverend Mr. Humphrey, then pastor of the church in the town and later president of Amherst College, recalled that Haynes used "no notes, but spoke with freedom and correctness." The sermon was so "rich in Scriptural thought . . . there was so much of truth and nature in it . . . hundreds were melted into tears." Did the black pastor perhaps feel lonely among his hundred white colleagues? "In meetings of councils and associations," wrote Dr. Cooley, without a smile, "where it was necessary to put two in one bed, one and another would say, *'I will sleep with Mr. Haynes!'* " And what would have been Haynes's reaction, one wonders, to the benevolent appraisal of a Vermont governor's wife, who was a member of his flock: "He ever held the station of man without blemish—never appearing to repine that God had not made him without a stain upon his skin: nor was he often called upon to remember it, unless more than ordinary tenderness, manifested by others in their intercourse with him, should have reminded him of it."

New Haven and Fairfield were triumphs, but all was not going as smoothly back in Rutland. A partisan of the Federalists who did not mince his words in the pulpit, Haynes found himself in increasing conflict with most of his parishioners. In a manuscript written by an unknown contemporary, the conflict may have been a matter of racism: "The people in Rutland, where he preached for thirty years, at length began to think they would appear more respectable with a white pastor than a black one, and therefore, or at least measurably on that account, dismissed him. Attending to this, he subsequently used to say 'he lived with the people of Rutland thirty years, and they were so sagacious that at the end of that time they found out that he was *a nigger*, and so turned him away.' "

Opposing the War of 1812, he nevertheless scorned the threat of New England secession, but his activity in the conservative Washington Benevolent Society, as well as his biting sarcasm in urging his political views, at last brought matters to a crisis. Thus it was that during the spring of 1818 the pastoral relation between Lemuel Haynes and his Rutland church came to an end. The farewell letter of the black minister—he was now sixty-five—is far from pathetic:

> It was thirty years ago . . . since I took the pastoral care of this church



96. Unknown artist, *Reverend Lemuel Haynes in the Pulpit*, papier-mâché tray, 1800–1820. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich.

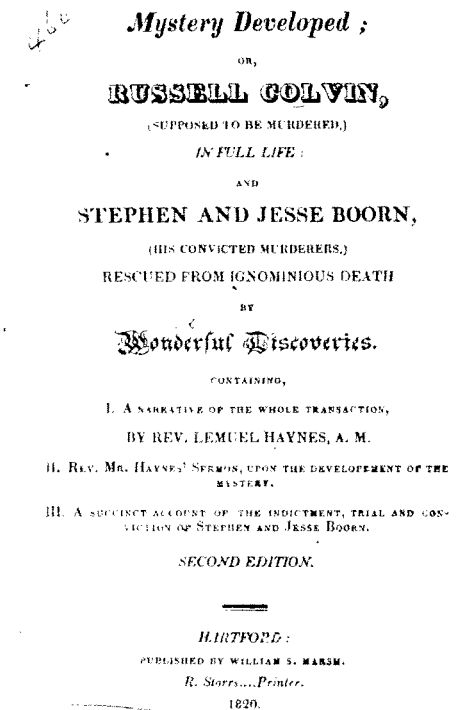
> and people; the church then consisted of forty-two members; since which time, there have been about three hundred and twelve added to it. . . . I have preached about five thousand five hundred discourses: four hundred of them have been funeral sermons. I have solemnized more than a hundred marriages. During this period we have had two remarkable seasons of the outpourings of the Spirit. . . .

"Never was a greater degree of stupidity discovered among us," he wrote to a friend, "I expected it. . . . It was mutual agreement. No impeachment of my moral or ministerial character was pretended. I fully acquiesce in the event. I have many calls to labor elsewhere."

The third call, which he now responded to, was from Manchester, on the west side of the Green Mountains. It was there in 1820 that he became involved in the celebrated case of the allegedly murdered Russell Colvin, a "wandering maniac" of the town. In 1813 Colvin had suddenly disappeared. Years passed and a charge of murder was pressed against his wife's two brothers, who were finally sentenced to hang. Haynes spent many hours with the doomed men, grew convinced of their innocence, but despaired of saving them. Seven years after the supposed crime and thirty-seven days before the time appointed for the execution, Rus-

sell Colvin, alive and well, wandered back to town. The event was the sensation of the day. Haynes's sermon on the facts and meanings of the case under the title *Mystery Developed* broadened into an interesting disquisition on religion and prisons; packaged with his "narrative of the whole transaction" and the trial records, it was a best-seller for a decade [fig. 97].

Two years later, in 1822, when the excitement was over, he learned to his dismay that his flock in Manchester felt the need for a younger pastor. There was regret on both sides. In Vermont he had made good friends: Richard Skinner, congressman, judge, and antislavery governor; Joseph Burr, patron of the American Colonization Society; Stephen Bradley, who had introduced into the Senate the bill that abolished the African slave trade; and Chief Justice Royall Tyler, poet and playwright. Now, once again, Lemuel Haynes, at three score and ten, resumed his pilgrimage. This time it took him over the border into New York, where, in the town of Granville, revered as Father Haynes, he spent the last eleven years of his life. There were preaching trips to New York City, Albany, and Troy, and a trip back to the first church he had led, in Massachusetts. He was a firm Federalist to the end. When Jackson was elected president in 1828, celebrating Democrats forced him to toast the victor. He responded: "Andrew Jackson. Psalm 109th, 8th verse." The toast was drunk before anyone could look up the passage: "Let his days be few; and let another take his office." When, on September 28, 1833, at an even eighty, he breathed his last, he left in his own hand "an epitaph to be put upon my tombstone": "Here lies the dust of a poor hell-deserving sinner, who ventured into eternity trusting wholly on the merits of Christ for salvation. In the full belief of the great doctrines he preached while on earth, he invites his children, and all who read this, to trust their eternal interest on the same foundation."



Mystery Developed ;

OR,

RUSSELL COLVIN,

(SUPPOSED TO BE MURDERED,)

IN FULL LIFE :

AND

STEPHEN AND JESSE BOORN,

(HIS CONVICTED MURDERERS,)

RESCUED FROM IGNOMINIOUS DEATH

BY

Wonderful Discoveries.

CONTAINING,

I. A NARRATIVE OF THE WHOLE TRANSACTION,

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II. REV. MR. HAYNES' SERMON, UPON THE DEVELOPEMENT OF THE MYSTERY.

III. A SUCCINCT ACCOUNT OF THE INDICTMENT, TRIAL AND CONVICTION OF STEPHEN AND JESSE BOORN.

SECOND EDITION.

HARTFORD :

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM S. MARSH.

R. Storrs.....Printer.

1820.

97. Lemuel Haynes, *Mystery Developed: or, Russell Colvin . . .* (Hartford, 1814). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

When Samuel E. Cornish, editor of the New York *Colored American*, one of the earliest black newspapers in the country, received a copy of Dr. Cooley's biography of Lemuel Haynes for review, it is probable that he was not quite sure what he ought to make of the "very interesting and useful memoir of Father Haynes . . . one of the Lord's worthies . . . published for the benefit of his children." How could this miracle have come to pass in the United States? Sixty years after the Declaration of Independence, the black editor struggled for an answer: "He is the only man of *known* African descent, who has ever succeeded in overpowering the system of American *caste*. And this he did by wisdom and piety, aided also by the more favorable state of the times in which he lived."