

MISCELLANEOUS.

INDEPENDENT AFRICAN METHODISM.

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The misinformation of the average American Christian, not excepting the editors among them, in relation to the independent African Methodist Churches of the country, is amply astounding. Astounding, you may say, is a big word. True; but it is not a whit too big as descriptive of a "darkness that may be felt." You converse with one of the class mentioned, and the possibilities are that he can tell you all about each of the "Ten Great Religions;" but interrogate him about the black men of his own faith, his next door neighbors, and in the majority of cases, he will make a medley of them. There can be given but one reason for this fact—the reason that these African Methodists, though numbering hundreds of thousands, have not been considered worth looking after. Composed as they are of the nation's Pariahs, why should the nation's Brahmins notice them? This will doubtless be controverted by not a few, but it is, nevertheless, a fact; for how else account for the palpable misinformation existing. These African Methodist Churchmen have never pursued the policy of putting their light under a bushel; but, on the contrary, with a true American spirit, have ever aimed to let it be seen; but all to no purpose. Their papers, not first-class of course, have gone unnoticed; their attempts at correspondence by editorial *fiat*, have gone to the waste basket; and their every attempt to let the world know who or what they are, has been most successfully checkmated. By the mighty spirit of caste, they have been hermetically sealed up as a class, from all public notice. But why should we linger upon the dead past, when the Master says, "Let the dead bury the dead." We would not, if the same fell spirit did not haunt around the grave.

There are three distinct branches of Independent African (negro or colored, as you may elect) Methodist Churches in the land—the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. (We make no mention of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, in the Dominion of Canada.) Here and there a congregation of Independent Methodists may be found; but they are so "few and far between," that any formal recognition of them cannot be made. The three Churches named above are to be accepted as the sum of the independent African Methodism of the country. Not so many after all; certainly not enough to warrant the high colors employed by Chancellor Haven.

By the old rule of primogenitorship, the post of honor is given to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. To attempt any lengthened historical account of this Church, would be out of place—at least, at this moment. Suffice it to say that it was formally organized in Philadelphia, during the month of April, 1816. As early as November, 1787, the colored people of the Quaker city, in conventional form—after having considered "the evils under which they labored, arising from the unkind treatment of their white brethren, who considered them a nuisance in the house of worship"—decided upon a separate service. In their attempt to carry out this decision, they were greatly opposed by the officers of the Methodist Episcopal Church; and being threatened with expulsion if they did not surrender the subscription books they had been using to procure means with which to build themselves a house, they resigned, "being fully satisfied that they should be treated without mercy." In six years, they esteemed themselves "outcasts."

In 1793 Richard Allen, their leader, purchased a blacksmith's shop, and having removed it to his own property, converted it into a church, where the colored Methodists of the city usually worshiped; and where, in 1816, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formerly organized, by the election of this heroic man, as its first Bishop. It might be of interest to say that at his ordination, Absalom Jones, a negro presbyter of the Episcopal Church, and a true yoke-fellow in the Gospel with Allen, assisted by the imposition of his hands, in connection with four other ordained ministers. At that organization of the Church, sixteen men were present, representing what was afterward organized into the Philadelphia and Baltimore Annual Conferences. The membership represented by them was, possibly, five thousand. From that small beginning, it has spread all over the land. The number of Conferences, with clearly defined borders, and in excellent working condition, is twenty-five. We have one University, with a Faculty of four, and more than a hundred students. Its value cannot be less than \$50,000. We have a publishing house, where we issue our hymn-books and Disciplines, and the various requisites of the Church. We have a weekly organ, *The Christian Recorder*, now in its fourteenth volume. Its circulation is four thousand weekly. Six colored printers are employed, a clerk, a salesman, and a mail-man. The business done is to the amount of \$15,000 annually. The establishment is worth not less than \$10,000.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is of later origin, a few years, however, only. It originated in New York city. It is not, however, as Dr. Porter says, in his "Compendi-

um"—a most unreliable authority, by the way, in everything that pertains to Colored Methodism—"not having all confidence in Allen." It was not for the want of confidence in Allen that made our New York brethren refuse to cast in their lot with us. Far different is the reason, namely, they did not then, nor do they now, believe in a third ordination, and have ever steadfastly refused to practice it. Previous to 1868, they would not so much as allow their chief pastors to be called Bishops. At the General Conference of that year, however, they did so far relent in their opinions as to allow the title, and authorize a form of installing, but not of ordaining the Bishops whom they should thereafter, quadrennially elect. Consequently they are not to be ranked as Dr. Curry ranks them in his *Advocate* of January 13, with *Episcopal Methodists*; that is, if by *Episcopal Methodist* we mean one who believes in an ordained, life-time episcopacy. Not only so, but in addition to this fundamental defect, as viewed by us, at least, our Zion brethren subordinate the spiritual officers of the Church to the trustees. Hence it was they would not unite with Allen, and hence it is, that any union with Allen's successors, now, is impossible. This Church, as we have said, originated in New York, springing out of "Zion" Church, erected in 1800, seven years after Allen had turned his blacksmith's shop into a Church in Philadelphia. It has five unordained Bishops. Its Conferences number —? It has no Church school, and no Publishing Department, at least, in operation.

The third and last organization to be noticed is the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. From the connection which this Church sustains toward the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, it is probably the best known—thanks to Dr. Wheeler and Chancellor Haven—of any of the independent colored Churches. Singularly enough, such brethren as the above seem to have appreciated enforced independence more than volitional. Consequently they have allowed no opportunity to pass to acquaint themselves and the Christian public with this Church. It was organized in Clarksville, Tenn., in 1872, by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, in conformity to a resolution passed at their previous General Conference. It is but just to say, that in sending Hagar away, they were humane enough to give her bread and a bottle of water, in the shape of a well-accredited episcopacy, a Hymn-book, a Discipline, a Catechism, and a weekly paper, *The Christian Index*. We can almost imagine we can yet hear the shouts old man Allen would have sent up, had similar humanity been shown at his moral expulsion from home into a more than the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

Without having any statistics of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church at hand—reliable statistics, we mean, for those in the Methodist Episcopal Almanac for 1876 are not worth anything—we take pleasure in noting the life this Church manifests. Its four Bishops are certainly men of energy, and judging from appearance are doing a fine work among the people, to whom they are limited by organic law.

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