

The Star of Zion

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH

VOLUME FORTY-EIGHT

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

THURSDAY, JUNE 19, 1924

NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR

THE QUADRENNIAL ADDRESS OF THE BOARD OF BISHOPS OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH.

Prepared and Read at the General Conference
By Bishop Lynwood Westinghouse Kyles

Ministers of Jesus Christ, and servants of God: In another quadrennial session the Board of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church greet you in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by whose Providence we have been brought to this epoch of our history and by whose hand we have been led to this vantage ground where we can correlate the larger sweeps in the march of mind.

In our last quadrennial session we were just emerging from a deadly conflict which staggered the world and from the effects of which mankind have not yet fully recovered. We are living in the reconstructive period of the most stupendous epoch in human history since the birth of "The Lowly Nazarene." France, swollen and bleeding in every vein, impatient of recovery, solidarity and security, early in the aftermath retired Clemenceau; England, nervous with anxiety and dread displaced her brilliant but erratic genius, Lloyd George. These rapid developments were followed by the occupation of the Rhur under the ministry of M. Poincaré for sanctions of non-payment of reparation by Germany, which we hope the Dawes Commission has finally settled. There were differences of opinion as to the advisability of the occupation of the Rhur, and the pendulum of uncertainty and doubt has swung between the two extremes of peace and order, and chaos and confusion.

The devaluation of the German mark and the fall of the franc reacted adversely and the world quivered with anxiety lest the superstructure of civilization might be overturned. We are gratified however to know that through the succor and encouragement of the American Government conditions are stabilized throughout the world and the material peace and prosperity of mankind from this angle are assured. Upon this happy eventuality the sentiment of our doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," is fitting comment.

Our Fallen Fathers.

From the General Conference at Knoxville, Tenn., May 1920, there went forth eleven bishops appointed to supervise that portion of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ committed to the care and nurture of Zion Methodism. They were not all in the full bloom and vigor of health when they were equipped and commissioned. Nevertheless they went forth with obedient hearts and anxious souls. Some however, faltered beneath the weight of physical impotence and vacillating pulsations. There were eleven of us, as hopeful as sons of God might be, determined as good soldiers of Jesus Christ to fight the good fight of faith. There were bishops George Wiley Clinton, John Wesley Alstork, Josiah Samuel Caldwell, George Lincoln Blackwell, Andrew Jackson Warner, Lynwood Westinghouse Kyles, Robert Blair Bruce, William L. Lee, George C. Clement, John W. Wood and Paris A. Wallace. Eleven of us there were when we left Knoxville, Tennessee, and of this number, only seven remain.

Death's hurricane has swept thru the human forest of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and four stately trees have fallen, rich in the fruits of their gathered years, and a blessing to the race and the Church. The passing of these noblemen of God has been a distinct loss to the Church, the race and the nation.

Bishop Andrew Jackson Warner, was the first to join the saints above. He was a great gospel preacher and a sweet singer in Zion. No more will his voice be heard in the conferences below. He has joined the celestial choir and now sings "The song of Moses and the lamb." Bishop Robert Blair Bruce, teacher, editor and bishop, pulled off his Episcopal robe, laid down his interpretative

and transferred his studies to bright mansions above. Bishop John Wesley Alstork, genial and humorous, an organizer and leader, walking the hills and valleys of Alabama, dramatized the life of Jesus Christ anew in our hearts and memories and went to heaven from Montgomery. Bishop Geo. Wiley Clinton, magnanimous in spirit, heroic in deeds, eloquent in speech, one of God's noblemen, was the last to go. His passing was sudden and unexpected. He loved his Church and his race and took advantage of every opportunity to represent them. He did his work well. He preached his best. He went away. Disease and death have burdened and saddened us. Only seven of us remain and here we are, my brethren, presenting ourselves as remaining sacrifices of your enactments. The passing of our colleagues left the work to us who survived them. We have done the best we could and are stimulated by the consciousness that those who have preceded us look down upon our efforts with happy approval. We bow in humble submission to Him who commissions us to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

America and the Negro.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is co-existent with the great American Republic. Geo. Washington, the founder of our country, became president of a free American Republic in 1796 which had revolted from the rule of England; and in the same year, Jas. Varick the founder of our Church became the leader of a great spiritual denominational democracy which had wrested itself from the bands of racial caste and spiritual dependence. It is significant that God called into being at the same time and commissioned these two agents the state to unify and civilize the peoples who had assembled on the Western Hemisphere, and the Church to emancipate and christianize a race that had been introduced into bondage. We therefore study the rise and progress of the Church and the advances and recessions of the government with compatible emotions. Our government is the greatest in material wealth and natural resources, in science and invention and in the wonderful universality of its benefactions.

Our nation has been overshadowed with gloom recently by the passing of two of its great men, the President Warren G. Harding, and the Ex-President, Woodrow Wilson. President Harding made a profound impression on the nation and the world by the infusion of Christian ideals in his policies for the conduct of the government. The nation was shocked at his passing. The death of ex-president Woodrow Wilson saddened the nation also. We are too near the stirring events of his career to give a correct appraisal of his value to the world as a man and a statesman; but that history will record him as one of the greatest characters of all times we have no hesitancy in affirming. The patriot soul of Zion shares the nation's sorrow and grief.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church views with alarm the ominous signs of deterioration and decay which it discerns in the dim perspective. The recent revelations in Washington, separate and distinct from their political aspects have shocked the sensibilities of mankind, and is a moral consequence of that general disregard for law as affecting smaller racial groups, of greed and injustice. Having devoured the weak, they turn now upon each other for blood and satisfaction. It is the result of an unchangeable law written in nature, in history and in

the scriptures: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

We have reason to rejoice in the fact that our nation so recently entangled in a terrible war is at peace with the world and takes its place among the nations as a leader in world adjustment. Since we last assembled in general session America has led the nations of the earth to the altar of peace at Washington and plead for the reduction of the possibility of war to its minimum. But may I say that the perpetuity of a nation depends not so much upon its external relations as upon its inherent spirit and a just and equitable regulation of its internal affairs. The growth of a nation like that of an individual is from within. The history of the fall of nations is a revelation of their internal weaknesses. Many of the great nations of today should beware lest the same fate overtake them. They have but to study the weaknesses of those nations to the escape their doom. While the nations have just cause for pride in their achievements, there is ample ground for grave apprehension of danger, for along with the great material development and intellectual advancement there has been a corresponding increase in evils which threaten their existence.

Our own nation is no exception to the rule. Among the great evils which threaten the future of America and endanger its future is the growing antipathy between the races and the indifference of the national government toward the perplexing problems incident to race relations in America. The danger consists not so much in the possibility of any harm the oppressed may do, for we are law abiding citizens, but in the fact that the hand of God is against the oppressor. The questions affecting race relations in America and the rights of Negroes as citizens, is no longer a question to be dealt with by the South alone. It is rapidly becoming a national issue. A question involving such great interests and affecting so vitally the moral of a whole nation can not be left to the whims of the people of any section for adjudication, but must be finally regulated by the government itself so that the fifteen millions of black people in America may go on with the work of race development and character building. Lincoln uttered a maxim when he said "This nation can not exist one-half free and the other half slave." It is true today that the nation can not enjoy the largest prosperity with one-half free and exercising all the rights of the Constitution, and the other half oppressed and denied the fundamental rights of citizenship.

The position we take on this subject is not based upon any desire on our part for the amalgamation of the races. We are content to follow the divergent trend of the races in things purely racial. We are the descendants of a great and noble race. We are willing to develop our distinct racial characteristics and to shape our character after the standards of Christianity. We believe that in the maintenance of our racial identity and the development of our character after the true, the beautiful and the good in our Christian system, we lay the foundation for a great and prosperous future. Our contention is based upon the desire for the full enjoyment of all the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the constitution.

Crossing the Mason and Dixon Line.

The majority of the members of our race have always lived south of the Mason and Dixon Line. Since their emancipation they have been the chief dependence of the south in

have tilled the soil, assisted in the development and expansion of its industries and helped the south to retrieve its fortune lost in their struggle for the continuance of their enslavement. Until the recent world upheaval and general awakening in our own country which affected our people like other people, they have remained true to southern traditions, faithful to its service, and cheerful and happy under the most trying and humiliating circumstances. Following the war a mass movement began which has resulted in nearly a half million of our people crossing the Mason and Dixon line, and settling in the north, east and west. The movement was without organization and leadership. It was spontaneous.

Judge Winston of North Carolina in an article in the Current History Magazine said, that the Southern Negro, (meaning I suppose the average Negro) was half slave. The merits of that statement we submit to others for determination. It may be laid down however as a maximum that people do not migrate from conditions that are satisfying and pleasing. Migration arises from a disturbance of heart and mind, and expresses the hope of a people for greater security of life and limb and larger avenues for the cultural development of the individual and the family. It represents the aspiration of a people for larger freedom and opportunity and for escape from repression and proscription. No man can breathe freely with fingers of suspicion and violence upon his throat. It was thought for a time that the restlessness and migratory movement on the part of our people would result disastrously to the business enterprises fostered by the race in the south and the Church. A careful study of conditions today will not reveal that any permanent injury has resulted to the race or the Church. On the contrary, the race has profited materially by the movement.

In the first place, it has resulted in the improvement of the economic condition of the race throughout the country. The infected sentiment which poisoned pen had made against us in fields of industry has been changed and the ideas of our hopeless ignorance, irresponsibility and unreliability have been exploded. The workshops in the north and east have been opened to us and the large wage paid has enabled thousands of our people to buy and build homes and to relieve many other economic needs. It has changed the attitude of the south toward Negro labor. The abandonment of the farm, the helplessness of the land owner, and the virtual impoverishment of some have caused the south to place a higher estimate upon the value of Negro labor. This is disclosed in the payment of higher wages and the creation of better conditions under which to labor. It has created a stronger sentiment for fair play and equality, at least before the courts of justice and in the field of industry. And finally, the migration of the Negro has raised his civic status and evaluated him as a citizen with rights; and aspirations that are entitled to respect.

Your bishops rejoice with you in the fact that in the migratory movement of the race from one section of the country to another our Church has not only held its own but has made rapid strides forward, both in the improvement of its property and the increase of its membership. Many new churches have been built and old ones improved, and thousands of members have been added to our communion. We join with you in gratitude to God for the Providence which has led to

The Volstead Act and Prohibition.

We are pleased at the progress which prohibition is making in this country. We take great pride in the contribution which the Methodist Church has made to the success of this movement. It has stood courageously and consistently for temperance and prohibition. The rumshop for a century was the bane of our material life. It came near wrecking the nation. Homes disrupted, reason dethroned, crimes committed, treason and arson followed the trail of the rum fiend. The victory is not yet won. The hydra-headed monster of intemperance still lurks in dark places of the nation. We feel that the contest for sobriety and decency should be continued until every bootlegger is run to earth and every distillery is demolished.

Lay Representation.

The demand for increased lay representation in the Annual and General Conferences is a question which should command our serious consideration at this session of our law making body. That the laity, as well as the ministry have rights, is too obvious for discussion here. The idea of the right of self-determination has gripped the world. Taxation without representation is abhorrent. The restlessness of the laity is a manifestation of that resistance to the restriction of individual and community rights so hateful to the American people.

Contiguous Districts.

There is a strong if not a prevailing sentiment throughout the Church in favor of contiguous districts. The strongest argument used in support of this contention is that it would eliminate the wanton waste of money and the needless expenditure of human energy in the present system of districting the Church and supervising the work and guaranteeing larger results for the kingdom. The bishops are disagreed on this question, the majority holding that the time is not yet ripe for such an arrangement of the districts. The minority believe that the time has come and now is when contiguous districts should be accepted as a settled policy of the Church.

The Tercentenary Movement.

The Tercentenary Movement was born of a historic coincident that was unique and interesting, if not prophetic. The year Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen was an epoch making year in the history of races and nations. It marked the close of the third century of the Negroes existence in America, the ending of the most disastrous war of human history and recorded the deeds of the notable Peace Conference which adjudicated the differences between the nations engaged in the war and laid the foundation for peace and world-wide democracy.

The consciousness of the presence of the hand of Providence in our history mysteriously guiding the destiny of the race and directing the course of nations, impelled the feeling on the part of the Church that there should be a fitting expression of our gratitude to God for the success of our race and the triumph of the nation, and of our sense of obligation in world reconstruction.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church elected to express her gratitude to God and to pledge herself to the obligations of reconstruction through the Tercentenary Movement. The plan provided for the raising of a million dollars for the equipment of our departments and the addition of a hundred thousand souls to the kingdom. The announcement of the plan met with hearty approval on the part of our ministers and communicants, and stirred the soul of the Church as it had never been stirred before.