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African Methodism and Wesleyan Hymnody

Bishop Henry M. Turner in Georgia, 1896–1908

Dennis C. Dickerson*

From its beginning African Methodist Episcopal Church worship has been anchored in Wesleyan hymnody. The Reverend Richard Allen as pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, published in 1801 *A Collection Of Hymns And Spiritual Songs, From Various Authors*. He printed another edition in 1808. Later as the first Bishop of the A.M.E. denomination Allen in 1818 produced *The African Methodist Pocket Hymn Book*. Both volumes included numerous hymns which Charles Wesley composed. The Wesleyan influence similarly shaped *The African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymn Book* of 1837 and the *Hymn Book Of The African Methodist Episcopal Church* of 1876.¹

Reverend Henry M. Turner, the manager of the A.M.E. Book Concern from 1876 through 1880, compiled the denomination's fourth hymnal. This volume drew from previous hymnals and Turner's own Wesleyan heritage. While the hymnal included 1,115 selections, 461 were written by the Wesleys. Contributions from Charles Wesley, John Wesley, Samuel Wesley, Jr., and Samuel Wesley, Sr. respectively numbered 430, 25, 5, and 1.²

Additionally, Turner, a lifelong Methodist, insured a prominent place for Wesleyan hymnody in the A.M.E. volume. In fact, Turner observed that the 1876 hymnal "may be regarded as strictly a Wesleyan hymn book." Turner's immersion in Methodism drew from experience in two Wesleyan denominations, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Born free in Newberry Courthouse, South Carolina on February 1, 1834, Turner attended various revivals between 1848 and 1851 where Methodist Episcopal Church, South evangelists called sinners to repentance. These successes led converted blacks, both slave and free, to affiliate with M.E. Church, South congregations. Hence, Turner joined the Abbeville church in 1848, received an exhorter's license in 1851, and authorization to preach in 1853. Under the aegis of the denomination Turner functioned between 1853 and 1858 as a licensed preacher to free black and slave communities in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. He preached extensively in such cities as Macon, Athens, Augusta, Montgomery, Mobile, and New Orleans. His audiences often consisted of black Wesleyan congregations over which the M.E. Church, South had jurisdiction. When he discovered the existence of the African

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¹Jon Michael Spencer, *Black Hymnody: A Hymnological History of the African American Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pp. 4–7.

²Spencer, *Black Hymnody*, pp. 9–11.

Methodist Episcopal Church in 1858, Turner left behind the M.E. Church, South and embraced a black Wesleyan denomination which offered him greater leadership opportunities. Pastorates in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. launched his rapid rise in the A.M.E. Church. After a chaplaincy in the Union Army, Turner's pivotal role as a superintendent of A.M.E. missions in Georgia, as a state legislator, and in later years as an African emigrationist made him an influential religious and political leader among southern blacks. Election as manager of the A.M.E. Book Concern in 1876 preceded his election in 1880 as the Twelfth Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bishop Turner's thirty-five years in the episcopacy put him in jurisdictions along the eastern seaboard, the Gulf states, the midwest, the upper South, Canada, Bermuda, and Africa. He presided the longest in Georgia where he served from 1896 to 1908.³

The same missionary and revival efforts which drew Turner to Methodism in South Carolina also impacted blacks in Georgia. Notwithstanding a Georgia black population of 465,698 in 1860, black members of the M.E. Church, South numbered 27,385. After 1865 the northern based African Methodist Episcopal Church initially drew its Georgia members from this nucleus of Wesleyan blacks. Reverend James Lynch, for example, met with a local preacher among Savannah's black Methodists and "made secret arrangements" to move the congregation out of the M.E. Church, South into the A.M.E. Church. Similarly, Reverend William Gaines convinced Wesleyan blacks in Macon, Columbus, and Atlanta to embrace African Methodism. With beachheads established in major Georgia cities A.M.E. preachers spread the denomination to other regions of the state. In 1867 there were 30 pastoral appointments, but the number grew to 57 in 1868.⁴ When Turner returned as the Bishop of Georgia, this episcopal district in comparison with the other thirteen was second only to South Carolina in size. In 1906, for example, Georgia had 139,284 members in 919 congregations.⁵

Wesleyan worship practices in Turner's jurisdiction and throughout the American South ranged between services which were folk and those which were formal. Rituals, musical forms, and belief systems which derived from the

³Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pp. 11-12, 20, 23, 29, 33; Richard R. Wright, Jr., *The Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1963), pp. 331-337. During his tenure in Georgia Bishop Turner attempted the establishment of A.M.E. churches in Cuba and Mexico. See Dennis C. Dickerson, *Religion, Race, and Region: Research Notes on A.M.E. Church History* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union/Legacy Publishing, 1995), pp. 121-130. Between 1896 and 1900 Alabama was attached to Turner's jurisdiction.

⁴W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1935, p. 495; Othal H. Lakey, *The History of the CME Church* (Memphis: The CME Publishing House, 1985), p. 105; Wesley J. Gaines, *African Methodism in the South Or Twenty-Five Years of Freedom* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House, 1890), pp. 5-6, 9-10, 13, 17.

⁵Benjamin W. Arnett, editor, *The Budget of 1904* (Philadelphia: Published by E. W. Lampton and J. H. Collett, 1904), pp. 161, 163.

African religious heritage and from African American Christianity yielded a black folk religion which many whites and some acculturated blacks viewed with derision. This black folk culture created the spirituals, emphasized eschatological scriptures which stressed freedom from sin, death, and racial oppression, and sanctioned ecstatic responses to sermons and songs which successfully summoned the Holy Spirit into worship services.⁶ A.M.E. congregations in Georgia and elsewhere possessed these characteristics, notwithstanding their strict adherence to Wesleyan doctrine and hymnody.

The annual conference, however, required a Wesleyan formality that Turner and his other episcopal colleagues in the United States and abroad rigidly enforced. Some hymn by Charles Wesley usually

And are we yet alive,
And see each other's face?
Glory and praise to Jesus give,
For his redeeming grace!

was sung at the opening of every annual conference over which Turner presided. In 1897 at the start of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference at St. Mary's A.M.E. Church in Thomaston and with Bishop Turner "in the chair" the congregation sang "And are we yet alive." Reverend James A. Lindsay, the keeper of the session minutes, noted that "this familiar hymn, which has cheered the hearts of millions in the past, and dispelled clouds of gloom and sorrow from many hearts, rolled up from our hearts with great earnestness, bespeaking joy and gladness." "And are we yet alive" started the 1904 Macon (Georgia) Annual Conference at Trinity, Warrenton, and "the Conference joined in singing that most impressive hymn, dear to the hearts of the Methodist ministry." The legacy of Charles Wesley surfaced again at the 1898 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference at Talbotton Chapel in Talbotton when Reverend John H. Adams, presiding elder of the Albany District, "opened with religious exercises using"

Forever here my rest shall be,
Close to thy bleeding side;
This all my hope, and all my plea,
For me the Saviour died.

At the 1906 North Georgia Annual Conference at Ebenezer in Cedartown the congregation sang "Jesus thou great redeeming power." The hymn "was sung with fervor and in an old Methodistic manner." Similar spirituality marked the

⁶Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), pp. 276-322; Alonzo Johnson, "Pray's House Spirit": The Institutional Structure and Spiritual Core of an African American Folk Tradition" in Alonzo Johnson and Paul Jersild, editors, *"Ain't Gonna Lay My 'Ligion Down": African American Religion in the South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, forthcoming).

opening of the 1906 Georgia Annual Conference at Gaines' Chapel Church in Waycross as two Wesleyan hymns, "Jesus, great shepherd of the sheep" and "O for a thousand tongues to sing," launched the forty-first yearly session of this A.M.E. jurisdiction.⁷

The continued growth of the A.M.E. Church required the North Georgia Annual Conference to authorize in 1899 the establishment of the Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference. Bishop Turner who arrived late to the 1901 session held at Mount Zion in Newnan asked Reverend Joseph S. Flipper, the pastor of St. Paul Church in Atlanta, to preside in his absence. As chair pro tempore, Reverend Flipper, a future bishop, "made an earnest plea to the brethren to act in harmony with the prayer, scripture lesson and the liturgic." Apparently, Flipper's "liturgic" sensibilities put a heavy emphasis upon Wesleyan hymns during those services over which he presided. The first hymn at the evening session of the first day, for example, was

Happy the man who finds the grace,
The blessing of God's chosen race.

Wesley's legacy continued into the second hymn announced after the invocation,

Jesus the name high over all,
In hell or earth or sky.

After Reverend C. W. Newton of Bethel in Atlanta preached a "thoughtful, logical, instructive" sermon on "Man the Limit of Infinite Thought or the Exaltation of Man, the Work of the Gospel Ministry," Reverend H. W. Dodson "led in singing," Wesley's "How happy every child of grace." Bishop Turner now in the audience commended Reverend Flipper "for the able manner in which he presided" including the Wesleyan "liturgic" which he placed into the worship.⁸

⁷*Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference of [the] A.M.E. Church* held in St. Mary A.M.E. Church, Thomaston, Georgia, Nov. 3rd to 9th, 1897 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1897), p. 9; *Journal of the Twenty-Third Session of the Macon [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Trinity A.M.E. Church, Warrenton, Georgia, November 23-29, 1904 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1905), p. 25; *Journal of Proceedings of the Second Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Talbotton Chapel A.M.E. Church, Talbotton, GA., November 2-7, 1898 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1899), p. 7; *Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, Cedartown, Georgia, December 5-10, 1906, p. 18; *The Journal of Proceedings and Yearbook of the Forty-First Session of the Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Gaines' Chapel A.M.E. Church, Waycross, Georgia, October 24-29, 1906 (Atlanta: The Franklin-Turner Printing and Publishing Company, 1907), p. 24.

⁸Richard R. Wright, Jr., compiler, *The Encyclopedia of African Methodism* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the A.M.E. Church, 1947), p. 389; *Minutes of the Seventh Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in St. Mary A.M.E. Church, Thomaston, Georgia, November 14-19, 1906 (Atlanta: The Franklin-Turner Co., 1907), p. 96; *Minutes of the Second Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, Newnan, Georgia, Dec. 17-23, 1901 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1902), pp. 19; 22-23.

Sessions of Georgia's annual conferences were serious and spiritually uplifting occasions. While anxieties about pastoral appointments were always present, emotions ran high because the ministerial "roll was called, and many of the battle-scarred heroes answered to their names." The challenges and difficulties of the preceding conference year seemed unimportant once an appropriate hymn was raised to affirm the faith and testify to what God had done through their ministries. Hence, conference participants broadly sampled a vast pool of Wesleyan hymns and sang them in these meetings.⁹ Bishop Turner, now well known as a hymnologist, often led his preachers in familiar Wesleyan renditions. Just before he read the pastoral appointments in the 1897 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference Turner "lined out the hymn, "And let our bodies part," which was sung with much fervor." At the 1898 session of this same annual conference the meeting "opened by all joining and singing, 'A charge to keep I have.'" Bishop Turner then announced another familiar Wesleyan hymn, "Try us O God and search the ground" which was sung "with much feeling." At an evening service of the 1898 North Georgia Annual Conference at St. Paul, Madison "the old church was packed with people from far and near." A spiritually moving service ensued. Bishop Turner introduced Reverend A. S. Jackson to preach. His sermon, "Wonderful Things," described "with much enthusiasm the coming wonders of the great beyond and exhorted the great audience to continue the march until these wonders are realized." The fervor with which the sermon was delivered drew "'amens' and 'hallelujahs' which rolled out freely from many hearts." Next an invitation was extended to "mourners who desired the prayers of God's people." When "several fell at the altar begging for mercy," a preacher "besought high heaven for mercy and grace for perishing sinners. Such was the earnestness and enthusiasm at this hour that the Conference was indeed a revival scene." A visiting women's missionary society official, at Bishop Turner's request, sang "Some mother's child." This rendition "bathed" the congregation "in tears and the old Methodistic fire evidently blazed in earnest upon the altar of our hearts. It was a Pentecostal scene, and although it was time to close, Bishop Turner, fired by his 'old-time fire,' marched down to the altar singing 'Come, sinners to the gospel feast.'" This hymn by Charles Wesley was often raised to invite the unsaved to accept Christ and join the church.

Come, sinners to the gospel feast,
Let every soul be Jesus' guest,
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden all mankind.

As the congregation sang the stanzas of this hymn, the bishop "opened the doors of the church," and one person joined. While Wesleyan hymns for Turner put for-

⁹*Minutes of the Second Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference*, p. 20.

mality into A.M.E. annual conference proceedings, he also used them to bring to a climax the spiritual fervor which often times occurred.¹⁰

Sermons highlighted A.M.E. annual conferences. Hence, Bishop Turner or his designee carefully chose sermon hymns which best prepared the congregation to hear the preacher. Again, the audience often sang Wesleyan hymns during these worship services. When Turner invited Bishop Abram Grant to preach the ordination sermon at the 1903 Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference at Big Bethel in Atlanta, the choir sang "My hope is built on nothing less" just before he spoke. The congregation, however, had already sung

O for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free,
A heart that always feels thy blood,
So freely spilt for me!

and

Jesus, great Shepherd of the sheep,
To thee for help we fly;
Thy little flock in safety keep,
For O the wolf is nigh!

After Bishop Turner presented Reverend F R. Sims of St. Philip in Savannah to preach at the 1904 Georgia Annual Conference at Bethel, Millen, the congregation sang

Hark, how the watchman cry,
Attend the trumpet's sound!
Stand to your arms, the foe is nigh;
The powers of hell surround.

Similarly, at the 1907 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference at Campbell Chapel, Americus, Turner introduced Reverend William D. Johnson, a future bishop, to deliver a sermon. Johnson himself had lined the hymn, "Jesus, the name high over all."¹¹

¹⁰*Journal of Proceedings of the First Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1897, p. 42; *Journal of Proceedings of the Second Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Talbotton Chapel A.M.E. Church, Talbotton, GA., Nov. 2-7, 1898 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1899), p. 8; *Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church* held in St. Paul A.M.E. Church, Madison, GA., November 9th to 15th, 1898, pp. 13-14.

¹¹*Minutes of the Fourth Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, Atlanta, Ga, November 11-17, 1903 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1904), p. 36; *Journal of Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Session of the Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Bethel A.M.E. Church, Millen, Ga., December 14-19, 1904 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1905), p. 18; *Journal of Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Campbell Chapel A.M.E. Church, Americus, Ga., Nov. 13th-18th, '07 (Atlanta: Morris Brown College Electric Print, 1907), p. 27.

While Wesleyan hymns dominated the order of service of Georgia's annual conferences, Bishop Turner also used other hymnwriters. Their songs had become as much a staple in A.M.E. hymnals as those of Charles Wesley. The works of Isaac Watts, for example, were well known to Georgia A.M.E.s. "How did my heart rejoice to hear" opened the 1898 session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference at Talbotton. In the same year at the Georgia Annual Conference at St. Andrew's in Darien Bishop Turner "made instructive comments on the first chapter of Jeremiah," and then "he rose and lined [the] hymn, Come let us join our cheerful songs . . . which was fervently sung by the assembled brethren." After Father Henry Porter, a superannuated elder, "led the conference in an earnest appeal to the throne of grace," Bishop Turner bade the congregation to sing "Come, ye that love the Lord." Additionally, Isaac Watts' "Not all the blood of beasts" started the conference's fifth day morning session. At the 1906 Georgia Annual Conference at Waycross "Go Preach My Gospel" readied the audience for the sixth day morning session.¹²

A.M.E.s deemed as Wesleyan the works of Watts, and a few others like John Newton and Philip Doddridge. As their hymns were sung in Georgia's annual conferences, Bishop Turner and the state's A.M.E. ministers and members affirmed their Wesleyan identity. At the 1898 Georgia Annual Conference in Darien, for example, Charles Wesley's "Jesus, the name high over all" "was sung with much fervor by the large congregation present." Then, after a prayer, John Newton's "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" was the sermon hymn. At the fourth day session Watts' familiar "Am I a soldier of the cross" started the conference proceedings. Watts' "Not all the blood of beasts" began the fifth day morning session while the sermon hymn was Wesley's

Thou seest my feebleness;
Jesus, be thou my power,
My help and refuge in distress,
My fortress and my tower.¹³

A.M.E.s at the 1907 Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference at St. Paul, Atlanta, put together a similar set of hymns to make the meeting a thoroughly Wesleyan occasion. The compositions of Charles Wesley played prominent roles in the proceedings. The conference secretary noted that on November 20, 1907 "at eleven o'clock, sharp, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, D.D., LL.D, [D.]C.L., senior Bishop

¹²*Journal of Proceedings of the Second Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1898, p. 15; *Journal of Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Session of the Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in St. Andrew's Chapel A.M.E. Church, Darien, Ga., Dec. 14-19, 1898 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1899), pp. 9, 28; *The Journal of Proceedings And Yearbook of the Forty-First Session of the Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1906, p. 54.

¹³*Journal of Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Session of the Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1898, pp. 11, 25, 28.

of the A.M.E. Church, and Chief Executive of the Sixth Episcopal District, in company with Bishop C[harles] S[pencer] Smith, of Detroit, Mich[igan] associating, took his place in the chair and sounded the gavel calling to order the eigh[th] session of the Atlanta [Ga.] Annual Conference. Every eye of the ‘Invincible Georgia Regulars’ were fixed upon him and silence reigned supreme.” Then, “by request, Revs. J. E. Drake and T. J. Linton led in singing two old time Methodist hymns.” Next, Bishop Turner asked his colleague, Bishop Smith, to open formally the worship services with the singing of “And are we yet alive.” Other Wesley hymns included the familiar “O for a thousand tongues to sing” and the routinely sung “Try us, O God, and search the ground.” The sermon hymn at the Sunday service was

How can a sinner know,
His sins on earth forgiven?
How can my gracious Saviour show,
My name inscribed in heaven?

The final session of the annual conference adjourned to the People’s Tabernacle since St. Paul, the host church, was too small to accommodate the huge crowd. There “a vast throng . . . gathered to witness the close and hear the appointments read.” Bishop Turner, accompanied by Bishop Smith and now by Bishop Levi J. Coppin, “proceeded to the platform and took their seats.” Bishop Turner then “requested the whole congregation to stand and sing,

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify;
A never dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.¹⁴

Watts’ hymns added to the numerous Wesley compositions which were sung at the 1907 Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference. Bishop Charles S. Smith opened a session with Watts’

Let every tongue thy goodness speak,
Thou sovereign Lord of all.

During the time that Bishop Turner read the disciplinary question on whether any members of the annual conference had died, another Watts’ hymn was sung:

¹⁴*Minutes of the Eighth Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in St. Paul A.M.E. Church, Atlanta, Ga., November 20–25, 1907 (Publishing Committee: Revs. L. A. Townsley, E. K. Nichols, J. S. Flipper, John Harmon, W. A. Fountain, J. R. Fleming, F. L. Fleming), pp. 16, 29, 30, 34.

Before Jehovah's awful throne,
 Ye nations bow with sacred joy,
 Know that the Lord is God alone;
 He can create, and he destroy.

Another session began with "My Saviour, my almighty friend." Philip Doddridge's hymn,

Awake my soul, stretch every nerve,
 And press with vigor on,

was announced on the first day evening session. After the scripture reading, "the choir joined with the congregation in singing this old Methodist melody."¹⁵

While Wesleyan hymns, whether written by the Wesleys, Watts, or others, anchored A.M.E. worship services in Methodist tradition, blacks often adapted them to their folk religious culture. Often these Methodist hymns were altered in meter and tempo to reflect black musical tastes. Moreover, the singing of Methodist music whether traditional or idiomatic stirred shouts of "Amen," "Hallelujah," "Praise the Lord," or "Thank You, Jesus!" Additionally, Bishop Turner and other A.M.E. leaders believed that Wesleyan hymns should be supplemented with musical compositions by black hymn writers.

Bishop Turner, a traditional Methodist, never discouraged open emotional displays either in preaching, singing, or in other aspects of worship. He agreed with Presiding Elder J. A. Lindsay of the Marietta District in the North Georgia Annual Conference who commended the churches within his jurisdiction for "living in the happy enjoyment of the Christian religion." He added that "the old Methodist fire which characterized the church in the days of the Wesleys and Whitfields [Whitefield] is still ablaze." Moreover, "this high classed formalism which has been, yet freezing the church to death—sapping the life-blood of too many of our city charges, has not made any perceptible degree (of progress) on the Marietta District." Turner endorsed such sentiments. In commenting on the 1906 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference in Bainbridge the bishop observed that it was a "grand session" because "the people shouted and praised God until they were finally worked down in their demonstrations of praises and thanksgiving to Almighty God." He remarked "that he had never seen anything just like it, or equal to it, in all of his life."¹⁶

Turner's annual invitations to the missionary and singer, Sara J. Duncan, to attend his Georgia conferences showed his belief in traditional Wesleyan hymns

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 19, 21, 24, 26.

¹⁶*Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church* held in Allen Temple A.M.E. Church, Atlanta, Ga., November 8–14, 1899 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1899), pp. 51–52; *Minutes of the Seventh Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in St. Mary A.M.E. Church, Thomaston, GA., November 14–19, 1906 (Atlanta: The Franklin-Turner Co., 1907), pp. 19–20.

and black folk religious music. Both belonged in A.M.E. worship services and each could enrich Methodism. Three years after Turner spearheaded in 1893 the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he drew Sara J. Duncan of Selma, Alabama into its presidency. Because southern A.M.E. women primarily belonged to this missions group, Duncan often traveled in the region to promote its programs. That objective made her a frequent visitor to Turner's Georgia meetings. Her musical ability also made her a welcome participant in the proceedings of Turner's annual conferences.¹⁷

Duncan sang twice at the 1903 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference at St. James, Columbus. Her song "went to the depth of every heart." Again at the 1906 North Georgia Annual Conference at Ebenezer, Cedartown Duncan "rendered two beautiful songs." Sometimes her music consisted of traditional selections or Wesleyan hymns. She sang "Jesus, keep me near the cross" at the 1899 Macon (Georgia) Annual Conference at Steward Chapel in Macon. At the 1901 Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference at Mount Zion, Newnan, for example, Duncan sang "a beautiful poem." On other occasions her music used familiar idioms, and often deeply emotional responses resulted. At the Macon Conference in 1899 her rendition of "Some mother's child" caused one observer to say that "no pen can picture the effect this song had on the Conference. A spiritual wave swept over the entire audience in such a manner as we have never witnessed before." In Warrenton at the 1904 Macon (Georgia) Annual Conference Duncan, "the sweet singer and world-wide soloist, sung in sweetest tones, that most beautiful solo, 'Tell mother I'll be there' . . . which like an Eolian harp, swept through the sensibilities of each heart of the vast audience, as they remembered their loved ones long since gone to the better land." "Some happy day" was her rendition at Nelson Chapel, Bainbridge at the 1906 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference. "The melody of the song," wrote one observer, together with the rich intonations of the voice of the singer, soon secured the attention, as well as the admiration of the audience."¹⁸

¹⁷Sara J. Duncan, *Progressive Missions In The South And Addresses* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1906), pp. 9-10; 12-14.

¹⁸*Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in St. James A.M.E. Church, Columbus, GA., November 4th-9th, 1903 (Americus, Ga.: Press Publishing Co., 1903), p. 33; *Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1906, p. 23; *Minutes of the Second Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1901, p. 39; *Proceedings of the Macon [Georgia] Eighteenth Annual Session of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Stewart A.M.E. Church, Macon, Ga., Nov. 15-21, 1899 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1900), pp. 15, 18; *Journal of the Twenty Third Session of the Macon [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1904, pp. 40-41; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Nelson Chapel A.M.E. Church, Bainbridge, Georgia, November 7-12, 1906 (Atlanta: The Franklin-Turner Company, 1907), p. 27.

For Bishop Turner Methodist music had a dual function. In both the congregation and the conference the singing of Charles Wesley's "Jesus, the light of the world" and "Father, I stretch my hands to thee" made A.M.E.s readily identifiable as Wesleyans. If whites wondered or if blacks were unsure, they would no longer have doubts when A.M.E.s routinely sang or recited—

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high;
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

Nonetheless, Turner encouraged and endorsed the blending of these Wesleyan hymns into idioms that allowed blacks in general and A.M.E.s in particular to pour meaning into the lyrics which reflected their special and singular experience with God. As dignified African Methodists they could sing in conference "Jesus, great Shepherd of the sheep," and later in a praise service participate in worship in ways more informal and less structured. For example, at the 1897 North Georgia Annual Conference at St. Mary's, Thomaston "before the hour for preaching had arrived the vast congregation had gathered and engaged in one of those old-time prayer-meetings and song service(s)." There was a similar occurrence at the 1901 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference at St. Thomas in Thomasville. "Anxiously awaiting the time of the arrival of the time for service," recorded one observer, "the people began crowding the church and were entertained by a song service." The following well-known spiritual songs were sung: "Hallelujah, 'tis done" led by Rev. A. Beall; "At the cross," led by Rev. C. C. Bryant; "When I can read my title clear," led by Rev. S. Proctor." After the formal start of the worship service, "Blessed assurance," and a Watts hymn, "Am I a soldier of the cross," and Wesley's "O for a thousand tongues to sing," were sung. Bishop Turner then introduced Reverend David L. Williams, "the blind poet, evangelist and musician," who led in singing "Looking this way." After his singing and exhortation, the congregation sang another Wesley selection, "Jesus the light of the world." Williams returned to sing "I must die in the field." "The people were so delighted with his enthusiastic singing," said a conference secretary, "till they desired him to sing another, which he did to the delight of all, using that old familiar spiritual song, 'Free at last.'" When Williams came back to another session, he sang the spiritual, "Go tell it on the mountain." After Reverend R. V. Branch "preached a brief logical sermon eliciting much applause, Williams sang "several plantation melodies." "And are we yet alive" and "Free

at last” had a place in any Wesleyan conference over which Bishop Henry M. Turner presided.¹⁹

While Turner surely had his favorites among the many Methodist hymns which he knew from memory, he did not believe that Wesleyan hymn writing was over. He pointed out to the 1897 Southwest Georgia Annual Conference in Cuthbert that there was “great value of the composition and music of the hymns of the Negro.” He “gave a very instructive lecture on hymnology and declared that the time had come for the Negro to preserve and write his own hymns and set them to music, in order to meet the demands of the age.” Turner also made remarks to the 1905 Georgia Annual Conference at Bethel, Quitman concerning “the power of Negro music.” These comments, said one minister, were “both inspiring and encouraging to the Conference.”²⁰ Already, Turner had been heeded. A black Methodist Episcopal Church pastor in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Reverend Charles Albert Tindley, was writing hymns which A.M.E.s were already singing. Sara J. Duncan sang Tindley’s “Stand by me” at the 1906 Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference in Thomaston. It was a “beautiful song,” said the conference scribe. At the 1907 Atlanta (Georgia) Annual Conference in Atlanta “By and by, when the morning comes” was sung.²¹

Although Bishop Turner was best known as a Reconstruction politician and African emigrationist, he was similarly committed to Methodist doctrine and Wesleyan hymnody. As the Bishop of Georgia for 12 years he upheld the Wesleyan musical tradition while he encouraged efforts to blend it with black folk religious practices. As a result A.M.E. testimonies about salvation from sin and divine rescue from racial oppression were expressed in Wesleyan worship rituals anchored in Methodist tradition and African American religious experience.

¹⁹*Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church* held in St. Mary’s A.M.E. Church, Thomaston, Ga., Nov. 3rd–9th, 1897 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1897), p. 20; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifth Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in St. Thomas A.M.E. Church, Thomasville, Ga., November 6th–11th, 1901, (Americus, Ga.: L. A. Morgan & Co., 1902), pp. 14–15, 28–29.

²⁰*Minutes of the First Session of the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1897, p. 7; *Journal of Proceedings of the Fortieth Session of the Georgia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held in Bethel A.M.E. Church, Quitman, Ga., December 13–19, 1905 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1906), p. 38.

²¹See Ralph Jones, *Charles Albert Tindley: Prince of Preachers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982); *Minutes of the Seventh Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1906, p. 30; *Minutes of the Eighth Session of the Atlanta [Georgia] Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1907, p. 31.