

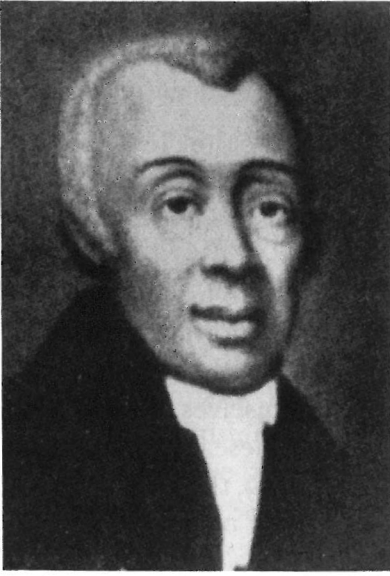
## Introduction: O Black and Unknown Bards

In the prologue to this hymnbook, James Weldon Johnson captures the quintessence of the African-American spiritual and the creativity of the “unknown bards” who fashioned it from the rhythm latent in their bones and the melody overflowing from their religious souls. Serving as the preamble to his *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), “O Black and Unknown Bards” is also a fitting prologue to this collection of hymns by fourteen black bards who either were born into slavery themselves or were of the first generation of freedmen. Even though these fourteen are not “unnamed” (like the creators of the spirituals), they are, as bards, “unfamed.” Never again to be forgotten, their names are Richard Allen, Joshua McCarter Simpson, Charles Price Jones, Charles Harrison Mason, F. M. Hamilton, Lucius H. Holsey, George Patterson McKinney, Sarah Collins Fernandis, John Howardton Smith, Mary L. Tate, Mary F. L. Keith, H. C. Jackson, S. R. Chambers, and Robert Nathaniel Dett.

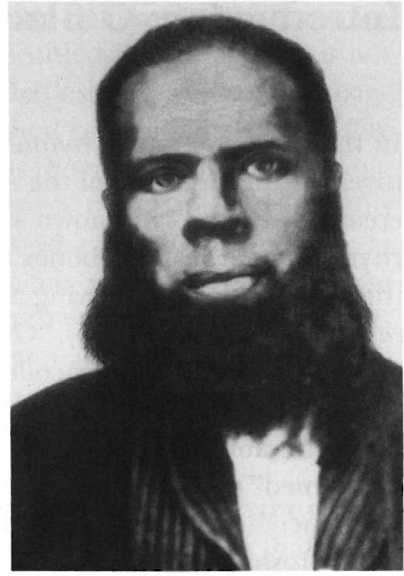
### Richard Allen

Richard Allen (1760–1831) was the founder and first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Of the myriad denominations that the black church comprises, the AMEs have the most extensive and impressive genealogy of hymnals, dated 1801, 1818, 1837, 1876, 1892, 1941, 1954, and 1984. Although the volume of 1818 is considered the first official hymnbook of the church, insofar as it was published subsequent to the inaugural General Conference of 1816, Bishop Allen’s hymnbook of 1801 is doubtless the most portentous hymnological artifact of the AME Church and the black church at large.

Entitled *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns, Selected from Various Authors*, Allen’s compilation of fifty-four classic and “folk” hymns later appeared in a second edition, containing ten additional pieces, with the slightly modified title *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs, from Various Authors*. Although the hymn-writers are not credited (a commonality in hymnbooks of the



Richard Allen



Joshua McCarter Simpson

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), it is determinable that many of the classic pieces are by such hymnists as Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and John Newton. Of interest to the present collection of unsung hymns is the one piece by Allen himself, “See! How the Nations Rage Together.” The authorship of this hymn is known in that it shares lines and stanzas with one of the two original hymns in Allen’s autobiography, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*.

### **Joshua McCarter Simpson**

Joshua McCarter Simpson (born ca. 1821) was a free black citizen of Windsor and (later) Zanesville, Ohio, a graduate of Oberlin College, and a composer of antislavery lyrics. While most antislavery reformers, poets, and songwriters were white Protestant evangelicals, this unknown black bard compiled fifty-five original antislavery songs in three of his own privately published songbooks, making him the most prolific of abolition songsters. Revealing the roots of his poetic aspirations, Simpson remarks thus in the preface to his songbook *The Emancipation Car* (1874): “As soon as I could write, which was not until I was past twenty-one



Charles Price Jones

years old, a spirit of poetry, (which was always in me,) became revived, and seemed to waft before my mind horrid pictures of the condition of my people, and something seemed to say, 'Write and sing about it—you can sing what would be death to speak.' So I began to write and sing."

Of notice to this collection of unsung hymns is a song entitled "Freedom's Cause," the opening piece in Simpson's first published collection, *Original Anti-Slavery Songs* (1852). "Freedom's Cause" is seemingly the only piece in Simpson's volume of "fugitive verse" that was to be sung to the tune of a sacred rather than secular song, "We Won't Give Up the Bible." Too, while most anti-slavery songs are implicitly sacred, this one is explicitly so. And since it contains no specific antislavery imagery, it has a hymnic quality that even modern worshipers can appreciate.

### **Charles Price Jones**

Charles Price Jones (1865–1949) was one of the great organizers of the Holiness movement among black Protestants who were dissatisfied with the spiritual condition of the Baptists and Methodists. Although Jones was a firm believer in the Holiness move-

ment, which had begun in 1867 upon the convening of the first national Holiness convention, he did not set out to found a new denomination. However, because the Baptists rejected him and his followers, marking them fanatics and heretics, he was forced to come out from among them. Not only did he establish a new denomination, the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA, he also created a vast and rich corpus of original hymnody—some thousand original gospel hymns (including some anthems), almost all of which he personally set to music.

Two years following the national Holiness convention which Jones held in 1897 (the official founding date of his denomination), this unsung hymnist commenced a prolific output of songbooks which featured his own works: *Jesus Only* (1899), *Jesus Only, Nos. 1 and 2* (1901), *Select Songs, His Fullness* (1906), *Sweet Selections*, and *His Fullness (Enlarged)* (1928). In 1940 the first official denominational hymnal was published, *Jesus Only Songs and Hymns Standard Hymnal*, which in 1977 was revised under the title *His Fullness Songs*. Intermixed with the favorite gospel hymns of the day, Jones's hymns constitute about half of each of these songbooks and hymnals, and yet they are relatively unknown and unsung among mainline Protestants.

Although the themes that coalesce in Jones's songs clearly identify him as a product of the gospel hymn movement, his songs bear the distinct Holiness insignia of biblicism, perfectionism, and separatism, and their antitheses, antiseccularism and anti-culturalism. In spite of this strong Holiness bent (which has made many of his hymns theologically repulsive to mainline Protestants), the four representative pieces in this collection illustrate that his poetry is often exquisite and unusually heartfelt.

### **Charles Harrison Mason**

Charles Harrison Mason (1866–1961) was one of the early leaders of the Holiness movement, until he attended the protracted Los Angeles revival where Pentecostalism originated in April 1906. For approximately five weeks he remained at the Azusa Street Revival, and in March 1907 he finally satisfied his aspiration: baptism by the Holy Ghost as evidenced by speaking in other tongues. Converted to the belief that tongues alone is the

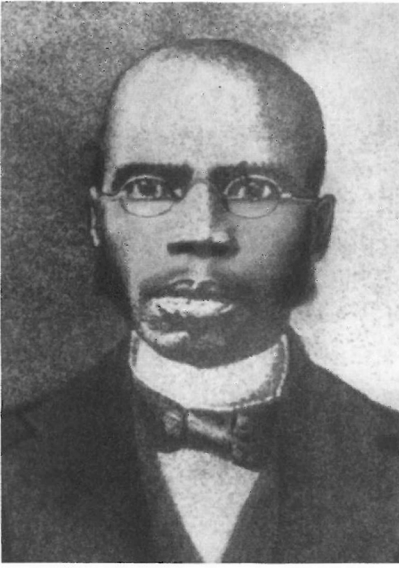




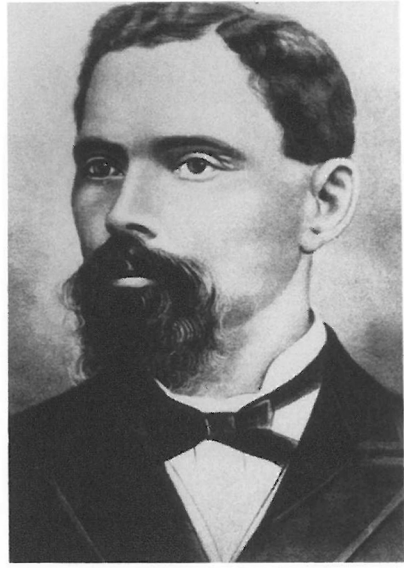
Charles Harrison Mason

initial evidence of Spirit-baptism, Mason returned to Lexington, Mississippi, where he had been working with his partner C. P. Jones in the Holiness crusade and pastoring a Holiness church. Because Jones would not accept Mason's newly appropriated belief that tongues is the sole initial evidence of Spirit-baptism, the two longtime friends went their separate ways. Jones became the official founder of the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA, and Mason of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC).

The first hymnal of the COGIC, entitled *Yes, Lord!* (1982), was published a full seventy-five years after the founding of the church. Along with the myriad gospel songs covering the C. P. Jones, Thomas A. Dorsey, and Andrae Crouch eras, *Yes, Lord!* contains three pieces by the denomination's venerable founder: "Yes, Lord," "My Soul Loves Jesus," and "My Soul Says, 'Yes.'" Because the COGIC today is a moving force in Afro-Christianity and black church hymnody, many black worshipers have heard these songs sung at one point or another. However, these are not the only praise songs Bishop Mason created and sang during his ecclesial career. In a book entitled *The History and Life Work of Elder C. H. Mason* (1924) are seven praise hymns created and sung extemporaneously by Mason. What is revealing about these pieces,



F. M. Hamilton



Lucius H. Holsey

heard and transcribed by one Elder G. G. Brown in an essay entitled “Observations of Elder C. H. Mason; Chief Apostle,” is the appearance of the “yes” exultation and similar affirmative responses to God’s divine behest. Typical of Mason’s praise songs in the *Yes, Lord!* hymnal, these seven short pieces are replete with repetition, variation, and permutation, all of which render them kin to the chanted “celebration” in black preaching.

### **F. M. Hamilton and Lucius H. Holsey**

Rev. F. M. Hamilton (d. 1912), a native of Macon, Georgia, who pastored in Alabama, Virginia, Arkansas, and Georgia, was for about three decades one of the recognized leaders of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME). He served as secretary to the General Conference from 1886 to 1910, editor of *The Christian Index* from 1886 to 1892, and book agent of the publishing house from 1886 to 1890. As author of numerous pamphlets and monographs on CME Church history and polity, Rev. Hamilton was probably the most prolific writer in the early years of the denomination.

In 1904 Rev. Hamilton, with the editorial assistance of Bishop

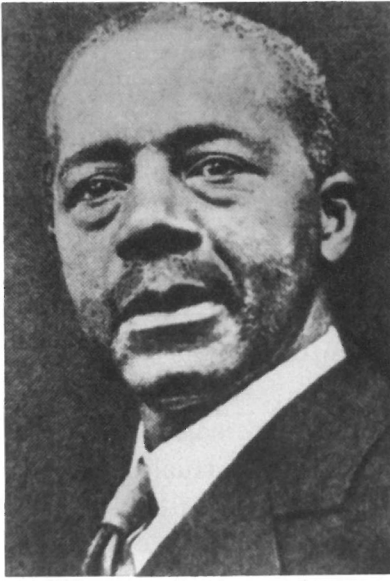
Lucius H. Holsey (1842–1920), compiled a songbook for the CME Church entitled *Songs of Love and Mercy*. “Love and Mercy,” as it was called, contains 198 hymns, a plentiful 54 of which were composed or set to music by Rev. Hamilton—he composed both the text and music to 38 hymns, the text alone to 4 additional hymns, and the music to 12 pieces (5 hymns, 5 arrangements, and 2 anthems). One of the hymns set by Rev. Hamilton is Bishop Holsey’s “O Rapturous Scenes,” the anthem of the church. Apparently written by Bishop Holsey during Reconstruction, the hymn was probably set by Rev. Hamilton during the years leading up to its initial publication in *Songs of Love and Mercy*.

While Bishop Holsey, a Georgia-born freedman and the third elected bishop (1873) of the CME Church, was virtually the father of CME hymnody—having compiled the church’s first hymnal of 1891 and played a part in the making of “Love and Mercy”—Rev. Hamilton, the most prolific of CME hymnists, is without doubt the sweet singer of Colored Methodism. An abundant twenty-nine of Rev. Hamilton’s hymns are reproduced in the present volume because *The Hymnal of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church* (1987), being an exact duplicate of *The New National Baptist Hymnal*, includes naught but his setting of Bishop Holsey’s “O Rapturous Scenes” as part of the hymnal’s prefatory matter.

### **George Patterson McKinney**

Rev. George Patterson McKinney, Sr. (1863–1933), was born the son of Florida slaves. Following in the footsteps of his father, Rev. Ishmael McKinney, he became a Baptist minister and was licensed to preach in 1885 and ordained in 1888. From 1 October 1890 to 1 January 1916 he served as pastor of the African Baptist Church in Live Oaks, Florida (f. 1868). In May 1892, he was appointed president of the Florida Institute (now Florida Memorial College) in Daytona Beach, the school he had entered as a student ten years earlier. He served the college as president until 1903 and again from 1911 to 1914.

It was during his second stint as president of the Florida college, founded by the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, that Rev. McKinney wrote his first and only hymn. Entitled “Emancipation Hymn,” the piece was initially sung to the tune of



George Patterson McKinney, Sr.

“Deliverance Will Come” by the students of the Florida Institute on 1 January 1913 for the fifty-first commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation. The musical setting was composed about a year later in 1914 by Josephine Straughn (d. 1928), a black woman from South America who served as an agent of the Foreign Missionary Board.

### **Sarah Collins Fernandis**

Sarah Collins Fernandis (1863–1951) is one of the esteemed alumni of Hampton Institute, having graduated in 1882 when General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, its founder, was still principal. Best remembered among Hampton alumni as the author of the school’s alma mater, from about 1902 to 1935 Fernandis also published numerous original poems in Hampton’s famed periodical, *The Southern Workman*, most of which appeared in her privately published collection entitled *Poems* (1925).

Fernandis’s poems evolved from the same bedrock of religious ardor that inspired her discipleship as a teacher with the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of Boston and as an independent social worker in the deteriorating black communities of Washington,



Sarah Collins Fernandis



John Howardton Smith

dc; East Greenwich, Rhode Island; and her hometown, Baltimore. In a book entitled *Twenty-two Years' Work at Hampton* (1891), which in part recounts Fernandis's first six years of social service after graduating from Hampton, the author, Helen Ludlow, quotes Fernandis's life's motto, which is unmistakably the impetus behind her hymns of service and discipleship: "My aim in life is to do well whatever I find to do; to grow broader and deeper in intellect through reading and study; to keep my heart in sympathy with my fellow-creatures and alive to its duties to them; and to make my life a contradiction to the idea that a Negro is low and groveling in sentiment and purpose. I mean to look up and lift up."

### **John Howardton Smith**

John Howardton Smith (1880–1977) was born the son of ex-slaves in Rowan County, North Carolina. Ordained a Presbyterian Elder (a lay minister) in 1900, for decades Smith served the black congregation of the Broad Street Presbyterian Church in Statesville and the larger Presbytery of Yadkin of the Western District of North Carolina. As the clerk of local church sessions,

superintendent of the Sunday school, choir leader, and secretary of Western District conferences, Smith's religious zeal also produced over 250 gospel hymns, poems, proverbs, and religious short stories. His hymns, a substantial number of which are featured in this collection, first appeared in his privately published volumes *Gospel Songs and Poems* (1926), *Unpolished Gems* (1939), and *Evangelistic Songs* (1927), a piece of sheet music containing five original hymns set to melodies apparently composed by Smith and harmonized by an unidentified musician.

Although Smith is virtually unknown today, during his day he received substantial attention as a result of these works. The 1 November 1939 issue of *The New Advance* gave a favorable review of his *Unpolished Gems*. And on 1 May 1941 Ella Mae Lineberger wrote him from nearby Winston-Salem, saying, "I just had to write you and thank you again for the beautiful music and the wonderful book of poems. Only God can be with a man who writes such sweet and beautiful poems." A few years following, on 26 December 1944, came a letter from the president of the International Mark Twain Society inviting Smith to be an honorary member alongside such notable honorary members as Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, and Edgar Lee Masters (according to the organization stationery). The letter said, "Dear Mr. Smith: For your contribution to literature, the Executive Committee has voted you the Honorary Membership. The award will be made upon your approval. There are no dues. Cordially yours, Cyril Clemens." Another newspaper clipping has a caption which reads, "John Smith Presented Honorary Membership [in] Eugene Field Society." In addition, there is an autographed picture to him from opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs. It says, "To Mr. John Howardton Smith, an unusual, fine, and creative gentleman."

### **Mary L. Tate and Mary F. L. Keith**

The House of God, Which Is the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of the Truth, Without Controversy, Inc., was founded in 1903 by Mary L. Tate (d. 1930). The original Chattanooga congregation of this Holiness denomination was probably initially associated with another black Holiness group founded in 1889: the Church of the Living God (Christian



Mary L. Tate

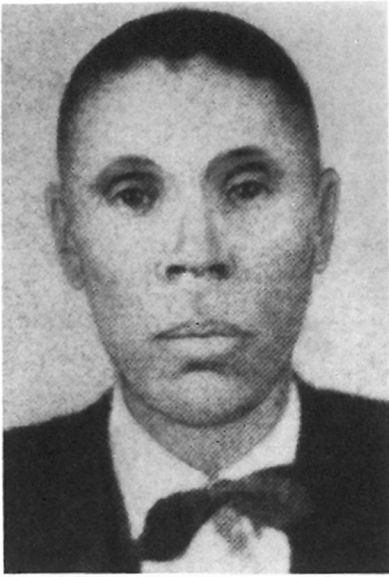


Mary F. L. Keith

Workers for Fellowship), organized in Wrightsville, Arkansas, by William Christian.

Many of the hymns sung in Mother Tate's church were compiled in the denomination's first hymnbook, *Spiritual Songs and Hymns* (ca. 1944). Privately published in Chattanooga, the volume says on its cover page that its content was "Composed and Compiled by Bishop M. L. Tate and Edited by Bishop M. F. L. Keith." The preface by Mother Tate's successor, Bishop Keith (d. 1960), chief overseer from 1930 to 1960, further states, "This Hymn Book represents the work and labor of our Dear Mother M. L. Tate." Although none of the 254 hymns of the volume are attributed, Mother Tate by no means "composed" them all or even most of them. Perhaps Bishop Keith meant that Mother Tate composed the hymnbook and not actually each and every hymn therein. On the other hand, it is quite possible that Mother Tate did compose some of these hymns, and that some of them might even have been the work of Bishop Keith, for Keith states in the hymnbook's foreword that the Lord had also given her many songs which she hoped to bring out some day in music form.

In *Spiritual Songs and Hymns* are three manner of hymns which



H. C. Jackson

may have been the work of one of these two Holiness matriarchs: the Scripture-citing hymns, which actually incorporate biblical references in a fashion typical of Holiness preaching and teaching; the hymns about “mother,” distinct in that no hymnal of a patriarchal denomination so affirms the mothering aspect of womanhood; and the single hymn entitled, in part after the church, “The Church of the Living God,” which may have been the denominational anthem. Because all of these hymns which Bishop Tate or Bishop Keith could have composed are omitted from the new *Spiritual Songs and Hymns*, published under the current chief overseer, Bishop James W. Jenkins, their appearance in the present volume is all the more vital and valuable.

### **H. C. Jackson and S. R. Chambers**

The earliest collection of hymnody produced by a member of the Church of God in Christ is the work of Elder H. C. Jackson, *The Jackson Bible Universal Selected Gospel Songs* (ca. 1940s). According to the caption beneath his picture inside the cover, Elder Jackson was from Memphis and came to Mississippi to pastor two small churches, in New Albany and Aberdeen. While residing in New



Albany, he became the state evangelist of Mississippi Churches of God in Christ and the founding president and dean of a Bible school bearing his name, the Jackson Bible Universal, Inc. The songbook, according to the advertisement on the cover, was published and sold as a means of raising money for the school.

Among the thirty-five songs in Jackson's songbook are pieces by such gospel hymnists as C. A. Tindley, Thomas A. Dorsey, W. H. Brewster, and Kenneth Morris. Of special interest to the present collection of unsung hymns are the three original pieces by Jackson himself. One of these, "Jesus Is Healing Today," is understandably devoted to the subject of divine healing, for the testimonies prefacing the volume claim that Jackson was a "God sent man" through whom the Lord healed all manner of afflictions among the multitudes. "The Elder has favors with God in prayer," reads the caption above his picture, "and is widely known in the United States by the Lord healing through him, and throughout the Church of God in Christ." Elder Jackson himself may have sung his original "Jesus Is Healing Today" as he healed the afflicted who flocked to his revivals, for two of the unattributed pieces in the songbook have the footnote "As sung by Elder H. C. Jackson," indicating that he was a singing evangelist.

Another original piece in Jackson's songbook, which is included in this collection of unsung hymns, is "Me and the Devil Had a Tussle but I Won," by Elder S. R. Chambers. Probably a fellow churchman of Jackson, Elder Chambers was apparently a singing evangelist as well, for another piece in the songbook has the footnote "As sung by Elder S. R. Chambers." Elder Chambers's hymn reflects the denomination's doctrine of demons as expressed in its denominational discipline. "It can well be said that the Christian Church believes in demons, Satan, and devils," says the COGIC manual. "We believe in their power and purpose. We believe they can be subdued and conquered as in the commandment to the believer by Jesus." That Satan can be conquered is the very message of Elder Chambers's hymn.

### **Robert Nathaniel Dett**

Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882–1943) was a composer and educator largely known for his arrangements of black spirituals, his



Robert Nathaniel Dett

best-known published collections being *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton Institute* (1927) and *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals* (1936). As the longtime director of the Hampton Institute Choir (1923–32), Dett’s estimable music career was spent “developing” the spiritual into anthem form in order that the “slave songs” might be of practical use in refined Christian worship.

Dett himself was unquestionably a refined and highly educated man, holding a bachelor of music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (1908) and a master of music degree from the Eastman School of Music (1931), and having done intermittent study at several other American universities and in France and Germany. On leave from his professorship at Hampton Institute for a year of study at Harvard University (1920–21), Dett defended his compositional “development” of the spiritual in a four-part essay entitled “Negro Music,” which won him Harvard’s Bowdoin Literary Prize in 1920.

Dett’s sublime writing style, which helped him to win the Harvard award, was in part the consequence of his appreciation of literature and language. In fine, he was a poet. Not only did he produce two collections of original poetry, *Album of a Heart* (1911)

and *The Song of Seven* (unpublished), but James Weldon Johnson included one of his published poems in his famed *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922). What is special about the piece included in the present collection of unsung hymns is that it is probably the only hymn he ever wrote, and until now it has never been published.

While Dett, a child prodigy, was taught by his mother at an early age to recite the poetic works of Tennyson and Shakespeare and long nurtured an appreciation for the writings of Goethe, Browning, Longfellow, and Milton, the hymns of the other unknown bards represented in this volume are equally special in their own way—Bishops Mason, Tate, and Keith and Elders Jackson and Chambers in the depth of their scripturalness and Christ-centeredness; Bishop Holsey in the romanticism of his quest for eternal rest; Mr. Simpson and Rev. McKinney in their edification of the ideal of black liberation; Bishop Allen, Mrs. Fernandis, and Elder Smith in their zeal for social discipleship; and Bishop Jones and Rev. Hamilton for their estimable poetic as well as musical skills. Even though these fourteen unsung hymnists are not “unnamed,” as are the creators of the spirituals, they are as bards “unfamed.”

Jon Michael Spencer