

Rev. James W. C. Pennington, D.D.

Born in Maryland 1809, a slave, escaped to the North, educated himself for the ministry, ordained 1838, pastor Hartford Talcott Street Church 1840-1847, stated supply 1855; pastor Fourth Cong'l Church (Colored) Portland, Me. 1868-1870. Died Jacksonville, Florida 1870.

Married in Hartford at the home of Edward Goodwin, at one time editor and publisher of The Connecticut Courant, to Almira, who had been for a considerable time a member of the household of Mr. Goodwin, by Rev. Joel Hawes, Pastor of the First Cong'l Church.

"The first public movement made with reference to doing something to carry the Gospel to Africa, and for the aid of colored people in America, was by the Rev. James W. C. Pennington, D.D., the colored pastor of the First Colored Cong'l Church in Hartford, Ct., who called a meeting in his own church May 5, 1841, at which a committee was appointed to call a general meeting of the friends of missions, which was held in Hartford, August 18, 1841, to consider the subject of missions to Africa. This was the origin of associated society work for Africa and some of the antecedents of the American Missionary Association, which has done so great and good work for the freedmen, Chinese and Indians. Mr. Pennington came to Hartford as a fugitive slave, and was employed by a man who had a large library of books which he was permitted to use. He worked days and studied nights, until fitted for the ministry. His ability was so well known by his brethren in the ministry that he was often called upon to preside at their association meetings. One one of these occasions a student for the ministry was examined and licensed to preach, Mr. Pennington, as moderator, signed his license. Mr. Pennington was at that time the slave property of this young student's father. Later, Mr. Pennington, fearing that his old master might search him out and trouble him, raised money, and through a friend, John Hooker, Esq., negotiated with his master and bought his freedom."

"Dr. Pennington was born a slave on the farm of Col. Gordon in the state of Maryland. His early life was not unlike the common lot of the bondmen of the Middle States. He was by trade a blacksmith which increased his value to his owner. He had no opportunity for learning and was ignorant of letters when he made his escape to the north. Through intense application to books he gained as far as possible what slavery had deprived him of in his younger days. Dr. Pennington had not been free long ere he turned his attention to theology and became an efficient preacher of the Presbyterian denomination. He was several years settled over a church in Hartford. He has been in Europe three times, his second visit being the most important, as he remained 3 or 4 years preaching and lecturing, during which time he attended the Peace Conferences in Paris, Brussels and London. While in Germany the degree of D.D. was conferred upon him by the University of Heidelberg. On his return to the U.S. he received a call and

was settled over Shiloh Church, New York City. The doctor has been a good student, is a ripe scholar and is deeply versed in theology. While at Paris in 1849, we, with the American and English delegates to the Peace Conference, attended divine services at the Protestant Church where Dr. Penning had been invited to preach. His sermon on that occasion was an eloquent production, made a marked impression on his hearers and created upon the minds of all a more elevated idea of the abilities of the negro. In past years he has labored zealously and successfully for the education and moral, social and religious elevation of his race. The doctor is unadulterated in blood, with strongly marked African features, in stature he is of the common size, slightly inclined to corpulency, with an athletic frame and good constitution. Dr. P. is considered a good Greek, Latin and German scholar, although his early life was spent in slavery."

From "The Black Man" William Wells Brown

*Wade full & interesting account of early life & edscope
of Mr Pennington in Chambers (Edinburgh) Journal
Span. Review Vol 13 Jan-June 1850 pp 122, 123 & 124 entitled
"The Fugitive Negro Blacksmith"*