

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas James

*The Rev. Thomas James (1804-1891) was one of Rochester's leading black citizens. A life-long worker in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, James was a principal founder of Rochester's A.M.E. Zion in the 1820s and was later engaged in extensive missionary work in other parts of the country. More than this, he was a participant in the antislavery movement from its beginnings in western New York and New England. During the Civil War, James, an ex-slave himself, assisted Union authorities in the relief of newly liberated blacks in Louisville, Kentucky — complicated and dangerous work in a violent border state.*

*In 1886, having returned to Rochester, James wrote a brief autobiographical account and published it in pamphlet form as the "Life of Rev. Thomas James, By Himself." Two printings of the pamphlet were quickly exhausted, and in 1887 a third edition appeared, identical in text to the earlier version but with an enlarged title and addendum containing two poems and the text of James' wartime commission. Copies of*

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*the autobiography are now quite rare. The text for this issue of Rochester History is taken without abridgment from the third edition, with the cover title, "Wonderful Eventful Life of Rev. Thomas James, By Himself. Rochester, N.Y. 1887. Third Edition. Price, 25 Cents. Rochester, N.Y.: Post-Express Printing Company, Mill Street. 1887."*

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## TO THE READER

The story of my life is a simple one, perhaps hardly worth the telling. I have written it in answer to many and oft repeated requests on the part of my friends for a relation of its incidents, and to them I dedicate this little volume.

THE AUTHOR.

Rochester, Feb. 15, 1886.

Life of  
Rev. Thomas James,  
By Himself

I was born a slave at Canajoharie, this state, in the year 1804.\* I was the third of four children, and we were all the property of Asa Kimball, who, when I was in the eighth year of my age, sold my mother, brother and elder sister to purchasers from Smithtown, a village not far distant from Amsterdam in the same part of the state. My mother refused to go, and ran into the garret to seek a hiding place. She was pursued, caught, tied hand and foot and delivered to her new owner. I caught my last sight of my mother as they rode off with her. My elder brother and sister were taken away at the same time. I never saw either my mother or sister again. Long years afterwards my brother and I were reunited, and he died in this city a little over a year ago. From him I learned that my mother died about the year 1846, in the place to which she had been taken. My brother also informed me that he and his sister were separated soon after their transfer to a Smithport master, and he never heard of her subsequent fate. Of my father I never had any personal knowledge, and, indeed, never heard anything. My youngest sister, the other member of the family, died when I was yet a youth.

While I was still in the seventeenth year of my age, Master Kimball was killed in a runaway accident; and at the administrator's sale I was sold with the rest of the property, my new master being Cromwell Bartlett, of the same neighborhood. As I remember, my first master was a well-to-do but rough farmer, a skeptic in religious matters, but of better heart than address; for he treated me well. He owned several farms, and my work was that of a farm hand. My new master had owned me but a few months when he sold me, or rather traded me, to George H. Hess, a wealthy farmer of the vicinity of Fort Plain. I was bartered in exchange for a yoke of steers,

[\*New York State did not abolish slavery until July 4, 1827.]

a colt and some additional property, the nature and amount of which I have now forgotten. I remained with Master Hess from March until June of the same year, when I ran away. My master had worked me hard, and at last undertook to whip me. This led me to seek escape from slavery. I arose in the night, and taking the newly staked line of the Erie canal for my route, traveled along it westward until, about a week later, I reached the village of Lockport. No one had stopped me in my flight. Men were at work digging the new canal at many points, but they never troubled themselves even to question me. I slept in barns at night and begged food at farmers' houses along my route. At Lockport a colored man showed me the way to the Canadian border. I crossed the Niagara at Youngstown on the ferry-boat, and was free!

Once on free soil, I began to look about for work, and found it at a point called Deep Cut on the Welland Canal, which they were then digging. I found the laborers a rough lot, and soon had a mind to leave them. After three months had passed, I supposed it safe to return to the American side, and acting on the idea I recrossed the river. A farmer named Rich, residing near Youngstown, engaged me as a wood chopper. In the spring I made my way to Rochesterville and found a home with Lawyer Talbert. The chores about his place were left to me, and I performed the same service for Orlando Hastings. I was then nineteen years of age. As a slave I had never been inside of a school or a church, and I knew nothing of letters or religion. The wish to learn awoke in me almost from the moment I set foot in the place, and I soon obtained an excellent chance to carry the wish into effect. After the opening of the Erie Canal, I obtained work in the warehouse of the Hudson and Erie line, and found a home with its manager, Mr. Pliny Allen Wheeler. I was taught to read by Mr. Freeman, who had opened a Sunday-school of his own for colored youths, on West Main street, or Buffalo street, as it was then called. But my self-education advanced

fastest in the warehouse during the long winter and spring months, when the canal was closed and my only work consisted of chores about the place and at my employer's residence. The clerks helped me whenever I needed help in my studies. Soon I had learning enough to be placed in charge of the freight business of the warehouse, with full direction over the lading of boats. I became a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Society in 1823, when the church was on Ely Street, and my studies soon took the direction of preparation for the ministry. In 1828 I taught a school for colored children on Favor street, and I began holding meetings at the same time. In the following year I first formally commenced preaching, and in 1830 I bought as a site for a religious edifice the lot now occupied by Zion's church. In the meantime the Ely street society had ceased to exist, its death having been hastened by internal quarrels and by dishonesty among its trustees. On the lot already mentioned I built a small church edifice, which was afterwards displaced by a larger one, the latter finally giving way to the present structure on the same site. I was ordained as a minister in May, 1833, by Bishop Rush. I had been called Tom as a Slave, and they called me Jim at the warehouse. I put both together when I reached manhood, and was ordained as Rev. Thomas James.

*[The Rev. James soon channeled much of his energy into the newly emergent abolition movement. Anti-slavery sentiment existed in the colonial period; it was greatly stimulated by the rhetoric of the Revolution and by the controversy, in 1820, over admission of Missouri as a slave state—Jefferson's "fire-bell in the night." But the abolitionism which culminated in the Civil War is said to date from 1831, the year when William Lloyd Garrison began publication of the Liberator and organized the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Similar efforts at organizing opponents of slavery were undertaken simultaneously elsewhere in the North.]*

Two years before the last mentioned event in my life,

Judge [Ashley] Sampson, vice-president of the local branch of the African Colonization Society of that day, turned over to me a batch of anti-slavery literature sent him by Arthur Tappan. It was these documents that turned my thoughts into a channel which they never quitted until the colored man became the equal of the white in the eye of the law, if not in the sight of his neighbor of another race. In the early summer of 1833 we held the first of a series of anti-slavery meetings in the court house. The leading promoters of that meeting were William Bloss, Dr. [William W.] Reid — whose widow, now in the 86th year of her age, still lives in Rochester — and Dr. [James] W. Smith. There was a great crowd in attendance on the first night, but its leading motive was curiosity, and it listened without interfering with the proceedings. The second night we were plied with questions, and on the third they drowned with their noise the voices of the speakers and finally turned out the lights. Not to be baulked of his purpose, Mr. Bloss, who was not a man to be cowed by opposition, engaged the session room of the Third Presbyterian church; but even there we were forced to lock the doors before we could hold our abolition meeting in peace. There we organized our anti-slavery society, and when the journals of the day refused to publish our constitution and by-laws, we bought a press for a paper of our own and appointed the three leaders already named to conduct it. It was printed fortnightly and was called *The Rights of Man*. I was sent out to make a tour of the country in its interest, obtaining subscriptions for the paper and lecturing against slavery. At LeRoy I was mobbed, my meeting was broken up, and I was saved from worse treatment only by the active efforts of Mr. Henry Brewster, who secreted me in his own house. At the village I next visited, Warsaw, I was aided by Seth M. Gates and others, and I was also well received at Perry. At Pike, however, I was arrested and subjected to a mock trial, with the object of scaring me into flight from

the place. At Palmyra I found no hall or church in which I could speak. Indeed the place was then a mere hamlet and could boast of but half a dozen dwellings. My tour embraced nearly every village in this and adjoining counties, and the treatment given me varied with the kind of people I happened to find in the budding settlements of the time. In the same fall I attended the first Anti-Slavery State Convention at Utica.

In 1835 I left Rochester to form a colored church at Syracuse. Of course I joined anti-slavery work to the labor which fell upon me as a pastor. In the city last named the opponents of the movement laid a trap for me, by proposing a public discussion of the leading questions at issue. I was a little afraid of my ability to cope with them alone, and therefore, quietly wrote to Gerrett Smith, Beriah Green and Alvin Stewart for help. When the public discussion took place, and these practiced speakers met and answered the arguments of our opponents, the representatives of the latter — the leading editor and the foremost lawyer of the place — left the church in disgust, pleading that they had a good case, but did not expect to face men so well able to handle any question as the friends of mine I had invited. After their retreat from the hall, the two champions of slavery stirred up the salt boilers to mob us, but we adjourned before night, and when the crowd arrived at the edifice they found only a prayer meeting of the church people in progress, and slunk away ashamed. I was stationed nearly three years at Syracuse, and was then transferred to Ithaca, where a little colored religious society already existed. I bought a site for a church edifice for them, and saw it built during the two years of my stay in the village. Thence I was sent to Sag Harbor, Long Island, and, finally to New Bedford, Massachusetts.

It was at New Bedford that I first saw Fred. Douglass. He was then, so to speak, right out of slavery, but had already begun to talk in public, though not before white people. He

had been given authority to act as an exhorter by the church before my coming, and I some time afterwards licensed him to preach. He was then a member of my church. On one occasion, after I had addressed a white audience on the slavery question, I called upon Fred. Douglass, whom I saw among the auditors, to relate his story. He did so, and in a year from that time he was in the lecture field with Parker Pillsbury and other leading abolitionist orators. Not long afterwards a letter was received from him by his fellow church members, in which he said that he had cut loose from the church; he had found that the American church was the bulwark of American slavery. We did not take the letter to mean that Mr. Douglass had repudiated the Christian religion at the same time that he bade good-by to the churches.

It was soon after this that great excitement arose in New Bedford over the action of Rev. Mr. Jackson, a Baptist minister, who had just returned from a Baltimore clerical convention, which sent a petition to the Maryland Legislature in favor of the passage of a law compelling free negroes to leave the state, under the plea that the free colored men mingling with the slaves incited the latter to insurrection. Rev. Mr. Jackson was a vice-president of that convention and a party to its action. Printed accounts of the proceedings were sent to me, and at a meeting called to express dissent from the course taken by the minister named and his brethren, I introduced a resolution, of which the following is a copy:

*“Resolved, That the great body of the American clergy, with all their pretensions to sanctity, stand convicted by their deadly hostility to the Anti-Slavery movement, and their support of the slave system, as a brotherhood of thieves, and should be branded as such by all honest Christians.”*

The tone and tenor of this resolution now carry an air of extravagant injustice, but there was at that time only too much truth in the charge it contains. The resolution was



tabled, but it was at the same time decided to publish it, and to invite ministers of the town to appear at an adjourned meeting and defend their course, if they could. Nearly thirty ministers of New Bedford and vicinity appeared at the next meeting, and with one voice denounced the obnoxious resolution and its author. The result was that a strong prejudice was excited against me, a prejudice that was increased by an event which took place soon afterwards – the whole due to the fact that the respectable and wealthy classes, as well as the lower orders, at that time regarded abolitionists with equal aversion and contempt. The conscience of the North had not yet been fairly awakened to the monstrous wrong of human bondage.

*[The conscience of the North would, in time, be “fairly awakened,” in no small measure because of the enforcement of fugitive slave laws. Federal law upheld the claims of slave holders for recovery of their property even in free states. The United States Constitution (Article IV. Section 2) provided that “No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.” The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 enforced this provision and set fines of up to \$500 for persons convicted of harboring escaped slaves. The demands of Southern representatives led to enactment of a stronger Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 with increased penalties and speedier enforcement machinery. Opposition in the North, particularly in New England, was intense. Out-right disobedience of the law (often with the collusion of state and local officials) was not uncommon. Henry Thoreau commented that “I have heard a good deal said about trampling of this law under foot. Why, one need not go out of his way to do that. This law rises not to the level of the head or the reason; its natural habitat is in the dirt . . . and he who*

*walks with freedom . . . will inevitably tread on it, and trample it under foot."*

*James describes several first-hand experiences during the New England resistance against the Fugitive Slave Law. Controversy over the Emstead captives. Arthur Burns, and William and Ellen Craft gained national attention.]*

On my journey homeward from a visit to New York City, I met Mr. Henry Ludlam, his wife, two children and a slave girl, from Richmond, Va., all bound for New Bedford to spend the summer with Captain Dunbar, father-in-law of the head of this party of visitors. I said that I met them, but the meeting consisted only in this, that they and I were on board the same train, but not in the same car. I was in the "Jim Crow" car, as colored persons were not permitted to enter the others with white people, and the slave girl was sent to the same car by the same rule. I talked with her, and, as I was in duty bound to do, asked her to come to my church during the stay of the family in New Bedford. After some weeks had passed and she did not come, I took with me a colored teacher and another friend to call on her and learn, if we could, why she did not attend the services. Her master or owner met us at the door and gave us this answer: "Lucy is my slave, and slaves don't receive calls." In short he refused to let us enter the house, whereat we took advice from friends, and applied to Judge Crapo for a writ of *habeas corpus*. The judge sent us about our business with the advice not to annoy Mr. Ludlam, who was entitled to hospitable treatment as a visitor and guest. Instead of taking this advice, we journeyed to Boston, and were given by Judge Wilds the writ his judicial brother in New Bedford had denied us. We had Sheriff Pratt and the writ with us when we made our next call on the slave girl's master. The latter at first refused even the sheriff leave to see the girl, and finally proposed to give bail for her appearance before the judge. The sheriff turned to me inquiringly when this proposal was made, and

I answered: "Mr. Sheriff, you were directed to take the person of the girl Lucy, and I call upon you to do your duty." Thus we got possession of the girl, but not before her owner had obtained leave for a few minutes' private conversation with her. In this talk, as we afterwards learned, he frightened Lucy by telling her that our purpose was an evil one, and obtained her promise to display a handkerchief from the room in which she would be confined as a signal for the rescue he promised her. We took the girl to a chamber on the upper floor of the residence of the Rev. Joel Knight, and in the evening we prepared to lie down before the door. Lucy displayed the handkerchief as she had promised, and, when we questioned her about it, answered: "Master told me to do it; he is coming to take me home." At this we quietly called together twenty men from the colored district of the place, and they took seats in the church close at hand, ready for any emergency. At one o'clock in the morning Ludlam appeared on the scene, with a backing of a dozen men, carrying a ladder, to effect a rescue. The sheriff hailed them, but they gave no answer, whereat our party of colored men sallied forth, and the rescuers fled in all directions. The entire town was now agog over the affair. So many took sides against us, and such threats were made, that the sheriff was forced to call to his aid the local police, and, thus escorted, the girl was placed aboard the cars for Boston. The other party, to the number of 150 men, chartered a train by another route, with the design of overpowering the sheriff's posse in the streets of Boston; but so large a force of officers was called out by the sheriff that the slaveholder's friends gave up the idea of carrying out their design. Lucy was brought before Judge Wilds, who postponed the hearing until the following Saturday, and meanwhile invited us privately to bring the girl to his home in the course of the day, as he wanted to talk with her. This we did, and the judge told Lucy what her rights were; that by the laws of Massachusetts

she was free — her case was not covered by the fugitive slave law — and that if she wanted her freedom she should have it. If, however, she chose to return to her master she could do so; “but,” added the judge, “after what has happened, he will probably sell you on your return with the family to a slave state.” She asked for her freedom, and received it the next day, when the case was heard in open court. The Sunday night following word was received at the colored church where we were holding services that our enemies were trying to kidnap the girl. That broke up the meeting; the colored people rallied, and the attempt failed. Lucy’s master was forced to return to his slave home without his human chattel. The girl afterwards married, had children and, I believed, live happily among the people of her own color at the North.

One of the earliest cases in which I became interested as a laborer in the anti-slavery cause was that of the Emstead captives. The slaver Emstead was a Spanish vessel which left the African coast in 1836 with a cargo of captive blacks. When four days out the captives rose, and coming on deck, threw overboard all but two of the officers and crew. The two they saved to navigate the vessel; but instead of taking the vessel back to the coast they had just left, as they were directed by the blacks, the two sailors attempted to make the American main, and the vessel finally drifted ashore near Point Judith, on Long Island Sound. The Spanish Minister demanded the surrender of the blacks to his government. They were taken off the ship and sent to Connecticut for trial. Arthur Tappan and Richard Johnson interested themselves in the captives, and succeeded in postponing their trial for two and a half years. Two young men were meanwhile engaged to instruct the captives, and when their trial at last came they were able to give evidence which set them free. They testified that they had been enticed on board of the slaver in small parties for the ostensible purpose of trade, and had then been thrown into the hold and chained. There

were nearly one hundred of the captives, and on their release we tried hard, but vainly, to persuade them to stay in this country. I escorted them on shipboard when they were about to sail from New York for their native land.

After a stay of two years at New Bedford I took charge of a colored church in Boston, and left that to give nearly all my time to lectures and addresses on the anti-slavery issue. It was during this period that I took an active interest in the case of Anthony Burns, a runaway slave, who reached Boston as a stowaway in 1852. His former master learned that Burns had found a home in Boston, and made two futile attempts, with the aid of government officials, to recapture him. They made a third trial of it with such precautions as they thought would surely command success. A posse of twenty-five United States Deputy Marshals was collected in Richmond, Washington, Philadelphia and New York, and secretly sent to Boston. They lined the street in the vicinity of the shop in which Burns was employed. Several of them followed him when he emerged from the door, and at the corner of Hanover and Cambridge streets they surrounded, captured and ironed him, telling the crowd which was fast collecting that he was accused of breaking into a jewelry store. The marshals succeeded in getting their prisoner into the court-house before the true state of the case became known to the crowd. A call was at once issued for a meeting of our Anti-Slavery Vigilance Committee, and word was sent to Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, and other noted leaders, to attend and give advice as to the wisest course to take under the circumstances. It was at first proposed to buy or ransom Burns, and representatives of the committee accordingly offered \$1,300 for him. But the marshals would not take it. They said they would let Boston people see that the law—the fugitive slave law—could be executed in spite of their opposition. Two companies of marines from the navy yard were called out to support the marshals. But the people gathered from all quarters; they

came in swarms from points as far as Lowell, and it was determined at all hazards to prevent the return of the fugitive to slavery. A beam sixty feet long was procured, and at nine o'clock that night was used as a battering-ram against the court-house doors. An incident which happened just before this attempt to force an entrance into the court-house added fuel to the fierce fire of excitement. One of the court attendants who found himself outside the building tried to re-enter it, but received a deadly slash from a sword in the hands of a guard, who mistook the character of the man. The victim of this ghastly mistake ran but a few rods before he fell, bleeding and lifeless. The doors gave way at the first thrust of the beam, and we entered to find ourselves in the midst of the two armed companies already mentioned. We gave the soldiers warning that they would get but one fire before all would be over with them, and at this threat they gave up trying actively to interfere with us. But although it had proved easy to break into the court house, it was not so easy to get at the prisoner. The marshals had him with them in an underground cell. The passage to it was narrow, the doors were strong, and we could for the moment do nothing. We finally hit upon a plan to bring the marshals to reason by threatening to starve them out. When they found that not even a glass of water could be sent in to them they began to talk of terms, offering to take the \$1,300 we had in the first instance proposed to give them for their prisoner. We declined the proposition, but now offered them \$300 for their trouble. This they consented to take, with the proviso that they should be allowed to convey the prisoner unmolested to Richmond, Va., and then return him quietly to Boston, in order that they might be able to say they had succeeded in taking their man out of the state. We made them give a bond in the sum of \$10,000 that they would abide by the agreement, and use Burns well while they had him in their hands. It was all done, as people say, according to contract. Benjamin F.

Butler said to me at the time—he was then the Democratic collector of the port—“James,” these were his characteristic words, “I had rather see the court house, niggers and all, blown up to the seventh heaven than see a slave taken out of the city of Boston.” When Burns was taken to the wharf guarded by a large force of marshals and from fifteen to twenty companies of militia, every store along the streets traversed was hung with crepe. At one point a black coffin suspended from a wire level with the third story windows was drawn back and forth. Boston was in mourning over the disgrace of even in appearance surrendering as a slave a human being who had once set foot on its soil.

Another case in which I was equally interested was that of the fugitive slaves, William and Ellen Craft. The latter, who had hardly a tinge of African blood in her veins, and who could not in color be distinguished from a white person, was housekeeper for a rich southern planter, and the former, who was quite black, was her husband. In August, 1851, the master and his family departed for a watering place, leaving Ellen in charge of the mansion during their absence, and putting money enough in her hands for the temporary needs of the household. Soon after the departure of the family, Ellen put on men's clothing, and with her husband set out on foot at night for the North and freedom! In the morning they stopped at a public house, Ellen representing herself as a planter's son, with a servant—her husband—to attend her. She carried her arm in a sling, and told the clerk she could not use it when he asked her to register their names. In this manner they made their way north, and finally to Boston. Their master at last obtained trace of them, and one day arrived at Boston to recover his human property. He called upon the judge of the proper court for the necessary order, but the judge, pleading pressure of business, directed the applicant to call again later in the day. In the interval the judge notified the abolitionists, and they held a meeting the

same evening to decide what to do in the case. They came to the conclusion that as the writ or process issued in conformity with the fugitive slave law was civil, and not criminal, there would be no means of serving it upon the fugitives if the latter kept within the domicile and locked the doors. The Crafts acted upon this advice, and were secretly supplied with food by their abolitionist friends during their confinement within doors. The master was thus prevented from recovering possession of them, but he remained in the city and lingered about the neighborhood in which the fugitives were self-confined until the Boston boys annoyed and pestered him to such a degree that he was forced to ask police protection. He obtained it only on a promise to leave the city, but broke his word and was again persecuted by the boys so persistently that he was forced to leave Boston. The fugitives were not again molested, for they quietly removed to Montreal as soon as their prosecutor was fairly out of the way.

Still another case in which I was concerned was that of a runaway slave girl who was seized in Boston and taken to the court house, where a hearing was obtained for her by the opponents of the fugitive slave law. Our counsel had little hope of gaining anything but time by the proceeding, and arranged a signal by which we who were gathered outside the court room--for the proceedings took place with closed doors--might understand that the case had gone against us. When the decision was given the lawyer started for the door in feigned disgust, and it was partially opened for his exit he gave the signal by raising his hand. Instantly a huge colored man named Clark thrust an iron bar between the door and its frame, so that it could not be closed, and we rushed in, to the terror of the court attendants. We took the girl from their hands, and, placing her in a closed carriage, drove her to Roxbury. Three other carriages were driven from the court house in other directions at the same moment, in order to



baffle any attempt at pursuit. The crowd of colored people collected in front of the court house on the occasion included a large number of women, each of them armed with a quarter of a pound of Cayenne pepper to throw into the eyes of the officers should the latter come to blows with their friends. The girl was kept in her hiding place a fortnight, and then as the excitement had abated, safely sent to Canada.

*[Northerners were hardly unanimous in their support for abolition, and still less were they uniformly in favor of racial equality. James describes two personal encounters with the "color bar" on public transport in New England prior to the Civil War. One of the most disgraceful displays of racism in New England was the controversy over Prudence Crandall's girls' school in Canterbury, Connecticut. After opening her school to black girls, Crandall was ostracized and insulted; rocks were thrown at her school and her well was contaminated. Finally, she was arrested in 1833 for violation of a hastily-enacted state law prohibiting the instruction of non-resident colored students without town approval. Her subsequent trial and conviction (later overturned for "insufficient evidence") won widespread notoriety.]*

In relating the rescue of the slave girl Lucy, I mentioned the fact that we colored people were in those days obliged to ride in a second class or "Jim Crow" car, even in New England. The same separation was enforced on steamboats and stage-coaches, colored people being compelled to ride on the outside of the latter. It was hard to make headway against the rules of the railroad and steamship companies, because they would only sell us half-fare tickets, and on these we could not demand seats with white people. I finally procured two first class or full fare tickets by having a white man buy them for me. A colored friend and myself quietly took seats in the corner of the regular passenger coach. The brakemen did not see us until just before the time for the train to start. Then one of them, approaching us, said: "You

have made a mistake." "No," was our answer, as we held up the tickets. But the man persisted, "You can't ride in here; you know that." My answer was: "You advertise a fare of nine shillings from New Bedford to Boston, and I have this ticket as a receipt that I have paid the money." He reiterated: "You can't ride here, and I want you to go out." "No," was my answer, "I have bought and paid for this ticket and have the same right here as other people." The ticket agent was called in, and tried to persuade us to leave the car. "Our rules," he said, "forbid your occupation of seats in this car. We want no trouble, and you had better go out peaceably." "We want none," answered I, "and shall make none, but we propose to stay where we are." They sent in trainmen, baggageman, and hackmen; we resisted passively, and three seats to which we clung as they were dragging us along were torn up before they got us out. I obtained a warrant from Judge Crapo, and had them arrested at once. The hearing took place the same day, and on the following morning the judge handed down a long written opinion. He ruled that custom was law, and by custom colored people were not allowed to ride in cars in company of white people. Furthermore railway corporations had the right to make their own regulations on such a subject, and consequently we had no cause of action, I paid the costs and gave notice of appeal to the Supreme Court. When the case was heard at Boston the court decided that the word "color," as applied to persons, was unknown to the laws of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, and that the youngest colored child had the same rights as the richest white citizen. No company chartered as a common carrier had a right to enact regulations above the laws of the state. The decision of Judge Crapo was reversed, and I was given \$300 damages besides. That broke up the practice of consigning colored railway passengers to "Jim Crow" cars.

I had somewhat similar experience on the steamer plying between New Bedford and Nantucket. They would sell only

blue or second-class tickets to colored persons, who were thus prevented from entering the cabin with white people. When I asked for a full fare ticket it was refused me, but they offered to sell me a blue one. This I would not take, and I went on board without a ticket. I visited the cabin and other parts of the boat forbidden to colored passengers, but no trouble occurred until the ticket gatherer made his rounds. I told the man that I had no ticket, but would pay the regular fare, not half fare. The captain began by taking the hat from my head and locking it up in his office. Next, he told me that I could pay half fare or be put off the boat at her next landing place. He was in such haste to carry out his threat, that he retarded the steamer's headway in sight of a port at which she was not to stop, had a boat lowered over the side and ordered me to enter it. I refused and he swore. "You have men enough to put me ashore if you choose," said I, "but I want the right of redress." At this he ordered the boat raised, and the steamer proceeded to her destination with me still on board. When we came within sight of Nantucket he sent a servant to me with my hat, but I refused to take it. I went ashore with a handkerchief tied about my head. It was well advertised before evening that I would at my lecture--I was already booked to speak there that night--tell the story of my treatment on the boat. When the bells were calling people to the lecture hall, the captain's clerk came to me with the message that the officer wanted to see me; but I sent back word that I would say all I had to say to him at the lecture. After the lecture three ladies presented me a new hat, in accepting which I remarked that Captain Nottfinney was welcome to wear my old one, left in his hands. I went back on the same boat without a ticket, for they still refused to sell me a full fare one; but no one asked for my ticket, and no one said a word to me, although I went where I pleased on the boat.

While stationed at Boston I made the acquaintance of Rev.

Mr. Phileo and his wife, the latter being that Prudence Crandall who was sent to a Connecticut jail for teaching a school for colored children at Canterbury Green. As I remember, a special session of the legislature was called by the governor for the express purpose of passing a law to cover such cases, and under the law thus enacted she was sent to jail. She was engaged at the time to the young preacher. He married her in jail, and when she was his wife claimed and obtained her release. The social persecution to which she had been subjected before her imprisonment was renewed on her release, and she and her husband left the place, never to return to it.

*[The most dramatic period in James' life was his wartime service in Kentucky.]*

The legal status of southern blacks during the Civil War was often uncertain. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which took effect January 1, 1863, liberated only those "persons held as slaves" in rebellious areas, territory which the Union armies had not yet penetrated. At least technically, the federal government recognized the "right" to own slaves in border states such as Kentucky. However, military commanders in the field, who were often sympathetic to the slaves, issued manumission orders (both before and after the Proclamation) of doubtful legality. They were encouraged in doing so by Congressional measures passed early in the war which freed black army enlistees and the confiscated property of rebels.

The de facto freedom enjoyed by refugee blacks in Kentucky heightened the tension between federal authorities and the local populace, many of whom were Confederate sympathizers. Violence and disobedience made military commanders still more determined to punish the whites by helping the blacks.

On March 3, 1865, Congress declared that "wives and children of colored men who have heretofore enlisted, or may

*hereafter enlist in the military service of the United States, are free."* The new federal law conflicted with Kentucky law which recognized no marital or parental relationships among slaves. On the Fourth of July, 1865, General John M. Palmer told a Louisville gathering, described by Thomas James, that all slaves in Kentucky were free. The declaration was premature and caused Palmer a good deal of trouble, until the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in December, 1865.]

I returned to Rochester in 1856, and took charge of the colored church in this city. In 1862 I received an appointment from the American Missionary Society to labor among the colored people of Tennessee and Louisiana, but I never reached either of these states. I left Rochester with my daughter, and reported at St. Louis, where I received orders to proceed to Louisville, Kentucky. On the train, between St. Louis and Louisville, a party of forty Missouri ruffians entered the car at an intermediate station, and threatened to throw me and my daughter off the train. They robbed me of my watch. The conductor undertook to protect us, but, finding it out of his power, brought a number of Government officers and passengers from the next car to our assistance. At Louisville the government took me out of the hands of the Missionary Society to take charge of freed and refugee blacks, to visit the prisons of that commonwealth, and to set free all colored persons found confined without charge of crime. I served first under the orders of General Burbage, [Stephen G. Burbridge], and then under those of his successor, General [John M.] Palmer. The homeless colored people, for whom I was to care, were gathered in a camp covering ten acres of ground on the outskirts of the city. They were housed in light buildings, and supplied with rations from the commissary stores. Nearly all the persons in the camp were women and children, for the colored men were sworn into the United States service as soldiers as fast as they came in. My first duty, after arranging the affairs of

the camp, was to visit the slave pens, of which there were five in the city. The largest, known as Garrison's, was located on Market Street, and to that I made my first visit. When I entered it, and was about to make a thorough inspection of it, Garrison stopped me with the insolent remark, "I guess no nigger will go over me in this pen." I showed him my orders, whereupon he asked time to consult the mayor. He started for the entrance, but was stopped by the guard I had stationed there. I told him he would not leave the pen until I had gone through every part of it. "So," said I, "throw open your doors, or I will put you under arrest." I found hidden away in that pen 260 colored persons, part of them in irons. I took them all to my camp, and they were free. I next called at Otterman's pen on Second Street, from which also I took a large number of slaves. A third large pen was named Clark's, and there were two smaller ones besides. I liberated the slaves in all of them. One morning it was reported to me that a slave trader had nine colored men locked in a room in the National hotel. A waiter from the hotel brought the information at daybreak. I took a squad of soldiers with me to the place, and demanded the surrender of the blacks. The clerk said there were none in the house. Their owners had gone off with "the boys" at daybreak. I answered that I could take no man's word in such a case, but must see for myself. When I was about to begin the search, a colored man secretly gave me the number of the room the men were in. The room was locked, and the porter refused to give up the keys. A threat to place him under arrest brought him to reason, and I found the colored men inside, as I anticipated. One of them, an old man, who sat with his face between his hands, said as I entered: "So'thin' tole me last night that so'thin' was a goin' to happen to me." That very day I mustered the nine men into the service of the government, and that made them free men.

So much anger was excited by these proceedings, that the

mayor and common council of Louisville visited General Burbage at his headquarters, and warned him that if I was not sent away within forty-eight hours my life would pay the forfeit. The General sternly answered them: "If James is killed, I will hold responsible for the act every man who fills an office under your city government. I will hang them all higher than Haman was hung, and I have 15,000 troops behind me to carry out the order. Your only salvation lies in protecting this colored man's life." During my first year and a half at Louisville, a guard was stationed at the door of my room every night, as a necessary precaution in view of the threats of violence of which I was the object. One night I received a suggestive hint of the treatment the rebel sympathizers had in store for me should I chance to fall into their hands. A party of them approached the house where I was lodged protected by a guard. The soldiers, who were new recruits, ran off in a fright. I found escape by the street cut off, and as I ran for the rear alley I discovered that avenue also guarded by a squad of my enemies. As a last resort I jumped a side fence, and stole along until out of sight and hearing of the enemy. Making my way to the house of a colored man named White, I exchanged my uniform for an old suit of his, and then, sallying forth, mingled with the rebel party, to learn if possible, the nature of their intentions. Not finding me, and not having noticed my escape, they concluded that they must have been misinformed as to my lodging place for that night. Leaving the locality they proceeded to the house of another friend of mine, named Bridle, whose home was on Tenth street. After vainly searching every room in Bridle's house, they dispersed with the threat that if they got me I should hang to the nearest lamp-post. For a long time after I was placed in charge of the camp, I was forced to forbid the display of lights in any of the buildings at night, for fear of drawing the fire of rebel bushwhackers. All the fugitives in the camp made their beds on

the floor, to escape danger from rifle balls fired through the thin siding of the frame structures.

I established a Sunday and a day school in my camp and held religious services twice a week as well as on Sundays. I was ordered by General Palmer to marry every colored woman that came into camp to a soldier unless she objected to such a proceeding. The ceremony was a mere form to secure the freedom of the female colored refugees; for Congress had passed a law giving freedom to the wives and children of all colored soldiers and sailors in the service of the government. The emancipation proclamation, applying as it did only to states in rebellion, failed to meet the case of slaves in Kentucky, and we were obliged to resort to this ruse to escape the necessity of giving up to their masters many of the runaway slave women and children who flocked to our camp.

I had a contest of this kind with a slave trader known as Bill Hurd. He demanded the surrender of a colored woman in my camp who claimed her freedom on the plea that her husband had enlisted in the federal army. She wished to go to Cincinnati, and General Palmer, giving me a railway pass for her, cautioned me to see her on board the cars for the North before I left her. At the levee I saw Hurd and a policeman, and suspecting that they intended a rescue, I left the girl with the guard at the river and returned to the general for a detail of one or more men. During my absence Hurd claimed the woman from the guard and the latter brought all the parties to the provost marshal's headquarters, although I had directed him to report to General Palmer with the woman in case of trouble; for I feared that the provost marshal's sympathies were on the slave owner's side. I met Hurd, the policeman and the woman at the corner of Sixth and Green streets and halted them. Hurd said the provost marshal had decided that she was his property. I answered--what I had just learned--that the provost marshal was not at his headquarters and that his subordinate had no authority



to decide such a case. I said further that I had orders to take the party before General Palmer and proposed to do it. They saw it was not prudent to resist, as I had a guard to enforce the order. When the parties were heard before the general, Hurd said the girl had obtained her freedom and a pass by false pretences. She was his property; he had paid \$500 for her; she was single when he bought her and she had not married since. Therefore she could claim no rights under the law giving freedom to the wives of colored soldiers. The general answered that the charge of false pretences was a criminal one and the woman would be held for trial upon it. "But," said Hurd, "she is my property and I want her." "No," answered the general, "we keep our own prisoners." The general said to me privately, after Hurd was gone: "The woman has a husband in our service and I know it; but never mind that. We'll beat these rebels at their own game." Hurd hung about headquarters two or three days until General Palmer said finally: "I have no time to try this case; take it before the provost marshal." The latter, who had been given the hint, delayed action for several days more, and then turned over the case to General Dodge. After another delay, which still further tortured the slave trader, General Dodge said to me one day: "James, bring Mary to my headquarters, supply her with rations, have a guard ready, and call Hurd as a witness." When the slave trader had made his statement to the same effect as before, General Dodge delivered judgment in the following words: "Hurd, you are an honest man. It is a clear case. All I have to do, Mary, is to sentence you to keep away from this department during the remainder of the present war. James, take her across the river and see her on board the cars." "But, general," whined Hurd, "that won't do. I shall lose her services if you send her north." "You have nothing to do with it; you are only a witness in this case," answered the general. I carried out the order strictly, to remain with Mary until the cars started; and under the pro-

tection of a file of guards, she was soon placed on the train en route to Cincinnati.

Among the slaves I rescued and brought to the refugee camp was a girl named Laura, who had been locked up by her mistress in a cellar and left to remain there two days and as many nights without food or drink. Two refugee slave women who were seen by their master making toward my camp, and calling upon a policeman he had them seized and taken to the house of his brother-in-law on Washington street. When the facts were reported to me, I took a squad of guards to the house and rescued them. As I came out of the house with the slave women, their master asked me: "What are you going to do with them?" I answered that they would probably take care of themselves. He protested that he had always used the runaway women well, and appealing to one of them, asked: "Have I not, Angelina?" I directed the woman to answer the question, saying that she had as good a right to speak as he had, and that I would protect her in that right. She then said: "He tied my dress over my head Sunday and whipped me for refusing to carry victuals to the bushwhackers and guerillas in the woods." I brought the women to camp, and soon afterwards sent them north to find homes. I sent one girl rescued by me under somewhat similar circumstances as far as this city to find a home with Colonel Klinck's family.

Up to that time in my career I had never received serious injury at any man's hands. I was several times reviled and hustled by mobs in my first tour of the district about the city of Rochester, and once when I was lecturing in New Hampshire a reckless, half-drunken fellow in the lobby fired a pistol at me, the ball shattering the plaster a few feet from my head. But, as I said, I had never received serious injury. Now, however, I received a blow, the effects of which I shall carry to my grave. General Palmer sent me to the shop of a blacksmith who was suspected of bushwhacking, with an order requiring the latter to report at headquarters. The rebel,

who was a powerful man, raised a short iron bar as I entered and aimed a savage blow at my head. By an instinctive movement I saved my life, but the blow fell on my neck and shoulders, and I was for a long time afterwards disabled by the injury. My right hand remains partially paralyzed and almost wholly useless to this day.

Many a sad scene I witnessed at my camp of colored refugees in Louisville. There was the mother bereaved of her children, who had been sold and sent farther South lest they should escape in the general rush for the federal lines and freedom; children, orphaned in fact if not in name, for separation from parents among the colored people in those days left no hope of reunion this side the grave; wives forever parted from their husbands, and husbands who might never hope to catch again the brightening eye and the welcoming smile of the helpmates whose hearts God and nature had joined to theirs. Such recollections come fresh to me when with trembling voice I sing the old familiar song of anti-slavery days:

Oh deep was the anguish of the slave mother's heart  
When called from her darling forever to part;  
So grieved that lone mother, that broken-hearted mother  
in sorrow and woe.

The child was borne off to a far-distant clime  
While the mother was left in anguish to pine;  
But reason departed, and she sank broken-hearted  
in sorrow and woe.

I remained at Louisville a little over three years, staying for some months after the war closed in charge of the colored camp, the hospital, dispensary and government stores. In 1865 the colored people of Kentucky were called upon for the first time to celebrate the Fourth of July. I spoke to General Palmer about it, and he, approving the idea, issued a proclamation for the purpose. There was but a single voice raised against it, and that, strange as it may seem, was the

voice of a colored Baptist preacher named Adams. But the slave holders had always pursued the policy of buying over to their interest a few unworthy colored ministers, who to serve their own ends, were ready to do the bidding of their masters. I had three regiments of colored troops ordered out to protect the colored people in their celebration. General Palmer and Brisbane and Colonel Klinck addressed us, and General Palmer, for our amusement, read a number of abusive anonymous letters he had received, because of his course in this and other matters where the interests of the colored people were concerned. I cannot close this fragmentary history of my camp without mentioning the gloom which hung over it during the early part of that very year. Sickness broke out among the refugee women and children, and many perished by it. I sent out seven corpses in one day, and the scenes I witnessed during that visitation of disease will never fade from my recollection.

In June, 1868, I was elected general superintendent and missionary agent by the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Connection. While at Washington, during the same year, I took an active part in the peaceful political revolution which placed the local government of the District of Columbia in loyal hands. In 1878 I was appointed by Bishop Wayman a missionary preacher for the colored churches of Ohio. While engaged in this missionary work I was driven out of Darke county by a terrorizing band of ruffians, who called themselves regulators, and many of whom were from the Kentucky side of the river. A number of leading white citizens were treated in like manner by the same band. In 1880, when the exodus from the South began, I labored under the direction of the Topeka Relief Association in behalf of the homeless throngs of colored people who flocked into Kansas. In the following year this relief was discontinued, and we organized in southern Kansas an agricultural and industrial institute, of which I became general

agent. The institute of which Elizabeth L. Comstock was an active advocate, is still in existence, and has done a noble work in the education of people of color. My last charge was the pastorate of the African Methodist Episcopal Church at Lockport. Between three and four years ago both my eyes became affected by cataracts, and I now grope my way in almost complete blindness.

My home is again in the city of Rochester, where I began my life work. In 1829, I married in this city a free colored girl, and by her had four children, two of whom are now married and living at the West. My first wife died in 1841. Sixteen years ago I married again. My wife was a slave, freed by Sherman at the capture of Atlanta and sent north with other colored refugees. I first met her in the State of Pennsylvania. She is the companion of my old age. Two children--my daughter, who is in the fifteenth year of her age, and my son, who is verging on his twelfth year, are the comfort and joy of our household. With them I sing the old "Liberty Minstrel" songs, which carry me back to the days when the conscience of the North was first awakened to the iniquities of slavery. Blessed be God that I have lived to see the liberation and the enfranchisement of the people of my color and blood!

You ask me what change for the better has taken place in the condition of the colored people of this locality in my day. I answer that the Anti-Slavery agitation developed an active and generous sympathy for the free colored man of the North, as well as for his brother in bondage. We felt the good effect of that sympathy and the aid and encouragement which accompanied it. But now, that the end of Anti-Slavery agitation has been fully accomplished, our white friends are inclined to leave us to our own resources, overlooking the fact that social prejudices still close the trades against our youth, and that we are again as isolated as in the days before the wrongs of our race touched the heart of the American people. After breathing for so considerable a period an

atmosphere surcharged with sympathy for our race, we feel the more keenly the current of neglect which seems to have chilled against us even the enlightened and religious classes of the communities among which we live, but of which we cannot call ourselves a part.

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### THE BEREAVED MOTHER.

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Oh! deep was the anguish of the slave mother's heart,  
When called from her darling for ever to part;  
So grieved that lone mother, that heart-broken mother,  
In sorrow and woe.

The lash of the master her deep sorrows mock,  
While the child of her bosom is sold on the block;  
Yet loud shrieked that mother, poor heart-broken mother,  
In sorrow and woe.

The babe in return, for its fond mother cries,  
While the sound of their wailings together arise;  
They shriek for each other, the child and the mother,  
In sorrow and woe.

The harsh auctioneer, to sympathy cold,  
Tears the babe from its mother and sells it for gold,  
While the infant and mother loud shriek for each other,  
In sorrow and woe.

At last came the parting of mother and child—  
Her brain reeled with madness—that mother was wild;  
Then the lash could not smother the shrieks of that mother  
Of sorrow and woe.

The child was borne off to a far distant clime,  
While the mother was left in anguish to pine;  
But reason departed, and she sank broken-hearted,  
In sorrow and woe.

That poor mourning mother, of reason bereft,  
Soon ended her sorrows and sank cold in death:  
Thus died that slave mother, poor heart-broken mother,  
In sorrow and woe.

Oh! list ye kind mothers to the cries of the salve,  
The parents and children implore you to save;  
Go! rescue the mothers, the sisters and brothers,  
From sorrow and woe.

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### A V I S I O N.

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(Scene in the nether world—purporting to be a conversation between the ghost of a Southern slaveholding clergyman and the devil!)

At dead of night, when others sleep,  
Near Hell I took my station;  
And from that dungeon, dark and deep,  
O'erheard this conversation:  
“Hail, Prince of Darkness, ever hail,  
Adored by each infernal,  
I come among your gang to wail,  
And taste of death eternal.”

"Where are you from?" the fiend demands,  
 "What makes you look so frantic?  
 Are you from Carolina's strand,  
 Just west of the Atlantic?  
 "Are you that man of blood and birth,  
 Devoid of human feeling—  
 The wretch I saw, when last on earth,  
 In human cattle dealing?  
 "Whose soul with blood and rapine stain'd,  
 With deeds of crime to dark it;  
 Who drove God's image, starved and chained,  
 To sell like beasts in market?  
 "Who tore the infant from the breast,  
 That you might sell its mother?  
 Whose craving mind could never rest  
 Till you had sold a brother?  
 "Who gave the sacrament to those  
 Whose chains and handcuffs rattle?  
 Whose backs soon after felt the blows,  
 More heavy than thy cattle?"  
 "I'm from the South," the ghost replies,  
 "And I was there a teacher;  
 Saw men in chains, with laughing eyes:  
 I was a Southern Preacher!  
 "In tasseled pulpit, gay and fine,  
 I strove to please the tyrants,  
 To prove that slavery is divine,  
 And what the Scripture warrants.  
 "And when I saw the horrid sight  
 Of slaves by torture dying,  
 And told their masters all was right,  
 I knew that I was lying.  
 "I knew all this, and who can doubt  
 I felt a sad misgiving?  
 But still, I knew if I spoke out  
 That I should lose my living.  
 "They made me fat—they paid me well—  
 To preach down abolition.  
 I slept — I died — I woke in Hell —  
 How altered my condition!  
 "I now am in a sea of fire,  
 Whose fury ever rages;  
 I am a slave, and can't get free  
 Through everlasting ages.  
 "Yes! when the sun and moon shall fade,  
 And fire the rocks dis sever,  
 I must sink down beneath the shade,  
 And feel God's wrath forever."  
 Our Ghost stood trembling all the while—  
 He saw the scene transpiring;  
 With soul aghast and visage sad,  
 All hope was now retiring.  
 The demon cried, on vengeance bent,  
 "I say, in haste, retire!  
 And you shall have a negro sent  
 To attend and punch the fire."

## HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF KENTUCKY.

Louisville, Kentucky, July 8th. 1865.

Rev. Thomas James, now of the Military Police of this Department, is hereby continued in charge of the HOME FOR THE COLORED REFUGEES, in the City of Louisville. His authority to manage the same, subject to the following and such other rules as may hereafter be prescribed, is to be regarded as only subordinate to the Headquarters of the Department.

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### R U L E S

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1. Said Thomas James will have charge of the Home and of all the property and furniture therein, and of all the property which may be committed to his care by freed men and women.

2. He will receive into the House only such persons as need temporary assistance; will give all such whatever advice or assistance in finding homes and employment that may be in his power. He will superintend contracts they may make for employment or service, and encourage all to industry and good conduct.

3. No guards or other persons will be allowed to enter said house without his permission.

4. Said James is authorized and directed to establish a Sabbath and Day School in connection with said house, and to make and enforce proper rules for the government of said schools.

5. He will make such rules for the government of the house and the conduct of the inmates as he may deem proper with reference to police, and will read his rules every Sabbath day once to the occupants of the house.

6. Said Thomas James will keep a record of the number of men, women and children received into the house each day. No. Sick, No. Deaths, No. discharged and No. remaining over, and such other facts as will give a correct view of his operations.

JOHN M. PALMER,  
Maj. General Commanding.