

LEMUEL HAYNES

Lemuel Haynes was born July 18, 1753, at West Hartford, Conn. He was a man of color, his father being of "unmingled African extraction, and his mother a white woman of respectable ancestry in New England." She was then a hired girl in the employ of a farmer who had a neighbor to whom belonged the Negro to whom the woman became attached. Haynes took neither the name of his father nor of his mother, but probably that of the man in whose home he was born. It is said that his mother, in a fit of displeasure with her host for some supposed neglect, called her child by the farmer's name. Mr. Haynes took the young mother to task, and while yet the baby was but a few days old, she disappeared. As she was the daughter of a Tolland County farmer, Mr. Haynes shielded the family from disgrace by having the child take his name with that of Lemuel which in Hebrew signifies "consecrated to God." The mother never had anything to do with her child, and it is said she married a white man, and lived a respectable life. Lemuel providentially met his mother once in an adjoining town, at the house of a relative, fondly expecting that he would receive some kind attentions from her. He was sadly disappointed, however, for she eluded the interview. Catching a glimpse of her at length when she was attempting to escape from him he accosted her in the language of severe but merited rebuke.

Mr. Haynes kept Lemuel till he was five months old, and then had him "bound out" to Deacon David Rose, of Granville, Massachusetts, a man of singular piety. There Lemuel grew up, and lived for thirty-two years. One condition of his indenture was that, in common with other children, he should enjoy the usual advantage of a district school education. Yet, as schools of that section were decidedly backward, his early opportunities for instruction were very

limited. Like other farmer boys, however, he was instructed in the fundamentals of education and the principles of religion. His duties often kept him from school, or caused him to arrive at a late hour. Yet he said, "As I had the advantage of attending a common school equal with other children, I was early taught to read, to which I was greatly attached and could vie with almost any of my age."¹ He soon formed the habit of studying the Bible and early made a profession of faith in the Christian religion. While young he was baptized by the Reverend Jonathan Huntington.

He quickly mastered the studies of the district school but he struggled forward, becoming his own teacher and subjecting his mind to unremitting and severe discipline. The scarcity of books was one of the severest difficulties which he had to encounter. There was no public library in the place. The Bible, Psalter, spelling-book, and perhaps a volume or two of sermons, comprised the library of the intellectual people of those towns. But says he: "I was constantly inquiring after books, especially in theology. I was greatly pleased with the writings of Watts and Doddridge, and with Young's *Night Thoughts*. My good master encouraged me in the matter."²

There came a turning point in Haynes's life when in 1775 the excellent and pious Mrs. Rose died. She had been more to him than an employer. Adopting him as her own son in early infancy, she tenderly trained him up to intellectual and Christian manhood. Speaking of this, Haynes said: "Soon after I came of age, God was pleased to take my mistress away, to my inexpressible sorrow. It caused me bitter mourning and lamentation."³ Prostrated thus, he sought relief from his affliction in the service of the continental army.

¹ Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 36.

² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³ The pious Deacon Rose lived some years thereafter and had the pleasure of seeing Lemuel a distinguished man. See Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 40.

Lemuel Haynes was a patriot of the Revolution. He early imbibed those great principles respecting "the rights of man," in defense of which the colonies fought Great Britain. In 1774 he enlisted as a minute man. Under the regulations of this enlistment he was required to spend one day in the week in manual exercises, and to hold himself in readiness for actual service, but soon after the battle at Lexington the following year he joined the regular army at Roxbury. The next year he volunteered to join the expedition to Ticonderoga to expel the enemy. Referring to this service in an address some years later Haynes said: "Perhaps it is not ostentatious in the speaker to observe that in early life he devoted all for the sake of freedom and independence, and endured frequent campaigns in their defense, and has never viewed the sacrifice too great. And should an attack be made on this sacred ark, the poor remains of life would be devoted to its defense."

After the close of his northern campaign he returned to his former home to engage in agricultural pursuits. But while thus engaged he little anticipated the designs of Providence concerning him. Improving his leisure hours, he had made considerable progress in the study of theology. At length he selected his text, and composed a sermon, without education or teacher. It happened thus: In the family of Deacon Rose, the evening preceding the Sabbath was customarily devoted to family instruction and religious worship. Haynes was occasionally asked to read from the sermons of Watts, Whitefield, Doddridge or Davies. Called upon to read as usual one evening, he slipped into the book his own sermon which he had written, and read it to the family. Greatly delighted and edified by this sermon read with unusual vivacity and feeling, Deacon Rose, who was then blind, inquired: "Lemuel, whose work is that which you have been reading? Is it Davies's sermon, or Watts's, or Whitefield's?" Haynes blushed and hesitated, but at last was obliged to confess the truth—"It's Lemuel's sermon."⁴

⁴ Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 48.

It was then discovered that in this young man was the promise of usefulness. The community encouraged him to look forward to the Christian ministry. Referring to this, he said: "I was solicited by some to obtain a collegiate education, with a view to the gospel ministry. A door was opened for it at Dartmouth College, but I shrunk at the thought. Reverend Mr. Smith encouraged me with many others. I was at last persuaded to attend to studying the learned languages. I was invited (1779) by the Reverend Daniel Farrand, of Canaan, Connecticut, to visit him. I accordingly did. With him I resided some time, studying the Latin language."⁵

How long he studied under Mr. Farrand is not known. He devoted a part of his time to belles lettres and the writing of sermons. While with Mr. Farrand, Haynes composed a poem which was surreptitiously taken from his desk and afterward delivered by a plagiarist at a certain college on the day of commencement. During these years he labored in the field to defray the expense of board and tuition, but the mind of this student underwent unusual development for which Mr. Haynes retained to the end of life a grateful remembrance of his friend and patron.

After making an extensive study of the Latin language, he felt a desire to study Greek that he might read the New Testament in the original, but he had no means to prosecute this study. While in doubt as to how he could attain so desirable an end the Reverend William Bradford, of Wintonbury, a small parish composed, as its name imports, of a part of three towns, Winsor, Farmington and Symsbury, offered to instruct him in the Greek language. This benefactor promised also to secure there for Mr. Haynes a school paying him sufficient money to defray his expenses. Mr. Haynes said: "I exerted myself to the utmost to instruct the children of my school, and found I gave general satisfaction. The proficiency I made in studying the Greek language I found greatly exceeded the expectations of my

⁵ Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 60.

preceptor.”⁶ He was thus serving as a “spiritual teacher in a respectable and enlightened congregation in New England, where he had been known from infancy only as a servant boy, and under all the disabilities of his humble extraction.” “That reverence which it was the custom of the age to accord to ministers of the gospel,” says his biographer, “was cheerfully rendered to Mr. Haynes.”⁷ All classes and ages were delighted with the sweet, animated eloquence of the man. In consideration of his talents Middlebury College later conferred upon him the degree of master of arts.⁸

This led friends to advise that he should be licensed to preach, and on November 29, 1780, after “an examination in the languages, sciences, doctrines and experimental religion,” he was licensed and preached intelligently from Psalm 96:1. He was ordained soon thereafter. Then came an early call to begin his ministry at the Congregational meeting house at Middle Granville, where he labored five years, preaching eloquently with zeal. The time was one of moral darkness with intemperance, profanity and infidelity rife. Strange doctrines intruded. Vice came boldly forward, but, like a rock, the young minister stood by his Lord and faith.

Among the pious in the church was Bessie Babbitt. She was a woman of considerable education and was engaged as a teacher in her town. Looking to Heaven for guidance, she was led, with consistent delicacy, to offer her heart to her pastor. He commended the proposal to God in prayer, and consulted other ministers. Knowing his birth and race, he sought their counsel. They advised in favor, and on September 22, 1773, they were married. There began then their happy married life which was blessed with nine children.⁹

From his small retired parish, among the companions

⁶ Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸ Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 677.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 678.

of his childhood, he was called to Torrington, Connecticut, where he continued preaching two years to large audiences.¹⁰ It is said that at Torrington a leading citizen was much displeased that the church should have "a nigger minister," and, to show his disrespect, this man went to church and sat with his hat on his head. "He hadn't preached far," said he, "when I thought I saw the whitest man I ever knew in that pulpit, and I tossed my hat under the pew."

The number of communicants increased during the term of his residence in Torrington. Some of the most respectable families from adjoining towns, particularly from Goshen, became his warmest friends, who constantly attended on his ministry. His biographer says: "The aged refer to his ministry with many delightful recollections. He was held in high estimation, especially by the church, and was esteemed by all classes as "an apt and very ready man in the pulpit." The mere mention of his name even now, after the lapse of half a century, seems to renew in their minds interesting associations. The church and society were strengthened by his labors, and many wished to retain him as their permanent pastor. The sensibility of a few individuals prevented, it is said, the accomplishment of their desires.

His eloquence and Christian nobility won him much attention and led to his being called to the pastorate of the Congregational Church in West Rutland, Vermont. The town was a country seat, and the church was one of importance. Then in the meridian of life, rich with the spirit and devoted to his calling, he was singularly successful; and while there were those who saw in him "that colored minister," all knew his pure white soul. The first year of his pastorate he received forty-two members by profession. In 1803 there came a great revival, and there were one hundred and three conversions, together with one hundred and fifty in the adjoining town of Pittsfield. Five years later

¹⁰ Special Report of the United States Commissioner of Education, 1871, p. 342.

there was another revival and Haynes received one hundred and nine. Naturally he was in demand by other churches as a revival preacher.

At this time New England was in a very backward state. The genial influence of science and religion had not been generally felt. There was no college in Vermont and its only academy was the one at Norwich, near Dartmouth College. There were not more than four or five Congregational ministers on the west side of the Green Mountains. A religious revival of considerable extent, under the preaching of Reverend Jacob Wood and others, had resulted in the formation of small churches. Certain parts of Connecticut were not much more advanced. In 1804 the Connecticut Missionary Society, therefore, appointed Mr. Haynes to labor in the destitute sections of Vermont. In 1809 he was appointed to a similar service by the Vermont Missionary Society. In this capacity Haynes became a great factor in the religious awakening throughout New England at that time.

In 1814 he was fraternal delegate from the Vermont to the Connecticut Ministers' Association at Fairfield. On his way thither he stopped on Sunday at New Haven, where, at the Blue Church (formerly Dr. Edwards'), he preached a sermon to a crowded house, having in the audience President Dwight of Yale and many distinguished people. At Fairfield the association insisted on his preaching the annual sermon.

Haynes soon exhibited evidences of being no ordinary man. He readily engaged in the heated theological discussion of his time, taking first rank as a theologian.¹¹ His most interesting debate was that with the famous Hosea Ballou, whom Haynes vanquished in his famous sermon based on the text, *Ye shall not surely die*. Many strange doctrines were then abroad. A writer says: "The Stoddardian principle of admitting moral persons, without credible evidence of grace, to the Lord's Supper, and the

¹¹ Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, p. 280.

half-way covenant by which parents, though not admitted to the Lord's Supper, were encouraged to offer their children in baptism, prevailed in many of the churches. Great apathy was prevalent among professing Christians, and the ruinous vices of profaneness, Sabbath-breaking and intemperance were affectingly prevalent among all classes. The spark of evangelical piety seemed to be nearly extinct in the churches. Revivals of religion were scarcely known except in the recollections of a former age. Some of the essential doctrines of grace were not received even by many in the churches.¹² Respecting the operations of the Holy Spirit, Mr. Haynes adopted the same principles as Edwards and Whitefield. He became effective in dispelling some of these clouds of doubt, bringing the people back to a more righteous conduct. Out of it he emerged a man of fame.

Happy as was this apostle in his work at Rutland the violent political controversy of his time was divided between two militant parties with one of which every free-man felt that he should be allied. Imbued with the spirit of the American Revolution, Haynes could not be neutral. "In principle," says his biographer, "he was a disciple of Washington and, therefore, favored those measures conducive of national government."¹³ As party spirit rapidly developed into deeply rooted rancor, sharp differences of opinion led to controversy in his parish. Invited to preach on political occasions and in some cases to the public through the press, he discussed political affairs with such keenness and sarcasm that unprincipled parasites in his community were much disturbed. In one of his discourses he used the following expression: "A dissembler is one proud of applause—will advertise himself for office—dazzling the public man with high pretext, like aspiring Absalom, 'Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man might come unto me and I would do him justice.'

¹² Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 169; *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XLIX, p. 234.

Such subjects to applause and hypocrisy will, even when the destinies of their country are at stake, be to a commonwealth what Arnold was to American freedom or Robespierre to a French Republic."¹⁴

It was not long before political excitement disturbed the harmony between the pastor and the people in West Rutland. On certain occasions Haynes was treated with unkindness and even with abuse by unprincipled men. Scandalous reports concerning him were circulated and he was denounced with profane language. But he gloried in tribulations, knowing that "tribulations worketh patience and patience experience and experience hope and hope maketh not ashamed." Observing the signs of the times, therefore, and governed by prayerful deliberation he felt that he should sever his connection with his church in Rutland. Accordingly, on the 27th of April, 1818, at a council convened to consider the serious question the pastoral relation was by mutual consent dissolved.

Haynes was then invited to preach in Manchester Vermont, a desirable town west of the Green Mountains. Because of his reputation as a preacher here Haynes had the helpful contact of the Honorable Richard Skinner, who in early life was elected a member of Congress and afterwards served as a judge of the Supreme Court and finally as Governor of Vermont. He associated also with Joseph Burr, the liberal benefactor of several literary and religious institutions.

In 1822 Haynes removed from Manchester to Granville, New York. He had enjoyed the support of the best people in that New England community and had usually found them a generous and enlightened people. Under his ministration at Manchester the church was much enlarged, but he was now declining in intellectual vivacity and realized that, although there was entire harmony between him and the people in Manchester, they should have a younger man. His church accordingly yielded to the desire of the Congre-

¹⁴ Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, p. 170.

gational Church in Granville, New York, and he took leave of Vermont to preach in another State.

In going to Granville, Haynes connected with the renowned Deacon Elihu Atkins, of Granville, with whom he had corresponded for more than thirty years. There had been a cherished intimacy between them from their youth. Atkins had for years relied upon the convincing instruction which he endeavored to obtain through correspondence with Haynes. These letters show the tenderness and the watchfulness of a pastor over a flock, which reminds one of the relation existing between Paul and the aged Philemon. During the eleven years which he spent at Granville, his congregation was decidedly edified. Thousands of persons giving evidence of their piety, joined the church and lived above reproach. While laboring among these people he died in the year 1833.

Thus passed away the man who was regarded by those who knew him as a worker of unusual ability and a preacher of power. Says his biographer: "Although the tincture of his skin, and all his features bore strong indications of his paternal original, yet in his early life there was a peculiar expression which indicated the finest qualities of mind. Many, on seeing him in the pulpit, have been reminded of the inspired expression, 'I am black, but comely.' In his case the remarkable assemblage of grace which was thrown around his semi-African complexion, especially his eye, could not fail to prepossess the stranger in his favor."¹⁵

He was a man of a feeling heart, always sensibly affected at the sight of human suffering. His sensibility knew no bounds. He exhibited quickness of perception and had the advantage of a never-failing memory. The confidence generally reposed in him by both ministers and the people credit him with having mature judgment. Although lacking in what is commonly known as classical education, as he never penetrated very far into the Greek and Latin classics, his mind was decidedly literary. He read the Latin lan-

¹⁵ Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, pp. 372-373.

guage fairly well but had never read more than the Greek testament and Septuagint. He was well read, however, in the English classics and his discourses show taste for the beauties of poetry and elegant composition.

Haynes was always industrious, his early habits having been formed in the rigid pursuits of business. At home he was a man of the highest domestic virtue. His family government was strictly parental, based on reason and principle, not on passion or blind indulgence. He was always strict, ever adhering to a standard of the most Puritanic order. Having early formed the high ideals of uprightness, no man could ever bring against him the charge of dishonesty. Above all he was a man of consistent piety and resignation to the will of God.

His dying testimony was: "I love my wife, I love my children, but I love my Saviour better than all." A plain marble marks his grave. On it is this inscription, prepared by himself:

"Here lies the dust of a poor hell-deserving sinner, who ventured into eternity trusting wholly on the merits of Christ for salvation. In the full belief of the great doctrines he preached while on earth, he invites his children and all who read this, to trust their eternal interest on the same foundation."

So lived and died one of the noblest of the New England Congregational ministers of a century ago. Of illegitimate birth, and of no advantageous circumstances of family, rank or station, he became one of the choicest instruments of Christ. His face betrayed his race and blood, and his life revealed his Lord.

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