A Black Methodist on Reconstruction in Mississippi: Three Letters by James Lynch in 1868-1869

by William B. Gravely

One of the lesser known episodes of modern American church history is the story of the post Civil War mission of northern black churchmen to the southern freedmen. Aside from denominational histories and occasional references in monographs on reconstruction, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the Negro churchman’s crucial role in freedman’s education, in the organization of churches among the ex-slaves and in movements for black political participation and civil rights action in the region of the old Confederacy. Whenever there is a comprehensive analysis of the black Christian mission during reconstruction, the career of the Methodist preacher, James Lynch, will figure prominently in the study.

Lynch was born on January 8, 1839 in Baltimore. There is no account of why he decided to become a minister, but his father’s example surely influenced him in that direction. Benjamin Lynch earned his livelihood as a merchant, but he also preached part-time to small congregations of black Christians. At the same time James graduated from Kimball Union Academy in New Hampshire, his father was pastor of a Congregational church in Newtown, Long Island which claimed thirty-five regular communicants.

Unable to continue his education as he had wished at Dartmouth College because of a failure in his father’s business, James Lynch taught school for a time in 1857 at Jamaica on Long Island. Not long afterwards he began training for the ministry under the tutelage of the black pastor of Brooklyn’s Siloam Presbyterian Church, Amos N. Freeman. In 1859 Bishop Daniel A. Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who had given Lynch his first educational training years earlier, induced his former student to change to his denomination and enter its travelling ministry in Illinois and Indiana. While he was on this assignment, Lynch apparently met and married Eugenia Rice at Galena, Illinois. In

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2 The Minutes and Sermon of the Second Presbyterian and Congregational Convention, held in the Central Presbyterian Church, Lombard Street, Philadelphia, on the 28th Day of October, 1858 [sic, 1857] (New York: Daly, Printer, 1858), p. 9 and an unnumbered statistics page following p. 19.
April, 1860 Payne brought Lynch back East, transferred him into the Baltimore Conference of the A.M.E. Church and appointed him to a parish at Georgetown in the District of Columbia. During the two years on this charge Lynch did his first writing for the A.M.E. Church organ in Philadelphia, the *Christian Recorder*, and began to establish his reputation as a persuasive orator and preacher. In 1862 he moved to Baltimore to be minister of the Walters Chapel Church.

But it was not to be James Lynch's fate to have an ordinary ecclesiastical career. By the time the great upheaval of the American Civil War had brought a presidential declaration of freedom for southern slaves on January 1, 1863, the ground had been prepared for a different adventure which linked this young black preacher to the new destiny of his race.

James Lynch’s own mother had been a slave before Benjamin Lynch bought her freedom from bondage. Born a free man, James had not experienced the worst aspects of what he later called “American tyranny and prejudice,” but he knew something of the irrationality of caste and of social proscription because he was black. In 1860, for example, he and Bishop Payne were expelled from their quarters in the sleeping car of a train going to Baltimore because of the protest of a white Tennessean. They were forced to spend the night in the smoker, the car in which black passengers usually rode.

The motivation to combat “the greatest folly of white Americans,” as Lynch described racial prejudice, and the commitment to work for “the improvement of the colored people,” which he once called his “highest earthly aim,” were awaiting such an opportunity as that presented on April 27, 1863 at the annual session of the Baltimore Conference. C. C. Leigh, a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church and the financial agent of the newly formed National Freedmen's Relief Association, asked for missionary

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4 Ibid.; *Christian Recorder*, Nov. 2, Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 1861; May 31, Dec. 27, 1862. While he was at Georgetown, Lynch came to know Benjamin Tucker Tanner, later an outstanding editor and theologian who became an A.M.E. bishop. See Tanner’s private diary, entries for Dec. 7 and 16, 1860; Jan. 29, 1861, in the Tanner Papers which are part of the Carter G. Woodson Collection in the Library of Congress.


6 The episode is told by Payne in his *Recollections of Seventy Years* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968 reprint of the 1883 ed.), pp. 139-140.

volunteers "to care for the moral, social and religious interest of the freedmen of South Carolina." James Lynch responded to the call, and Bishop Payne appointed him to accompany James D. S. Hall from the New York A.M.E. Conference to the South. On May 17 the two missionaries preached their farewell sermons in New York City's Sullivan Street Church. The service so moved Lynch's sister, Jane, that she likewise volunteered as a teacher. Soon she too was at St. Helena's Island off Beaufort, South Carolina, an area which Union forces had controlled since November, 1861 and the spot of the Port Royal experiment as a model for reconstruction. 8

For the next two years Lynch was in South Carolina and Georgia directing relief activities, teaching and establishing schools, preaching and organizing churches. Late in 1863 he planned and coordinated the Beaufort celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation for the forthcoming New Year's day. 9 As the Union Army occupied new territory, especially after the fall of Savannah and Charleston late in the war, Lynch extended his labors to other areas. He was present, for example, at a widely reported interview between General William T. Sherman and twenty black church officials and ministers from Savannah in January, 1865. 10 Throughout the period his correspondence in the Christian Recorder recounted his travels and observations, appealed to northern blacks for aid and invited relief workers and educators to come South and share in uplifting the freedmen. 11

A month after the war had ended, Bishop Payne returned to his native South Carolina to organize a conference of the A.M.E. churches which Lynch and others had established. Lynch was one of the secretaries for the first session of the South Carolina A.M.E. Conference (which included at the time both Georgia and North Carolina), but he was left without an appointment to continue his

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11 This important series of letters, which runs from June, 1863 through the spring of 1865, has not been collated or examined in detail. One example from Lynch's southern correspondence is in James M. McPherson, The Negro's Civil War (New York: Vintage Books ed., 1965), pp. 134-135.
missionary work for the National Freedmen's Relief Association.\footnote{Minutes of the South Carolina Annual Conference of the African M. E. Church, 1865, 1866, 1867 (Charleston: Record Printing House, 1867), pp. 5-6. These Minutes are reprinted in Smith's History, pp. 503-524.}

During the summer of 1865 Lynch was in Georgia. On July 4 he addressed an estimated ten thousand freedmen at a celebration on the military parade ground in Augusta. His oration delineated the national mission to promulgate the "gospel" of the Declaration of Independence. It was a stirring address that spoke of "Divine Providence" uniting "the destiny of both races" and making "the deliverance of the slave from bondage the \textit{sine qua non} of the deliverance of the nation from the consuming fires of rebellion." Lynch's vision was optimistic. He praised what the nation had done in behalf of "the Colored Man" during the war and urged whites to go further and obliterate entirely the unnatural prejudice against color. He appealed that "North and South, white and black shake hands—join hearts—shout for joy—gird up their loins and with a patriotism as exalted as the national grandeur, a love of justice and mercy like that which is Divine, and a hope as high as the objects of promise, go on in the pursuit of further development."\footnote{The Mission of the United States Republic. An Oration Delivered by the Rev. James Lynch, at the Parade Ground, Augusta, Ga., July 4, 1865 (Augusta: Steam Power Press Chronicle & Sentinel Office, 1865), pp. 2, 7, 9, 11-14.}

By the winter, when the struggle for the control over and direction of reconstruction policy was going on between President Andrew Johnson and congressional leaders, Lynch had returned to Philadelphia. In February, 1866 he became editor of the Recorder. For the next sixteen months he wrote aggressively about southern matters, especially protesting the racist views of President Johnson and enthusiastically backing congressional Republicans who sought to insure the civil rights and political freedom of blacks.\footnote{See, for example, Christian Recorder, Feb. 17, Mar. 3, 17, 31, Apr. 7, May 19, 1866 and extracts from Lynch's editorials as quoted in Payne, The Semi-Centenary, pp. 159-172.} Lynch was concerned as well about ecclesiastical reconstruction. For a time he favored working out some accommodation with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, a majority of whose black members had abandoned their pre-war church ties for new ecclesiastical relations. Lynch was not confident that the A.M.E. Church, on its own, could meet the needs and demands of this movement for religious independence.\footnote{Christian Recorder, May 12, 19, June 2, 16, Sept. 8, 1866.} That view finally led him in the spring of 1867 to look to the white Methodists of the North who also were organizing churches, conferences and educational institutions for southern Negroes.
In April, 1867 Lynch visited the New England Conference of the M.E. Church where he conferred with abolitionist churchmen like Gilbert Haven who were championing a Methodist crusade into the South that would topple the structures of racial separation. As the new editor of Zion's Herald in Boston Haven had just published a manifesto, "No Caste in the Church of God," which would be, if he had his way, the platform for a racially integrated Methodism. For the next few weeks Lynch pondered the propriety of joining the predominantly white denomination, from which, eighty years earlier, the A.M.E. Church had withdrawn in protest over racial restrictions and caste treatment. He feared, however, that his church's "mission as a separate organization [was] near a close" and that it did not possess the resources "to carry on the great work of Methodist reconstruction in the South." The M.E. Church, on the other hand, was, Lynch came to believe, "God's chosen power to lift up my race from degradation." 17

In July, 1867 Lynch joined the Erie Conference of the M.E. Church and immediately transferred to the Mississippi Mission Conference as Presiding Elder of the Natchez District. His valedictory editorial for the Recorder traced his reasons for resigning and for pursuing this course to "convictions of duty to my race." Lynch announced, "They impel me to go to a Southern state and unite my destiny with that of my people, to live with them, suffer, sorrow, rejoice, and die with them. I feel, that, by the blessing of God," he explained, "I can, however little it may be, do more for my race, religiously and politically, by working in the South than remaining at my present post." 19

When Lynch arrived in Mississippi, he discovered that northern Methodist work, which was almost exclusively among blacks, had barely gotten off the ground. The entire state made up a single district until he came in August to share the work with W.N. Darnell. At the next annual conference held in New Orleans in December, the two districts were officially authorized to adjust to the increased membership in Mississippi which had nearly tripled during the previous year. 21

10 Zion's Herald, Apr. 10, 1867; Christian Recorder, Apr. 20, 1867.
17 New Orleans Advocate of the M.E. Church, as quoted in the New York Christian Advocate, Nov. 14, 1867.
18 New York Christian Advocate, July 25, 1867. No conference record mentions a Natchez District, so that the newspaper account may be in error.
19 Christian Recorder, June 8, 1867, quoted in the New York Christian Advocate, June 13, 1867.
21 Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1868 (New York, n.d.), pp. 5-7. That conference was the last in which
His territory was so vast, covering three-fifths of the state, and the needs so great that Lynch found in his first year that there was too much for one man to do. But he did not seem to tire under the heavy work load. He travelled the train lines, stopping off at towns and in rural communities to organize a M. E. church for blacks or to locate a preaching place for a new circuit. In April, 1868, for example, he wrote to the New York Advocate about preaching in a courthouse in Forest, Mississippi and in a Southern Methodist church at Hillsborough.\(^\text{22}\) By summer he reported an increase of 1800 members in his district since the past conference. In each location he did what he could to insure that day and sabbath schools were connected to the churches. When the local congregations were strong enough, he aided them in establishing temperance, benevolent and missionary societies.\(^\text{23}\)

Even though he was a frequent preacher for revivals and camp meetings, Lynch did not view the church's mission in Mississippi to be limited to spiritual matters. Almost immediately he sought to exercise responsible social and political leadership that would help the former slaves through the transition which the war's outcome had wrought. First, he used his oratorical power to advocate freedmen's rights and the extension of opportunity for their social and economic improvement. When the state constitutional convention met early in 1868, he gave a dramatic speech on that subject in the State Senate chamber that greatly influenced the delegates.\(^\text{24}\) Next Lynch drew upon his editorial experience. In the fall of the same year he began a journal, The Colored Citizen's Monthly, in which he proposed to defend the interests of the freedmen and cover their religious and political activities.\(^\text{25}\) Finally, by the spring of the next year Lynch had become a public official, adding political responsibilities to his extensive ecclesiastical duties.

The private correspondence which follows is a revealing portrait of Lynch's perceptions of Methodist reconstruction in Mississippi after nearly eighteen months of canvassing the state as a church organizer. The immediate setting for the first two letters is the end of the conference year for 1868. Lynch writes to Bishop Matthew

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\(^\text{22}\) New York Christian Advocate, Apr. 23, 1868.


\(^\text{24}\) New York Christian Advocate, Feb. 27, 1868.

\(^\text{25}\) New York Christian Advocate, Nov. 5, 1868; Zion's Herald, Nov. 5, 1868. His first issue was dated Oct. 20, 1868. No extant copies of this paper, which Lynch published until his death, have been located, but references to it can be found in Methodist Advocate, Feb. 24, June 23, 1869; Feb. 23, 1870; Zion's Herald, Apr. 22, 1869.
Simpson, the most influential Methodist leader of the era, in preparation for the upcoming session of the annual conference. He describes church developments and urges upon the bishop a strategy for wider church extension that would meet the challenge of competition from Southern Methodists, who were beginning to organize their remaining black members into a separate denomination, as well as from his old colleagues in the A.M.E. Church. Both letters indicate Lynch's deep concern for education for the black populace in general and for the training of preachers and teachers specifically. They show, likewise, Lynch's sensitivity about the political and racial outlooks of Southern Methodists. His third letter, written eleven months later, focuses rather exclusively on his own vocational dilemma. By this time he had become an alderman in the city of Jackson, had visited President Ulysses Simpson Grant in Washington to discuss racial and political matters and had been nominated on the Republican ticket for Secretary of State.²⁶ He appeals to Bishop Simpson for counsel as he finds himself drawn more and more into politics.²⁷

Jackson Miss
Dec. 3 1868

Bishop M. Simpson D.D.
Rev'd Sir:

Learning by the Episcopal plan 1868-1869 that you will preside at Miss[issippi] Conference Canton Jan 28th I beg leave to respectfully and confidingly submit the following for your wise consideration.

Extension of Our Work

It is thought by some that to cultivate well what we have should be the primary object; to increase our church territory, secondary. I do not know but what this line of policy might have been justly inferred from the remarks of Bishop [Edward R.] Ames at our last Conference. I have inclined to the opposite view. To increase our church territory is at this moment of primary importance and in comparison with this, the thorough cultivation of what we have is secondary. Because (1) The entire colored population of this state are at this time more impressible than ever they will be in the future (2) Influences are at work to secure them against the Methodist Episcopal Church: one of these is the Methodist Episcopal Church South which holds a colored [2] Conference at Hazel-

²⁷ The three letters are in the Matthew Simpson Papers at the Library of Congress. They are transcribed and edited here from photoreproduction copies of the originals. The page numbers in brackets are those in Lynch's manuscript.
hurst about the date of this letter (perhaps later). They elect to orders and ordain almost any colored man who will follow them: this they do at the white Conferences, if more convenient than waiting for the meeting of the colored. Their ministers are as unscrupulous as are the legates of the Pope, they tell the colored people that the M. E. Church has become corrupt, that it seeks them to make them subjects of taxation in the future to support church interests.

I regret to say that they select some of the vilest democrat negroes in the state as their instruments. The African M. E. Church is equally bitter toward us: it is in a singular position; professing to be radical in politics and opposed to the M. E. Church South, it at the same time endorses every slander breathed against the M. E. Church or its functionaries in the Episcopal and editorial chairs, by the M. E. Church South. The latest of which was the forcible vented by the African M. E. Bishop who visited here a few weeks since to the effect that one of the M. E. Bishops did not want the colored people [3] to live in the United States. The M. E. Church South is moved alone by political considerations, never was a church more partisan; professive to ignore politics. I can prove that it has refused to fellowship some of the best white men in the state—men of spotless Christian characters and also to renew licenses of local preachers because they were Radical in politics. We must possess the ground or give it up to this politico-ecclesiastical absurdity that is the bellows, blowing into life the dying fires of hostility to the Government. For the African M. E. Church I have a high regard. I honor its history in the past, I affectionately cling to many of the good and true men within its bosom; but reiterating what I have often expressed, it is not in a line with events, its arms are too feeble to be thrown around this great Methodist community of the South.

Everywhere in this state the people are ready to come to us—now is the time to plant our Church in every county of the state and thus, secure [4] the people forever against the influence of a Church that has got the consumption but yet possess[es] a sufficient lease of life to hinder progress and teach sectionalism. The great argument of the A.M.E. Church as against the M. E. Church has been that colored men organized it, my face knocks this argument dead. Beleiving [sic] then in the importance of


29 Lynch’s meaning is vague. There are some references to his being a mulatto
extension I am exceedingly anxious that new charges with preachers shall be recognized at our next Conference, and that appointments of bretheren [sic] to counties not yet occupied by us be made, provided men of self sacrificing zeal can be found. I would respectfully recommend that appropriations vary in amount [sic] according to the resources of the charges to which the preachers are sent. The old charges do not need the inspiration of missionary appropriations to keep them in working order, they have learned to love the Old Mother Church because it is the church of Christ, yet each one of them will want a little something to aid in supporting the preachers. It is our policy to impress the people with the idea of making the churches self supporting as rapidly as possible [5] I beg leave further to suggest that in cases where appropriations for old charges are reduced that it not appear that it was done on the recommendation of the Presiding Elders; possibly no such recommendations may be made. Our people are quite ignorant and require much tenderness as well as decision in dealing with them.

As the great cry is continually kept up by the rebel papers that "All the Northern preachers or politicians want is money" it would be a great calamity to throw any part of the support of the Presiding Elders on the people; for whenever amid fierce opposition they attempted to establish a church mercenary considerations would be charged; for let it be remembered that the M. E. South preacher and the democrat [sic] politician with intelligence and skill contest every inch of ground with us. The Presiding Elder can do much to raise the salary of the preacher in charge at Quarterly meetings.

Improvement

I am satisfied that you will be [6] pleased and astonished at the great improvement of the bretheren [sic] since you last met them.30

Colored Citizens Monthly

I have started on my own "hook" a paper with the above title, please find a copy inclosed. I have started it for several reasons (1) I desire to educate the people as to the design, and benefits to be derived from the organization of the M. E. Church, their duties thereto and its importance as an instrumentality for the salvation of souls (2) To educate the black man in the duties of citizenship to teach him to regard his manhood and to develop "back-bone," as well as to inculcate temperance and virtue (3) As the native capacity of the colored men is so poorly thought of I desire to make

and perhaps that is what he wants to emphasize here. Or, it may be that he is pointing out that he, as a Negro, is organizing M. E. churches.

30 Simpson presided over the Mississippi Mission Conference in December, 1866.
this paper as far as possible a demonstration of its strength. (4) Designing politicians as unscrupulous as Satan, are preying like wolves upon the Freedmen and they should be unmasked when they imperil their interests.

The paper will advocate the claims of the M. E. Church, the elevation of the colored race and Equal political rights [7] Proposition has been made to me to consolidate it with our Church paper to be published at Atlanta.\(^{31}\) I fail to see that I would be doing increased service to my race thereby; but yet if advised so to do by my superiors in the church I will yield with good grace.\(^{32}\) Yet as I take to editing a paper by almost natural inclination must I think that God may bless my effort in this direction.

**Schools**

The support of public schools by this state will not be reliable for several years, our meeting houses are generally used by Freedmen's Bureau schools under the auspices of teachers and societies who have no sympathy with Methodism, if the Freedmen's Aid Society of our Church will look after us a little we can have much influence in directing the educational work of this State, which in truth is not prospering in accordance with the large appropriations made.

I am, Bishop, Most Respectfully Yours

James Lynch

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Meridian Miss.
Dec 5 1868

Rev. M. Simpson D.D.
Dear Bishop

Yours reached me on yesterday. The change of time of holding Conference pleases the bretheren [sic] and all will be in readiness. I have every reason to assure you that I have no doubt that Mrs. Simpson will find a trip south at this time highly pleasant.

Our weather is fine and the fierce storm of political excitement is over—the Ku Klux have vanished—northern men are hated and persecuted in silence and under a Judas face—the election of [President U. S.] Grant was the signal of quiet. You will be treated by those whites you may meet, with civility and in many instances with that distinguished consideration that is due.

Gen Biddle U.S.A. formerly of Philadelphia, a first class gentleman, commands U. S. forces at Jackson. Mrs. Biddle has made

\(^{31}\) The Methodist Advocate of Atlanta began in 1869.

\(^{32}\) Lynch kept up his own paper and became, at the same time, a corresponding editor of the Methodist Advocate from 1869 to 1872.
inquiries of me respecting the health and location of your family. Perhaps Mrs. Simpson may know her. I am confident that she will delight to add if it be possible to the pleasure of Mrs. Simpson’s trip. I have not had opportunity as yet to make known to our Northern white friends that you are coming—it will be done within the next few days.

Six brethren [sic] are to be admitted into full Connexion, and are candidates for elder’s orders, though far below the literary standard, they have and are improving. [2] Nine (9) are to be continued on trial. There will probably be fifteen or twenty applications for local deacon’s orders and fourteen applications for admission on trial.

The conference therefore will probably number forty-nine (49)

I am looking forward to the Conference with great hope it will excite great interest throughout the state and make an impression on white and colored that will tell on future generations. It is almost like founding an empire. We need an educational institution in this state. One thousand dollars would put up a building that would do for a commencement, and three thousand dollars would pay a competent teacher a salary of eighteen hundred dollars a year and aid in supporting nearly fifteen or twenty young men in studying for the ministry. There is a man that I think would throw his soul in this work, and one whose ripened judgment in affairs of church and state, his sympathy with the race, would render him eminently fit to train a ministry from the freedmen. I mean Rev. J. D. Long of the Bedford Mission, the climate would promote his health. We must educate our ministry. Please pardon the boldness of my suggestions, inspired by an ardent zeal for the elevating of my race. The gross ignorance, superstition of our preachers render them not the best men to lay the foundations of a great work: however much we may encourage them, they are the best instruments we can get but if you can give us a school with such a man as Rev. J. D. [3] Long at its head we will soon have a different class of men. It is true that there is an institution at New Orleans but I feel it will not meet our wants. Dr. [John P.] Newman is the controlling spirit, though battling nobly for the church and a tower of strength for loyal blacks and white. I feel confident that his unlimited personal aspirations and his tendency to gain diffusive

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33 Long was a pre-war abolitionist who was involved in considerable controversy in the Philadelphia Conference because he charged some of his fellow pastors with owning slaves and holding pro-slavery sentiments. See his *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State* (Philadelphia: J. D. Long, 1857). After the war he operated a racially integrated Sunday school at the Bedford Street Mission in Philadelphia. See *Zion’s Herald*, June 26, 1867; Apr. 16, 1868; Jan. 9, 1873.

34 The Thomson Biblical Institute.
influence preclude any great interest on his part in the individual development of the Negro. I say this as an admirer of the Doctor. The Howard Orphan Asylum & grounds now controlled by [the Freedmen's] Bureau, could I think, as before explained be secured for two or three thousand dollars, yet to take the charge of the orphans and the infirm might be more than could be sustained just now. I am exceedingly anxious that some arrangement might be made by which this property and the entire control thereof, pass into our hands after the educational department of the Bureau is closed. It is a remarkable fact that the Freedmen's Bureau in its vast appropriations seems invariably to slight claims pressed by those who are in the interest of Methodism. I think the history of the Bureau will show that it has always given the "cold shoulder" to Methodism.

I have written to Professor Bassett of the Institute asking him to secure three or four colored young ladies to come down here as teachers to be located in Bureau schools at different points. I earnestly hope that you will recommend that they be aided by the Freedmen's Aid Society of the M. E. Church.

P. S. Dec 6 Sunday night 10 P.M.

Since writing the foregoing last night I communicate the following items which may be of interest. Our Quarterly meeting was held at Meridian to-day. Rev. Thomas Taylor (white) superintendent of "Colored Work" M. E. Church South visited our church and preached. He informed me that he had organized two colored conferences, one in Kentucky and then in Tennessee and would organize the Mississippi Colored Conference at Hazelhurst Miss on Jan 7th (Quite a coincidence that we both meet at the same time) The Alabama Conference which embraces a large portion of Mississippi, is in session here now, Bishop George F. Pierce presiding. I went tonight to hear Dr. Thomas O. Summers editor of Nashville [Christian Advocate] deliver a discourse on the "Unity of the human race" Text Acts 17c 26v It was a powerfully scientific, historical, and biblical argument in support of this great truth. He stated that he delivered it by request of Bishop Pierce. The Doctor was as emphatic however in declaring the negro to be unchangeably an inferior type or class of the human species as he was in declaring him to be a member of the human family. The Doctor repre-
sents the most liberal sentiment in the conference toward the negro, and it was evident from his tone that he felt his sentiments to be unpopular with his auditory which was largely composed of Methodist (South) preachers. To me this was a terrible commentary on the animus of his denomination and showed its utter unfitness to take charge of the spiritual interests of the colored people. Notwithstanding the Doctor—united with his vindication of the negro's right to be considered a member of the human species, a declaration of his inferiority, his brethren very largely consider him too far advanced towards negro equality!!

Dr. Taylor informed me that they were about to start a paper for their colored members at Memphis Tenn. Tennessee is their stronghold. I put on record my prediction that in Mississippi they will never succeed among the colored people until they join the Methodist Episcopal Church.

J. L.

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Dear Bishop, again I most earnestly beg that we may have a school for the training of ministers. Perhaps you might know someone that would do as well as Brother Long.

Very Respectfully Yours
James Lynch

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Meridian Oct 6 1869

Rev. M. Simpson D.D.
My Dear Bishop

You will remember I wrote to you some time since as to whether I would continue a political leader, and you left me to my judgment and conscience.

With great reluctance I have continued in politics—to have halted would have discouraged others. I have held the foremost position in the party as an organizer—have edited—and do now a political paper. By an overwhelming majority—almost unanimously—I have been nominated for Secretary of State. When it is remembered that this officer is a member of the Board of Education, the important relation which I will hold to the future of my people is manifest.

37 Late in 1869 under the editorship of a white Methodist, Samuel Watson, the Christian Index was begun. Later it became the paper for the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church following that denomination's official beginnings in 1870. See Southern Christian Advocate, Sept. 17, Dec. 3, 1869; Feb. 4, 1870; Nashville Christian Advocate, Nov. 27, 1869.
The church prospers everywhere. We are spreading out amazingly. But in the terrible whirlwind of political excitement of which we are the subjects [page 2 unnumbered] I feel that Christ's Church is starving and suffering for the bread which I would give were I devoted with singleness to the ministry. My political relations & labor increase the borders of the church for as I go I preach, but it does take from my ability to spiritualize and discipline. Yet I am doing the best I can. I have taken the liberty of appointing an Assistant Presiding Elder, Rev. Thomas Anderson: subject to your approval.

If you say I ought to resign my position on the state ticket I will do so. Dear Bishop be assured that I shall neglect no interest of the Church, for it lies near my heart. Our Canvass is a bitter one, nothing like it in the history of American politics. It will be over in (7) seven weeks—election 30th proximo. Revivals of religion at Goodman, Macon & Enterprise. There have been interesting ones at other points.

Yours in Christ
James Lynch

The conflict between his political career and ministerial responsibilities which James Lynch felt in 1869 never got resolved. Fortunately the church did not force him to make a choice of where he would invest all of his energies. That freedom permitted him to go on employing both institutions, church and state, to serve the religious and political progress of his race. For the next three years, like the previous two, Lynch ceaselessly devoted himself to that cause.

The years 1869 through 1872 were not a peaceful period in Mississippi. Once Lynch narrowly escaped an assassination attempt during a quarterly conference meeting at Lexington, Mississippi. But such dangers only intensified Lynch's commitment. "I will not voluntarily yield 'a hair's breadth' in asserting the manhood of my race," he wrote afterwards. His editorials in the Colored Citizen partook of the same sentiment. "We demand, then," he asserted in an appeal for support of the paper, "that every railroad and steamboat company, stage coach owner and hotel keeper, shall provide as good accommodations for colored citizens as they do for white; and that they shall not subject them to poorer fare at less cost." Such fundamental rights, Lynch contended, had nothing to do with "social intermingling" that white racists so often claimed was the goal of civil rights spokesmen.

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38 New York Christian Advocate, Apr. 8, 1869; Zion's Herald, Apr. 22, 1869.
39 Zion's Herald, Apr. 22, 1869.
40 Methodist Advocate, Feb. 23, 1870.
His fearless defense of black rights combined with his personal integrity and speaking skills made Lynch the most popular Negro leader in the state. He led the ballot on the state ticket in the 1869 elections, and two years later he was returned to office again as Secretary of State. In 1872, as in 1868, he was a delegate to the Republican national convention which nominated President Grant. 41

For all his political activity Lynch did not neglect the interests of his church. He continued as a presiding elder, although his district shrunk geographically as the conference wisely created new districts in response to the growing membership. By 1872 it was more than 23,000 in the state, a growth of more than four times the number in 1868. 42 The conference chose Lynch as its delegate to the General Conference of 1872 in Brooklyn where, toward the end of the session, he made an impressive speech opposing the organization of separate “white” and “Negro” annual conferences in Georgia and Alabama. 43

James Lynch was at the height of his power when, in December, 1872, pneumonia caused his ill-timed death and cut short his brilliant career of racial, political and ecclesiastical leadership. 44

No one can estimate what might have happened in Mississippi politics or in Methodism in that state had he lived beyond his

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42 Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1868 (New York, n.d.), pp. 5-7; . . . for the Year 1872 (New York, n.d.), pp. 146-147. Except for a few white missionaries in the conference the entire membership and clergy were black.
43 Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1872, pp. 90, 92-93, 103, 417.
44 There has been considerable confusion about the date and circumstances of Lynch’s death. Smith’s History lists the date as Dec. 18, 1871 (see p. 46), an error in the year which may have been a typing or printing mistake. More recent confusion originates in Wharton’s The Negro in Mississippi. Quoting from a white Democratic paper hostile to Lynch, Wharton stated that Lynch died in 1875 after being dragged into court by white Republican rivals on charges of adultery during the political canvass for Congress which Lynch had entered. There is no substantiation either for the date, which is certainly erroneous, or for the malicious inferences about Lynch’s character. Neither is there evidence that he was ever a candidate for Congress. Unfortunately, the distinguished historian John Hope Franklin uses Wharton’s date (p. 155) to correct what he supposed to have been a mistake contained in the autobiography of another black Mississippi reconstructionist named Lynch (no relation). John Roy Lynch, in his Reminiscences of an Active Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), gave the correct date (see p. 69) but Franklin wrongly corrected it in an editorial footnote (n. 2 on that page). Accounts of his death are in New York Christian Advocate, Dec. 26, 1872; the Jackson (Miss.) Pilot, Dec. 21 as quoted in the New York Christian Advocate, Jan. 9, 1873; Methodist Advocate, Jan. 6, 1873. A. C. McDonald’s funeral sermon on Dec. 22 is in the Christian Recorder, Jan. 16, 1873.
thirty-three years. He had earned begrudging praise even from Democratic opponents who recognized his talents and basic integrity. One paper spoke of him as "the most popular carpet-bagger in the State—the best educated man, and the best speaker, and the most effective orator, of that party, in Mississippi; and, withal, as much of a gentleman as he can be with his present white associations." 45

At his death, however, it was appropriately left to his old colleague and successor to the editorship of the Christian Recorder, Benjamin T. Tanner to offer a final estimation of James Lych as "... the most far-seeing man of his age that we ever knew. By nature a conservative," Tanner's tribute continued, "in so far as it is possible for a man of sect to chiefly prize Christianity, or a man of party to chiefly prize the nation, Mr. Lynch was the man to do it. Of course, in his latest years, he was a M. E. Methodist—but he belonged to us all; and so far as was possible sought the good of all. Of course he was a Republican; but in a higher and better sense, he was the most national man among the State officers of Mississippi. And lastly, he was a colored man, of course, but color with him was an accident; he esteemed man as man, irrespective of it." 46

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45 Hinds County Gazette, Sept. 15, 1869, as quoted in Wharton, The Negro in Mississippi, p. 155.
46 Christian Recorder, as quoted in Methodist Advocate, Jan 8, 1873.