

# **MEN OF MARK:**

**Eminent, Progressive and Rising.**

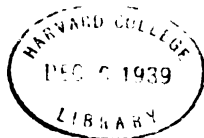
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**WITH AN INTRODUCTORY SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR BY REV. HENRY M.**  
**TURNER, D. D., LL. D., BISHOP A. M. E. CHURCH.**

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## CXXXV.

## JAMES W. C. PENNINGTON, D. D.

Able Presbyterian Divine—Greek, Latin and German Scholar.

**T**HIS, the first colored pastor of the New York Presbyterian church, was born about 1809 in Maryland. It is said by some that many men and women of the Negro race, who have stood head and shoulders above their fellow men, inherited their admirable traits of character from white ancestors; but it has been proven that there are many exceptions to this rule. The subject of our sketch was of pure African blood and descent.

Slave life in Maryland was more severe than in many of the Atlantic States, and in 1830 Mr. Pennington could no longer endure the yoke of bondage and escaped to Pennsylvania. Although twenty-one years old, he had never acquired any knowledge of letters. As soon as he was out of hearing of the slave driver's whip he applied himself earnestly to study, and in part made up for what was withheld from him in early life. In five years he had made such strides as to be able to teach a school for colored children at New Town, Long Island. Feeling that he had been called to the gospel ministry, he removed to New

Haven, Connecticut, where he could enter a theological seminary and where he commanded a larger salary as teacher. After three years' earnest study he returned to his old position in New Town; was ordained and took charge of the Presbyterian church. Two years later he went to Hartford, Connecticut, and remained there teaching and preaching eight years. Dr. Pennington was five times elected a member of the "General Convention for the Improvement of the Free Colored People." If nothing more than this was said, it would speak volumes for this worker for the race.

In 1843 he was elected delegate-at-large by the State of Connecticut to attend the World's Anti-slavery convention held in London. In the same year he was delegated by the American Peace convention to represent them in the World's Peace Society, which met at the same place and in the same year. During his three visits to England he lectured in London, Paris, Brussels, and by his pulpit brilliancy won many complimentary press notices. He supplied the pulpits of the most popular ministers, and was classed with the leading theologians of his day. The degree of D. D. was conferred by the University of Heidelberg, Germany. On his return to America he was received with open arms. He was twice elected president of the Hartford Central Association of Congregational ministers, composed exclusively of white men. During his presidency two young white men presented themselves to be examined for license to preach. Dr. Pennington examined them in church history, theology, etc., and signed their certificates. It must have been a novel scene—a fugitive slave

granting the sons of his oppressors (one the son of a Kentucky slave-holder) leave to preach the gospel.

In 1841 the doctor published a little book entitled, '**A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People.**' also an "Address on West India Emancipation," and other papers. He was a life member of the American Tract Society, and many years pastor of the Shiloh church, New York. The *Rising Sun* says:

In stature he was of the common size, slightly inclined to corpulency, with an athletic frame and a good constitution. The fact that Dr. Pennington was considered a good Greek, Latin and German scholar, although his life was spent in slavery, is not more strange than that Henry Diaz, the black commander in Brazil, is extolled in all the histories of that country as one of the most sagacious and talented men and experienced officers of whom they can boast. Dr. Pennington died in 1871, his death being hastened by the excessive use of intoxicating liquors, which had impaired his usefulness in his latter days.

In the life of this man we see much to commend to the young men of the race. Copy well his earnest quest for knowledge; his love for race; but shun the vice which at the last clouded his brilliant intellect and placed him beneath the shame of a dissipation and tarnished his otherwise good name.