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## BISHOP WESLEY J. GAINES, D.D.



[BISHOP WESLEY J. GAINES, D.D.]

THIS eminent warrior for God was born in Wilkes County, Georgia, October 4th, 1840, the seventh of fourteen children that were given to William and Louisa Gaines in the slave cabin of that Southern State. Godly people were these humble slave parents, and though the father belonged to the M. E. Church South, and the mother was a faithful adherent to the Baptist faith, their wedded life of fifty-eight years was one of harmony and affection, never disturbed by the bitterness of doctrinal discussion. Their united aim was the conversion of their children, and one of the earliest and most precious remembrances of Bishop Gaines' childhood is that of his mother praying for him under a tree in these words: "Oh God, make this, my boy, Wesley, such a man as Thou wouldst have him be. Make him Thy son for Jesus sake."

At the age of nine years the little slave boy gave his heart to God, and his earnest, consecrated life is evidence of a Divine answer to his mother's prayer.

The fact that Wesley was of frail physique exempted him from early being put at continuous labor, thus giving him larger opportunities for learning to read and write, which he did without the knowledge of his master. The few elementary books in his possession were kept carefully concealed. Hearing the approach of the patrollers one night, the little boy hid his treasures in an ash hopper, and to his great grief a heavy rain

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fell and the lye thus formed ruined his books. His sorrow over his loss was so deep that his father gave him all the money in his possession, three dollars and fifty cents, with which he purchased a Geography, English Grammar, "Peter Parley's" History, a copy book, pen and ink.

The first letter ever written by Wesley was to his brother Stephen in Washington; having no money he mailed the letter without stamping it, and ran from the office as fast as his little feet could carry him. Stephen was notified by the postmaster and forwarded the postage for the letter. His reply stimulated Wesley to greater zeal in his studies.

In 1855 he moved to Stewart County, Georgia, where he remained one year, going thence to Muscogee County, where he lived until he entered upon the work of the Ministry, which sacred office had been his dearest ambition since childhood. He began the rhetorical work of the sacred profession when a mere lad, by preaching the funeral sermon of every dog, chicken and bird that died on the plantation.

While on the Muscogee plantation he was married to Miss Julia A. Camper, August 20th, 1863, whose love, after forty years of happy union, is still the joy and blessing of the Bishop's life. One child, a daughter, Mary Louisa, has blessed their home.

License to preach was granted him in June, 1865, by Rev. J. L. Davis of the M. E. Church South; and by a happy coincidence his oldest brother, Rev. William Gaines, was also ordained in the same month by Bishop D. A. Payne, at Hilton Head, South Carolina, and appointed Missionary of the State of Georgia. Through the influence of this brother young Wesley had been led to unite with the A. M. E. Church.

In 1866, he was ordained Deacon by Bishop Payne at Savannah, Georgia, and admitted to the then South Carolina Conference, and the next year at Wilmington, North Carolina, Bishop Wayman made him Presiding Elder.

All of Bishop Gaines work as a Minister of the Gospel has been done in the State of Georgia, having held appointments at Florence Mission, Atlanta, Macon and Columbus, and several times was returned to Macon and Atlanta. During his first Pastorate at Atlanta he built Bethel A. M. E. Church that now

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has a membership of more than two thousand souls. At Macon he raised an indebtedness of \$4,500, and at Columbus built St. James A. M. E. Church at a cost of \$10,000.

During these busy years of service he found time for mental culture, studying Theology with Rev. Henderson, the able and liberal-minded Rector of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in Athens, Georgia, and at a later period with Rev. Joseph S. Key, of the Methodist Episcopal Church South; rhetoric and other branches were also pursued under various instructors. In 1883, Wilberforce University conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church at Large was not slow in recognizing the spiritual strength and intellectual attainments of Rev. Gaines, and this appreciation was shown in the bestowing upon him of Episcopal honors and responsibilities by the General Conference at its session in Indianapolis, in 1888.

As Bishop he is found worthy of the trust, and is doing grand work in the Second Episcopal District which includes the

Conferences of Baltimore, Virginia, North Carolina and West Carolina.

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