

George Liele: Negro Slavery's Prophet of Deliverance

GEORGE LIELE (Lisle, Sharpe) is one of the unsung heroes of religious history, whose exploits and attainments have gone virtually unnoticed except in a few little-known books and journals of Negro history.

Liele's spectacular but steady devotion to the cause of his Master began with his conversion in 1773 and subsequent exercise of his "call" in his own and nearby churches; it ended with multiple thousands of simple black folk raised from the callous indignity of human bondage to freedom and a glorious citizenship in the kingdom of God, largely as a consequence of this man's Christian witness in life and word.

George was born a slave to slave parents, Liele and Nancy, in servitude to the family of Henry Sharpe in Virginia. From his birth, about 1750, to his eventual freedom in 1773, Liele belonged to the Sharpe family, with whom he was removed to Burke County, Georgia, prior to 1770. Henry Sharpe, his master, was a Loyalist supporter and a deacon in the Buckhead Creek Baptist Church pastored by the Rev. Matthew Moore. Of his own parents and early years Liele reported in a letter of 1791 written from Kingston, Jamaica: "I was born in Virginia, my father's name was Liele, and my mother's name Nancy; I cannot ascertain much of them, as I went to several parts of America when young, and at length resided in New Georgia; but was informed both by white and black people, that my father was the only black person who knew the Lord in a spiritual way in that country. I always had a natural fear of God from my youth, and was often checked in conscience with thoughts of death, which barred me from many sins and bad company. I knew no other way at that time to hope for salvation but only in the performance of my good works."¹

In 1773, while listening to a sermon by the Rev. Matthew Moore, Liele, in his own words, "saw my condemnation in my own heart, and I found no way wherein I could escape the damnation of hell, only through the merits of my dying Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; which caused me to make intercession with Christ, for the salvation of my poor immortal soul; and I full well recollect, I requested of my Lord and Master to give me a work, I did not care how mean it was, only to try and see how good I would do it."² After being baptized by Mr. Moore and accepted into the church, Liele "began to discover his love to other negroes, on the same plantation with himself, by reading hymns among them, encouraging them to sing, and sometimes by explaining the most striking parts of them."³

Noting his interest in the Word of God, Moore's church (probably Big Buckhead Creek Baptist Church) gave him a "call at a quarterly meeting to preach before the congregation." Convinced of his ministerial gifts and seeing how his work had already been blessed among his brethren, the church unanimously licensed him to preach. Subsequently, his master, Henry Sharpe, a deacon in the church, gave him his freedom in order to permit him to exercise his gifts more freely. During the Revolution Sharpe served as a British officer, and Liele continued in his service for some time.

Between 1774 and 1775, Liele ranged some distance from Burke County toward Augusta, Georgia, and across the Savannah River into South Carolina. Here he appears to have gathered a group of converts at Gaulphin's Mill (Silver Bluff), who met together to hear his preaching. Among those who heard him and believed was David George who relates that he had known Liele since he (Liele) was a boy, and that he had heard him preach at Silver Bluff in the years prior to the Revolutionary War. They were to work together later at Savannah, "and at Yamacraw, a little distance from it, preaching with brother George Liele. He and I worked together also a month or two: he used to plough, and I to weed Indian corn."⁴ (David George left Savannah and gathered a church in Nova Scotia in 1784 before going to Sierra Leone in Africa to continue his ministry.)

The meeting at Silver Bluff is probably to be reckoned the first Negro Church gathered in America. Liele, writing from Jamaica to the Rev. Joseph Cook of South Carolina in 1791, said: "Brother Jesse Gaulphin (Peters), another black minister, preaches near Augusta, in South Carolina, where I used to preach."⁵ This settlement was located at Fort Gaulphin, twelve miles from Augusta, in Aiken County, South Carolina. The church was apparently constituted by the Rev. Wait Palmer of Stonington, Connecticut, a friend of Shubal Stearns whose sister was Daniel Marshall's wife, mother of the Rev. Abraham Marshall. The date when it became an organized church is uncertain, though the testimony of George Liele and David George (who was the first regular pastor of Silver Bluff Church and a charter member when it was constituted by Wait Palmer), indicates that Liele preached at Silver Bluff prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.

The chronology of later events and the journals, letters and recollections of knowledgeable persons indicates that this church must have begun in 1775 after Liele was licensed by his home church and before he moved to the Savannah area in 1778. During this three-year period he also preached along the Savannah River, on the plantation of Jonathan Bryan and in the western suburbs of Savannah at Yamacraw.

While other efforts had been made earlier to establish Christian

missions among the Negro slaves none of these had resulted in the establishment of churches among the slave population. Mention should be made of the establishment of a school in 1743 at Charleston, S.C., for the purpose of training Negroes for participation in missionary work among Negro slaves. The school, begun "by Commissary Garden and placed in charge of Harry and Andrew, two young men of colour, who had been thoroughly instructed in the rudiments of education and in the doctrines of the church,"⁶ was closed in 1763.

In 1761 the Rev. Thomas Bacon, clergyman of the Church of England, "inaugurated a free school for black children in Frederick County" in the Maryland colony. However, according to Dr. Carter Woodhouse in his *History of the Negro Church*, "the first successful worker in this field was the Rev. Samuel Thomas of Goose Creek Parish in the colony of South Carolina. The records show that he was thus engaged as early as 1695 and that ten years later he reported twenty black communicants, who, with several others, well understood the English language. By 1705 he had brought under his instruction as many as one thousand slaves, 'many of whom', said he, 'could read the Bible distinctly and great numbers of them were engaged in learning the Scriptures'. In some of the congregations the Negroes constituted one-half of the communicants." These are evidences for the existence of Christian converts among the Negro slaves but not yet of Negro churches. This distinctive development did not receive great impetus until the period of the American Civil War when many thousands of former slaves who had held membership in their masters' churches were forced to establish their own churches, which increased in amazing numbers.

Insofar as evidence is available, the Baptist congregation at Gaulphin's settlement is the earliest known Negro Church under Negro pastoral leadership. Dr. W. H. Brooks states that the Silver Bluff Church moved to "Augusta, Georgia, in 1793 to become the First African Baptist Church still under the pastorate of Rev. Jesse Peter (Peters, Gaulphin) who removed with them, and under the guidance also of Rev. Abraham Marshall and another white minister."⁷

Some years prior to this removal into Augusta, Peters and the Rev. Abraham Marshall, who succeeded his distinguished father as pastor of Georgia's oldest white Baptist Church at Kiokee outside Augusta, assisted in constituting the congregation of Andrew Bryan's converts into the First Bryan Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, in 1788. In his *Negro Baptist History*, Jordan notes that they helped to "re-organize the First African Baptist Church at Savannah in 1778, where there had already been a Negro Baptist Church since 1778, of which, it seems, George Lisle was pastor at one time."⁸

It was in 1778 that Liele moved into Savannah, where he continued to preach during the ensuing three years of British occupation of the city. During this period David George and George Liele worked together at farming and in preaching. And it was in the latter part of the same period (1778-82) that Liele "baptized Andrew and his wife, Hannah, and Hagar, slaves of Jonathan Bryan and Kate, who belonged to Mrs. Eunice Hogg," among other converts, who were to be part of the second Negro church to be constituted in America.

At the War's end, Sharpe's children attempted to re-enslave Liele and had him jailed. Liele was able to regain his freedom by producing his "free papers." Borrowing \$700 for passage for himself and his family from Colonel Kirkland, a British Officer, he left Savannah with the colonel as an indentured servant, on board one of the ships which evacuated the British troops in 1782, accompanying the colonel to Kingston, Jamaica.

Some months after Liele's departure, "Andrew, commonly called Andrew Bryan, began to preach at Yamacraw, and many converts were the result. Although persecuted by wicked and cruel white people who thus sought to interrupt their worship and put a stop to their religious meetings under a pretence that they were plotting mischief and insurrections, they were sustained by Chief Justices Henry Osburne, James Habershaw and David Montague, Esquires, after an examination. Permission to worship in the day was given them. A barn, for a house of worship was granted them at Branton, by Jonathan Bryan, the master of Andrew and his brother Samson."⁹ The fruits of Liele's ministry along the Savannah River and at Savannah were now gathered under Andrew Bryan and on January 20th, 1788, they were "constituted" a Baptist Church by the aforementioned Rev. Abraham Marshall, under the pastorate of the Rev. Andrew Bryan, who was ordained at this time.

Contemporaneously with these events, the first African Methodist Episcopal Church was being gathered in Philadelphia and was organized on April 12th, 1787, as the "Free African Society." However, it was some years after this when the Free African Society, "dissident Negro Methodists," later the "African Church," was accepted and constituted as an Episcopal Church on October 12th, 1794. The Rev. Absalom Jones was ordained a deacon on August 6th, 1795, as the first coloured minister of the Church.

The first Negro Baptist Church at Savannah, now known as the First Bryan Baptist Church, was constituted with eighty members and, despite suspicion and persecution from slave-owning whites, the membership rose to two hundred and fifty in 1792. By December of 1802 the Second Baptist Church of Savannah was organized from the membership of Bryan Baptist, and in January, 1803, the Ogeechee Baptist Church was likewise organized. "In April, 1802, the

first coloured church united with the white church of Savannah, and the Newington church, twenty miles north of Savannah, in the formation of the Savannah Association; and in January, 1803, we find all three of these coloured churches and the two white churches enrolled as constituent members of the Association."¹⁰ In Augusta and in Savannah, the ministry to the hapless slaves, begun under George Liele, continued to flourish with the preaching of Jesse Peters and Andrew Bryan.

George Liele arrived in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1783, and in his words: "I was landed at Kingston, and by the colonel's recommendation to General Campbell, the governor of the Island, I was employed by him two years; and on his leaving the island, he gave me a written certificate from under his own hand of my good behaviour. As soon as I had settled Colonel Kirkland's demand on me, I had a certificate of my freedom from the vestry and governor, according to the act of this island, both, for myself and family."¹¹ Now free himself, he was filled with compassion by the wretched condition of the slaves in Jamaica. After coming to know their condition and studying their problems, he began to preach in the evenings in a private home. Here he formed a church with four brethren from America, including his wife and George Gibbs, who became a preacher at St. Thomas, St. Mary and the Vale. "Ten years before the Baptist Missionary Society of England was formed and William Carey went to India, and thirty-two years before the American Baptist Missionary Union, which sent Judson to Burma, was organized, this Negro missionary launched his campaign."¹²

His first public meeting place was his preaching services at the Kingston Race Course. He reported that the "preaching took very good effect with the poorer sort, especially the slaves. The people at first persecuted us, both at meetings and baptisms, but God be praised, they seldom interrupted us now" he reported to Dr. Rippon in a letter in 1791. In this year the total of converts reached 500. Because of persecution by the planters and the Established Church, Liele applied to the House of Assembly "with a petition of our distresses, being poor people, desiring to worship Almighty God according to the tenets of the Bible; and they have granted us liberty, and given us their sanction. Thanks be to God we have liberty to worship him as we please in Kingston."¹³

After meeting for some years at Kingston Race Course and then in a private house, Liele's congregation began to build a house of worship in 1789. In his letter to Dr. Rippon in 1791, Liele reported: "We have purchased a piece of land at the east end of Kingston, containing three acres, for the sum of 145L (\$775) currency and on it we have begun a meeting house, fifty-seven feet in length, by thirty-seven feet in breadth. We have raised the brick wall eight feet high from the foundation, and intend to have a gallery." Following

an account of the poverty of the slaves, Liele called upon Dr. Rippon to induce other Baptist Churches in England to assist in the completion of the building: "And as the Lord has put it in your heart to inquire after us, we place all of our confidence in you to make our circumstances known to the several Baptist Churches in England, and we look upon you as our father, friend and brother. Within the brick walls we have a shelter in which we worship until our building can be accomplished."¹⁴

Later correspondence indicates the gratitude of the Jamaican Baptists for the support of their English brethren in the completion of the Chapel in 1793, known as the Windward Road Chapel, at the corner of Victoria Avenue and Elletson Road. This was the first Baptist Church on the island and also the "first dissenting chapel" to be built in Jamaica.

Liele supported himself, his wife and four children by various jobs. "My occupation is a farmer, but as the seasons of this part of the country are uncertain, I also keep a team of horses and wagons for the carrying of goods from one place to another, which I attend myself, with the assistance of my sons, and by this way of life have gained the good will of the public, who recommended me to the business and to some very principal work for the government."¹⁵

Most of the church members were slaves and this posed many difficult problems for the Baptist churches as well as for the other dissenting groups. The finances of these churches were precarious, with slaves given so little money for goods that they could barely feed themselves. Liele summed it up: "Out of so small a sum we cannot expect anything that can be of service from them; if we did, it would soon bring scandal upon religion."

In November of 1792, Liele wrote to Dr. Rippon and in explanation of his long delay in having written, said: "I would have answered your letter much sooner, but am encumbered with business: the whole island is under arms; several of our members and a deacon were obliged to be on duty; and I being trumpeter to the troop of horses in Kingston, am frequently called upon. And also by order of government, I was employed in carrying all the cannon that could be found lying about this part of the country."¹⁶ The increasing unrest among the slaves was being met with a growing distrust among the whites of the wisdom of allowing religion to be taught among the slaves, as the Rev. Steven Cooke pointed out in a letter to Dr. Rippon in 1792: "The idea that too much prevails here amongst the masters of slaves is, that if their minds are considerably enlightened by religion, or otherwise, that it would be attended with the most dangerous consequences, and this has been the only cause why the Methodist ministers and Mr. Liele have not made a greater progress in the ministry among the slaves."¹⁷ Criticizing the policy of the Methodist societies, Cooke continued: "I very

early saw into the impropriety of admitting slaves into their societies, 'without permission of their owners,' and told them the consequences that would attend it: but they rejected my advice; and it has not only prevented the increase of their church, but has raised them many enemies. Mr. Liele has very wisely acted a different part. He has, I believe, admitted no slaves into society but those who had obtained permission from their owners, by which he has made many friends; and I think the Almighty is now opening a way for another church in the capital . . ."¹⁸

Because of the suspicion of the planters, it was necessary to take precautions with those slaves taken into membership: "We receive none into the church without a few lines from their owners of their good behaviour toward them, and religion."

Though this helped to allay some of the fears of the slave owners it was not sufficient to prevent troublesome persecution as slave unrest threatened the overwhelmingly outnumbered white planters. As a result the slaves who attended suffered maltreatment and persecution and, "Mr. Liele suffered much opposition, and was often treated with contumely and insult. On one occasion, when the church was about to celebrate the Lord's Supper, a gentleman (so called) rode into the chapel, and, urging his horse through the midst of the people to the very front of the pulpit, exclaimed in terms of insolence and profanity, 'Come, old Liele, give my horse the Sacrament!' Mr. Liele coolly replied, 'No, Sir, you are not fit yourself to receive it.' After maintaining his position for some time the intruder rode out."¹⁹

Realizing the magnitude of the task that lay before them in evangelizing the slaves of the island, Liele began an attempt to interest the English Baptists in sending missionaries to Jamaica and in helping to support the work already underway. George Gibbs, a convert who came to Jamaica with Liele, and Moses Baker, barber and slave who was converted under Liele's preaching, were among the early Baptist preachers who won hundreds of Jamaican slaves to Christianity. Their testimony to the freed men and to the "poor illiterate slaves, some living on sugar-estates, some on mountains, pens, and other settlements" brought hope to the ignorant and superstitious slaves and fear to the owners. Two means of dissipating these fears were used by the preachers: a church-covenant, which was explained as "being a collection of some of the principal texts of scripture which we observe, both in America and this country, for the direction of our practice. It is read once-a-month here, on sacrament meetings, that our members may examine if they live according to all those laws which they professed, covenanted, and agreed to; by this means our church is kept in scriptural subjection."²⁰ Because most of the slaves could not read, "the reading this covenant once-a-month, when all are met together from the

different parts of the island, keeps them in mind of the commandments of God. And by showing the same to the gentlemen of the legislature, the justices, and magistrates, when I applied for a sanction, it gave them general satisfaction; and whenever a negro servant is to be admitted, their owners, after the perusal of it, are better satisfied."²¹

Liele also pointed out to Dr. Rippon that he used a bell on the church steeple in order to call the members to worship but it was rung, "more particularly to (give notice to) the owners of slaves that are in our society, that they may know the hour at which we meet, and be satisfied that their servants return in due time."²² Because the bell then in use was small, Liele requested of Dr. Rippon that he "send me out, as soon as possible, a bell that can be heard about two miles distance, with the price . . . The slaves may then be permitted to come and return in due time, for at present we meet very irregular, in respect to hours."²³

Despite difficulties, the work of these Negro pastors continued to grow as many of the converted slaves assisted in spreading the gospel to the plantations surrounding the city and into more distant parts of Jamaica. Liele "also employed a teacher to instruct the children both of free parents and of slaves. In little more than seven years he had the happiness of baptizing five hundred persons, of whom after deducting deaths, exclusions, etc., there were in church-fellowship three hundred and fifty members."²⁴

But the cost in human suffering and death was beginning to grow. Some time prior to 1802 "Mr. Liele was charged with preaching sedition, for which he was thrown into prison, loaded with irons, and his feet fastened in the stocks. Not even his wife or children were permitted to see him. At length he was tried for his life; but no evil could be proved against him, and he was honourably acquitted. [However, he was thereupon] thrown into gaol for a balance due to the builder of his chapel. He refused to take the benefit of the insolvent Debtor's Act, and remained in prison until he had fully paid all that was due."²⁵ Much of the expense of the chapel and other costs had come from Liele's contributions, and he also "laboured without fee or reward, supporting himself by the work of his own hands."

In 1805 the Assembly enacted a law forbidding all preaching to the slaves. Though the law was not always vigorously enforced uniformly until 1810 there were numerous instances of the severest persecution in the forms of whipping and brutal murder.

"Following a period of rebellion and the proclaiming of Martial Law by those in authority, some slave owners determined to stamp out a slave prayer meeting. They armed themselves and raided the meeting, with the intention of killing all present. The leader of that group of Christians, Moses

Hall, was absent, and his place for that day was filled by his assistant, David. David was seized and murdered. His head was cut off, and those white savages paraded with it through the village as a warning to his followers not to attend Prayer Meeting. In the middle of the village David's head was hung on a pole to the horror and amazement of his followers, who gathered around it. They were sternly warned to expect the same fate if they were caught assembling for prayers. Into their midst came Moses Hall, the Pastor of that group. He was rudely seized, dragged forward and made to stand against the pole, where he could see his colleague's head, and where all assembled could see him. 'Now Moses Hall,' said the leader of the gang of murderers, 'Whose head is that?' 'David's, Massa'. 'Do you know why he is up here?' 'Yes, Massa, for praying, Sir,' replied Moses Hall. 'Mark you, then, we will stop your religious nonsense', said the leader of the raiding gang. 'No more of your prayer meetings; if we catch you at it, we shall serve you as we have served David.' There was a pause, and the awe-struck crowd stood breathlessly watching their leader. Raising his clasped hands Heavenward, Moses Hall knelt down upon the earth, just beneath the martyr's head, and said solemnly, 'Let us pray.' Immediately, the whole circle knelt in prayer, and before the masters could recover from their surprise, the voice of that valiant hero of the cross rose clearly over the silence, praying that God would 'bless all the Massa Buckra and make them to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and that their souls might be saved at last.' The masters listened in silence and when the prayer was ended, they turned away without carrying out their threat."²⁶

Numerous instances of brutality, sexual abuse, imprisonment, lashings and murder were reported by numbers of observers and missionaries during the years between 1802 and 1834, when slavery was abolished throughout the British Commonwealth. However it was July 31, 1838, before all vestiges of slavery were eradicated from Jamaica.

The hopes of Liele and his fellow-labourers for support and for a well-trained ministry for their growing numbers was finally heard and answered by their English Baptist brethren when John Rowe and his wife landed at Montego Bay, February 23rd, 1814. At this time there were 8,000 Baptists in Jamaica, including slaves, freed men and some whites.

The efforts of Dr. Rippon, of the *Baptist Register*, and John Ryland, Principal of Bristol Baptist College, England, had resulted in a growing support by their English Baptist brethren of the work of Liele and his co-labourers. These men were now fully conscious

of the magnitude of their task of evangelizing the slave population and were becoming conscious of "their advancing years, personal limitations and inability to make adequate provisions for the continuation of the work." Consequently, they had appealed to their English brethren and had given them a unique opportunity by the wisdom of their own racial and ecclesiastical policies.

In addition to what has previously been noted it should be pointed out that the rejection of slave-holding practices, implicit in the status of Liele and his co-labourers, enabled the Baptists alone to offer a clergy and membership who did not indulge in nor condone slave-ownership. "The European Baptist Missionaries, coming to a Mission which already had an accepted policy, could neither compromise with nor engage in the traffic of their less fortunate Brethren, which would spell failure for them. This new interpretation of the mind of Christ was born out of the womb of oppression and injustice, and it was the greatest heritage of European Baptist Missionaries from their Negro American colleagues and His [Sic] Native Church."²⁷ Between 1814 and 1832 the English missionaries helped to organize the Jamaica mission and contributed to the evangelical efforts, which saw the numbers grow from 8,000 to 20,000 Baptists during those years. Among those who served were Compere, Coultant, Kitchen Godden, Mann, Thomas Knibb, Burchell and Phillippo.

The final chapter in George Liele's life involves the work of the Rev. William Knibb, brother of Thomas Knibb, also an English Baptist missionary to Jamaica, taking the place of Thomas. Against the hostile attitudes of the white planters and a restrictive licence to preach, which had to be obtained from the magistrate, the missionaries were also required by their own Society to refrain from all political speech and any interference with the established order, while they preached the Gospel of deliverance. The planters rightly felt that "the message of freedom embodied in the Gospel of Salvation to all men endangered the social and economic foundations upon which depended the Institutions by which they maintained their livelihood."²⁸ For the seventeen years from 1814 to 1831, under these conditions already noted, the slaves and missionaries continued, at the risk of their lives, their efforts to hear and proclaim the Gospel.

An abortive strike by the slaves, led by a Baptist deacon of Montego Bay, Sam Sharpe, and intended to support an attempt to introduce a bill in the Assembly abolishing slavery, got out of hand and resulted in an open rebellion among the slaves. Numbers of cases of assault, property destruction and arson were reported and, in reprisal, martial law was declared and the Militia shot and hanged thousands of slaves. Many of the Baptists were accused of being leaders in the uprising and were brought to trial. Sam Sharpe

was publicly hanged. Missionaries William Knibb, Abbot, Whitehorn, Gardner and Burchell were all arraigned on charges of treason and insurrection and were publicly treated with spite and calumny and threatened with death. They were acquitted of the charges after trial.

This experience solidified their determination to see slavery ended in Jamaica and to this end William Knibb returned to England in June, 1832 to address himself to his English brethren on behalf of the oppressed slaves. Conditions had worsened for the slaves following the revolt and the Baptist chapels were destroyed. Appearing at a public meeting at Spa Fields Chapel on June 21st, 1832, he told the assembly: "I appear as the feeble and unworthy advocate of 20,000 Baptists in Jamaica who have today no places of worship in which to meet, their chapels having been destroyed, and no sabbaths, and I believe and solemnly avow my belief, that by far the greater part of that twenty thousand will be flogged every time they are found praying. — I call upon you all by the sympathies of Jesus, whose mission was, and is, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. — O Lord, open the eyes of Christians in England to see the evils of slavery and to banish it forever from the earth."²⁹

Knibb and Burchell campaigned throughout England, lending their voices to the outraged consciences of others, until Parliament in August, 1833, passed a bill proclaiming that on August 1st, 1834, all slaves in the British Commonwealth should be set free, but setting up an apprenticeship system to last seven years. The abuses of this led to its abandonment and Parliament then set July 31st, 1838, as the last day of slavery throughout the Empire. At the stroke of midnight in Jamaica, Knibb, triumphantly declaring the thanksgiving of missionaries and slaves, is recorded to have said: "The Monster is dying, the Monster is dying, the Negro is free!"³⁰ Liele did not live to see the day of liberty for he died in 1828, having but once seen the land whose support he so graciously received when he visited his English brethren in 1822.

Ordained in a white church in Burke County, Georgia, this freed Negro slave gathered the first Negro church in America at Silver Bluff, (Gaulphin's Mill) S.C. Brought up in no church by slave parents he became the first ordained Negro Baptist minister in America. Though supported by no church or denominational agency, he became the first Protestant missionary to go out from America to establish a foreign mission, ten years before William Carey set out from England. A British (Loyalist) supporter during the Revolutionary War (as his master was), he established the first dissenting chapel in Jamaica, a British slave-holding colony. A man without formal education, he learned to read the Bible and became

a preacher of such effectiveness that in seven years in Jamaica he had converted over 500 slaves to Christianity.

Though born a Negro slave in Virginia about 1750 his illustrious service as a patriot and preacher served as a weighty influence in the abolition of slavery in 1838 from his adopted land of Jamaica. When the first English Baptist missionary reached Jamaica in 1814 there were 8,000 Baptist converts. This number grew to 20,000 Baptists in 1832, much of which growth was accomplished despite persecution by the English planters and the gaoling of Liele and his followers by the government authorities.

Several of his converts became preachers who established churches in Savannah, Georgia, Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone and Jamaica. His correspondence with the Rev. John Rippon and other English Baptists helped furnish the enthusiasm for their missionary interest and activity at home and abroad. His influence upon William Knibb helped to make him a formidable opponent of the British slave trade in numerous effective public debates throughout the British Isles.

The slave who was himself set free to declare the glorious deliverance of his Lord, had brought the fruits of the Gospel's spirit to thousands who had learned to love his Lord and accept His salvation. The Negro prophet of deliverance had raised up many courageous servants of the Lord to lead his people into their Promised Land of freedom.

NOTES

¹ Rippon, John, *Baptist Register*, 1791. Letter from George Liele to Dr. John Rippon dated Dec. 18, 1791.

² Rippon, *op. cit.*

³ Pringle, Alex., *Prayer For the Revival of Religion in All The Protestant Churches and For The Spread of the Gospel Among Heathen Nations Recommended*, Edinburgh, Schaw and Pillans, 1796.

⁴ Pringle, *op. cit.*, p. 129. From an account of David George's life told to Dr. Rippon in Sierra Leone.

⁵ Jordan, Lewis G., *Negro Baptist History, U.S.A., 1750-1930*, Nashville, 1930, contains an article by Dr. Walker H. Brooks, "The Story of the Silver Bluff Church and Information about Negro Baptists in Early Times" from which the material is quoted, p. 369.

⁶ Woodson, Carter, G., *The History of the Negro Church*, 1921.

⁷ Jordan, *op. cit.*, pp. 371 f.

⁸ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, compiled for *The Christian Index*, Atlanta, Harrison and Co., 1881, p. 58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ *Idem.*

¹¹ Pringle, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹² —, *An Hundredfold*, Kingston, Jamaica, The Jamaica Baptist Union, 1949, p. 10.

¹³ Pringle, *op. cit.*, pp. 104 f.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 107 f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁶ Pringle, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

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