

NEGRO MINISTER FILLS PULPIT AT VASSAR

Rev. Howard Thurston Is First of His Race to Do So

By LESTER A. WALTON
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Dr. Henry Noble MacCracken, president of Vassar College, is known as an uncompromising foe of intolerance. He enjoys a reputation for consistency in that he practices what he preaches.

His latest public slap at bigotry and illiberality was in having Rev. Howard Thurston, a Negro minister of Oberlin, O., fill the pulpit at Sunday morning services.

The spectacle of a Negro preaching the Word of God to members of the faculty and the students of Vassar was unprecedented. It had never happened before in the 67 years of the institution's history.

Nowadays the appearance of Negro men and women speakers at leading colleges and universities is not unusual. They are usually invited to discuss some phase of the race question. But the Rev. Howard Thurston went to Poughkeepsie to talk on theology and not racial progress, disfranchisement, Jim Crowism or the migration.

The Rev. Dr. Thurston, in his early thirties, is a graduate of Morehouse College, Atlanta. Two years ago, after finishing the Theological Department at Rochester University, he was called to the pastorate of the Zion Baptist Church, Oberlin. He is black and of unmixed blood, is six feet tall and weighs nearly 200 pounds.

Last summer Dr. MacCracken attended the Negro Baptist Convention at Detroit and heard the Rev. Dr. Thurston preach a sermon that deeply stirred a large audience. It was delivered with dignity, yet forcefully and eloquently. The president of Vassar made up his mind he would have the young Negro minister speak at chapel when the first opportunity presented itself.

At Vassar the Rev. Dr. Thurston took his text from Jeremiah, chapter xvii. He contrasted people living on barren ground and who inhabit the parched places in the wilderness with those living like a tree planted by the waters.

In alluding to the characteristics of the former or those who do not live with God, the speaker said they were not bad and may be good. He quoted Prof. Rouschenbush, who said, "Some people are very good but not good enough to disturb the devil."

People in this category are careful observers of the moral teachings of Jesus Christ but not of the religious teachings. It was asserted. They have a high grade of intolerance. As an illustration the Rev. Dr. Thurston cited the parable of the Pharisee and the publican—the former who would let God know how good he was and who left the temple the same as he

entered, while the latter was forgiven.

The promise of those who live apart from God is built on a false sense of security, the speaker pointed out. He recited the parable of the young man who went to Jesus asking for the secret life eternal. He had broken all commandments. Jesus replied that since he had been taking chances with his security he also could take chances with Him.

Those living like a tree planted by the waters have a personal dedication and devotion to things and deeds and look upon life not from their own level but from a higher level. They see God first and all life becomes clear.

Such people have an almighty affection which is not a cheap, blind sentiment, but a certain intelligent and undisturbed mind. For perfect love is a perfect knowledge. Reference was made to the mother who, because of her love for her child, has understanding knowledge of him.

The speaker recited the parable of the woman taken in adultery being brought before Jesus, who took her as she was and treated her as what she ought to be. He said people living with God have an unassuming sympathy, and told of a man who was in prison with Eugene V. Debs, as having said the late Socialist leader was "the only Christ I ever saw."

"Disregarding political or religious opinions, one must realize there was something to Eugene V. Debs," he declared.

Commenting further on people living like a tree planted by the waters, the Rev. Dr. Thurston said they showed a willingness to suffer in order to make the unideal situation ideal. They have a simple trust in God.