Holy Johnson

Pioneer of African Nationalism 1836–1917

E.A.Ayandele

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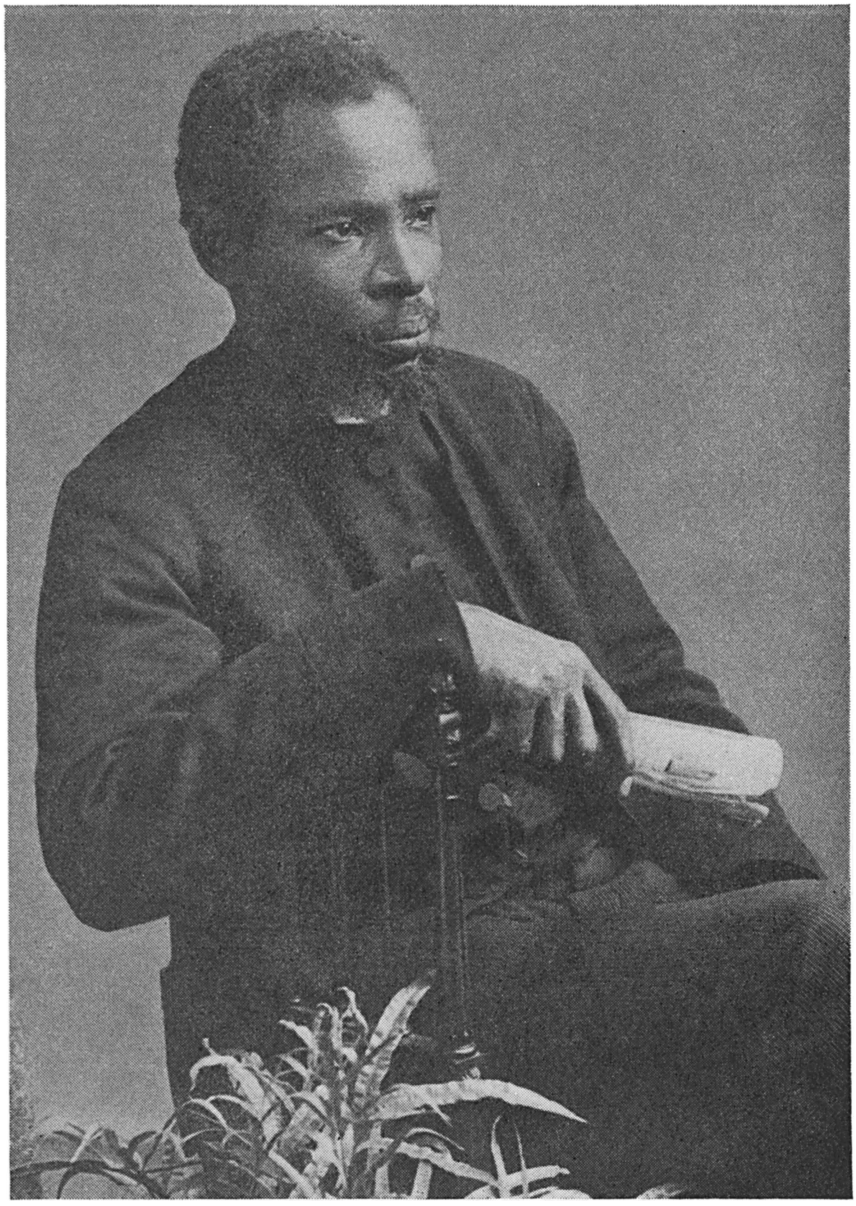

JAMES JOHNSON AS A YOUNG MAN

HOLY JOHNSON

Pioneer of African Nationalism, 1836 - 1917

BY

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF MAPS

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ABBREVIATIONS

C.M.S.	Church Missionary Society Archives
M.M.A.	Methodist Missionary Society Archives
B.M.S.S.	Brooke's Manuscripts (C.M.S.)
S.M.A.	Society of African Missions' Archives Rome
M.P.	Morel Papers
L.P.	Lugard Papers
A.P.S.	Aborigines Protection Society
P.P.	Parliamentary Papers
C.O.	Colonial Office
F.O.	Foreign Office
S.L.A.	Sierra Leone National Archives
N.A.	National Archives, Nigeria

PREFACE

HARDLY had James Johnson expired in May 1917 than the hope was expressed that a biography of this pioneer of African nationalism would not be delayed. From all account and as the uniquely profuse tributes that accompanied his death clearly testify, he was a rare but popular personality who occupied an olympian height in matters of morality and patriotism. For half a century this idealist of British West Africa commanded undiminished universal respect among Africans and Europeans even when they disapproved of his irrepressible passion, his puritanical outlook, his dogmatism, his sphinx-like resoluteness, his anti-white vituperations and his quixotism. For the Sierra Leonians he was "Wonderful Johnson", for Nigerians "Holy Johnson", for the authorities of the Church Missionary Society the "Pope" of Nigeria, for those who knew him in Britain a "saint".

Though he left behind no evil that might have lived after him his good was interred with his bones. His activities and ideas, which essentially anticipated those of the well-known nationalist leaders of the inter-war years and of post-independence statesmen, were completely forgotten until only very recently. So deep was the vault in which James Johnson was buried that on the eve of political sovereignty by Nigeria and Sierra Leone, when the graves of the nineteenth century dreamers of this crucial event in the evolution of the continent were uncovered, the remains of this early prophet of African independence went unmentioned.

Two factors would seem to account for the total eclipse of James Johnson. First, he left behind no self-advertisement in the form of publications of monumental value such as have perpetuated the names of E. W. Blyden, J. Casely Hayford, J. M. Sarbah and J. B. Horton, whose works are now being reprinted by Frank Cass. Second, naturally, biographies of the nationalist crusaders and independence-winners of present day Africa have absorbed the interest and attention of writers. These writers do not perceive that Abdel Nasser, Habib Bourguiba, Ben Bella, Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta and Kenneth Kaunda—to name a few—

are architects rather than fathers of independence, winners rather than beginners or originators. All over Africa, both before and during the colonial occupation of the continent, lettered and unlettered individuals and peoples had prepared the way for the well-advertised patriots of the last half century.

However it is better late than never. Thanks to enormously rich archival materials, it has been possible in this book to partially exhume and resuscitate one of the earliest of the literate prophets and pioneers of African nationalism—James Johnson. It is no more than a pioneer study. Were his personal papers available this unveiling of James Johnson's life would have run into several volumes. Nevertheless the author is persuaded that ample revelations have been made in this book to stimulate and to justify interest in the writing of biographical nineteenth century African personalities. The author is convinced that biographies can enrich and deepen our knowledge of the African past in a way no other kind of historical writing can: it compels authors to generalise less and, in the case of West Africa in the years covered by James Johnson's life, it enables the historian to operate in the wider West African, rather than the narrower provincial, spectrum. For, far more than the post-World War I African educated elite, their predecessors were cosmopolitan and West African, in their outlook; they were veritable West Africans. Unlike the present-day educated elite, narrow ethnic or tribal affinities and loyalty to narrow territorial frontiers were much less weighty than allegiance to Africa in general and West Africa in particular.

This fact can be abundantly illustrated. Dr. J. B. Horton, born of Ibo parentage in Sierra Leone Colony, spent the most eventful years of his 'political' life pleading the cause of the Fanti of the Gold Coast, apart from demanding social and political reforms on the platform of West Africa; scores of *Saro* from Lagos and Sierra Leone sojourned in the Niger Basin, among ethnic groups unrelated to them, as traders and missionary agents. Institutions linked together the four enclaves that were to become British West Africa. Until the founding of the first secondary grammar school on the Gold Coast in 1876 the C.M.S. Grammar School in Freetown was patronised by the Gold Coasters, just as, until the founding of university institutions on the Gold Coast and in Nigeria after the Second World War, Fourah Bay College served all West Africa. In the civil service J. B. Horton served in all the four colonies; Blyden and Dr. Obadiah Johnson in Sierra Leone and Nigeria. The vitality of the prevalent West African-ness of those days may be judged from the desire of leaders of elite opinion to know parts of British West Africa outside their own areas. Mojola Agbebi travelled to Liberia and Sierra Leone, Casely Hayford and Edward

Blyden to all the colonies; Herbert Macaulay of Nigeria corresponded with people in the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

All this indicates that from about the middle of the nineteenth century to the early years of British rule in this century West Africa was in a sense a unit, a unit demanding a history of its own. This biography belongs to this West African context. James Johnson was a representative of some of its spirit, values and aspirations. It is hoped that other characteristics of this West African society, partially and broadly revealed in Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought*, London, 1968, will be brought to the knowledge of the academic world by studies of the *dramatis personae* that embodied them.

From the point of view of sources this work has been denied the support of its character's personal papers; intensive searches for them have been futile but not frustrating. The absence of these documents have in several ways imposed limitations on the details of this portrait. One would have liked to have included personal touches such as James Johnson's habits of work and hobbies, his fun and mannerisms, his standard of living and family budgets, his family relationships and friendships. Fortunately little is obscure about his public life and career, thanks to his penchant for calling a spade by its name. His letters, journals, addresses, memoranda, newspaper articles and sermons—which taken together are staggeringly enormous—bear the imprint of an extrovert unloading his mind and of a gifted observer recording much of all that met his eyes.

This work would not have been ready for the press now or assume this shape but for the invaluable co-operation of archivists, librarians and scholars in West Africa and Britain. Among the archivists, I wish to mention in particular Miss Rosemary Keen of the Church Missionary Society; the often changing archivists of the Methodist Missionary Society; the officials of the Public Record Office, London; the late Mr. L. C. Gwam of the National Archives, Nigeria, and Mrs. Gladys Sheriff of the Sierra Leone National Archives. During my field work in Sierra Leone in July and August 1967 various individuals were kind and patiently helpful. The Registrar of Fourah Bay College, Mr. M. R. O. Garber, and his wife over-welcomed me with their hospitality; the Right Reverend N. C. O. Scott, Bishop of Sierra Leone, spared time for interviews and exerted himself to obtain for me a copy of the rare little autobiography of James Johnson; the Reverend J. I. Johnson of Benguema, a Lokoh who became an adopted member of the Johnson household, gave me tips about the genealogy of James Johnson, confirmed and embroidered by the manuscript of the family left behind by the late Bishop T. S. Johnson. To the latter's son, the

Reverend Eva Johnson, I here record my appreciation of his kindness in letting me peruse the document. Lastly I should not forget to thank my colleague, Dr. J. B. Webster, for putting at my disposal copies of the correspondence between James Johnson and J. K. Coker, one of the former's admirers who broke away from Breadfruit Church in 1901 in sympathy with its inspirer.

My gratitude to three academic seniors in Ibadan is beyond words. Professor E. U. Essien-Udom, Editor of the Frank Cass Africana Modern Library Series, encouraged me with his enthusiasm for the research and impressed me with a desire that has been consuming him for some time—that the frontier of African Political Science should be pushed back into the nineteenth century and beyond. He read through the entire manuscript with admirable patience and gave me the benefit of informed criticism. Professor E. B. Idowu, whose unflagging encouragement has all along been a fillip, read a few chapters with a meticulousness that I found truly beneficial. Lastly, though not the least, Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi, in spite of overwhelming commitments, strained himself and his time to go through a number of chapters and offered extremely valuable suggestions that resulted in a better focusing on James Johnson than I had achieved originally.

With benefit to myself I compelled two of my colleagues, Dr. J. B. Webster and Dr. T. N. Tamuno, to each read a chapter cognate to their research interests. My appreciation of the help of my kind friend, Mr. Christopher Fyfe, can be judged from the fact that I drafted the first two chapters in London in the summer of 1967 purposely to have the benefit of his advice and unrivalled knowledge of Sierra Leone.

Finally I wish to thank the authorities of the University of Ibadan for financing my trips to Sierra Leone and London. And to my brother, Mr. Victor A. Ayandele, who did the final typing I say thank you.

E. A. Ayandele

History Department,
University of Ibadan,
6 June 1968.

CHAPTER ONE

TWIN CHILD: FORMATIVE YEARS

> I have been asked to tell the story of my life; and I am glad to do so; because whilst there is nothing in it that I should speak of as fascinating or romantic, yet I do think it may serve to show how God often over-rules evil for good, . . . how He works in ways little expected to convert men to Himself and to use them to bring the life-giving knowledge of His son to those who are perishing in ignorance and sin.
>
> James Johnson addressing an audience in Ireland in 1908.

THE precise date when James Johnson was brought into this world may never be known. This may seem strange to scholars familiar with the impressive and considerably detailed documentary materials on the Waterloo District of the Sierra Leone Colony, where he was born, among which marriage licences provide some clue to the birthdate of many contemporaries older than he.[1] But there is nothing unusual about the absence from the records of any account concerning his birth. However it has one significance: it indicates the nature of his origins. For had his parents been literate or people of substance, in close contact with the C.M.S. or Wesleyan missionaries, the journal-makers of those days, or had he been born in the coastal area of Freetown which was under the close surveillance of the Colonial Government, his birth might have received attention. But both his father and mother were obscure, unlettered, poor and inconsequential frontier settlers, a class of people incapable of appreciating the necessity for birth-recording.

But it is clear beyond doubt that James Johnson had been living several years before 1840, the date ascribed him by the obituaries of his death, and before 1838, the year perpetuated in the expensive and prominent statue in St. George Cathedral, Freetown, com-

missioned to his memory by his Benguema countrymen. For the records reveal that not only was he in school in 1843 but also he was by this date a mature boy, intelligent enough to read the Bible, master "very well" the compound rules of Arithmetic, and able to take down dictation.[2] In those days of poor diet, relatively slow rate of maturity and little advantage for young children to enter school, James Johnson could scarcely have been less than seven years in 1843. In all probability, then, he was born about 1835.

The mist about his birth begins to clear away as one probes his origins. He was born in a tiny village, Kakanda Town, mid-way between Benguema and Campbell Town, only a few miles south of Waterloo.[3] Kakanda Town was within the twenty-five mile long and ten-mile wide peninsula which British philanthropists had located in 1787 and which from about 1809 onwards became the dumping ground for the medley of West African slaves originally intended for the New World but eventually rescued on the high seas by the British navy. His parents belonged to the Yoruba nation, the singularly culturally and linguistically homogeneous stock inhabiting the south-western portion of Nigeria. Their antecedents, a knowledge of which considerably influenced the development of their only son, is fascinating. The father was an Ijesha from Akure, the easternmost out-post of the Ijesha branch of the Yoruba nation into which the Edo, makers of Benin Empire, had intruded for centuries; the mother was an Ijebu from Ijebu-Ode, the seat of the paramount ruler of the Ijebu Kingdom. Both parents claimed royal blood, the father remotely with the Ilesha monarchy, the mother closely with the Awujale stool.

They were both victims of the perennial warfare that engulfed most of Southern Nigeria west of the Niger in the first half of the nineteenth century, the father of the inter-tribal conflict between the Yoruba and the Edo, and the mother of the intra-tribal war that marked the last days of the Old Oyo Empire. Both were adult and family people at the time of their enslavement, the father possessing several wives, the mother a husband with several children.[4] Both were fortunate to be liberated by the British and deposited in Freetown, though at different times, the father after some spell of service in Benin City.

It is possible to determine approximately when the father arrived in Sierra Leone Colony: it is said that he derived the name Johnson from the famous German missionary, W. A. B. Johnson of Regent, whose activities spanned the period 1816 to 1823. But James Johnson's father receives no mention in the missionary's memoirs.[5] His illiteracy was undoubtedly a handicap, preventing him from being able to take advantage of the various facilities put at the

disposal of liberated Africans by the British Government. Unlike Ajayi Crowther and other relatively younger people, James Johnson's father was too old to begin an education that could lead to a career in the Church or in the administration, an advantage taken by his sister, much his junior, who went to Charlotte school. Nor does his name occur in the long list of liberated Africans who learned a trade, such as carpentry, smithery, masonry, shingle-making or cultivation on farms allotted and supervised by the Colonial Government.[6]

There is evidence that he did not stay permanently in any settlement until he finally decided on Benguema, a further indication that he had neither a good nor a stable career. From Regent he moved from one village to another, including Kakanda Town, until finally he settled down at Benguema, a frontier outpost which liberated Aku (Yoruba) forcibly took from the Mende indigenes in the thirties. The village itself bore the Mende name Jengbeima, derived from the river near the village. The river, which was an emblem of worship, contained in abundance a type of fish known as Jengbe. After dislodging the Mende from the village, and pushing them to present-day Samuel Town, the name was Yorubalised into Gbongboima and ultimately anglicised by the British to Benguema.[7] This settlement, which today is a ghost of its former self, was very suitable and rewarded labour so abundantly that people began to flock there not only from the rank of newly liberated Africans, but also from the older settlements nearer Freetown. Apart from cassada, arrowroot, ginger, potatoes and cereals, Benguema began to specialise in fruit trees. Benguema had another attraction. It was blessed with the best form of grass for house-roofing, a factor which led at least a cousin of James Johnson to leave Regent for the frontier village.

James Johnson's father's instability was not only physical; he changed his denominational allegiance as well. For at the time James Johnson was born he had ceased to be an Anglican; he had become a member of the West African Methodist organisation, the body that had broken away from the Wesleyans in 1821,[8] and which was the first separatist African Church in the history of Christian missions in modern Africa.

It was in such circumstances that James Johnson's parents were married again. James was the first of a pair of twins and the only son of the remarried Johnsons. In later years two other children, both female, were added. The twins—James and Eliza—gave more anxiety than joy to their parents and posed a serious problem. In Akure the practice was to kill twins, in the belief that they belonged to the devil. Had James not been born under the British flag, he would never have been permitted to live. The parents found

themselves on the horns of a dilemma, but as they were wondering what to do a fellow Akure recaptive, who had become a constable, warned them that the strong hand of the British Government would never countenance a fulfilment of Akure law in Sierra Leone Colony.[9] The other alternative open to them was to apply another custom prevalent in the rest of the Yoruba country and which was employed in similar circumstances—that of the worship of *ibeji*, the god of twins, in order to ensure the welfare and continued existence of the two children. Therefore an altar was built and sacrifices began to be made to the god of twins by the entire family, the children participating.

The duality of the religious loyalty of the parents of these twins should not surprise us, nor was it peculiar to them. As it is clearly established by documents, the majority of the liberated Africans in the Colony in the early years were external conformists in the Church and the adherents of the traditional beliefs of their race in the inner recesses of their homes. This state of affairs can be easily understood. On the one hand, external conformity to Christian worship was easier among the liberated slaves than among any other group of Africans in the pre-scramble era: missionaries found them the easiest to convert. Uprooted from their ethnic groups and forced to live together in a common territory, the attachment of these liberated Africans to traditional religion was bound to be weakened in the new environment of the colony. Secondly, the rescue of their body by the British Government elicited from the people a spontaneous disposition toward the doctrine so patently encouraged by their liberators. Indeed many of them might have lost faith in the traditional gods that had failed so signally to protect them from the terrific physical sufferings of the Middle Passage.

But on the other hand, as Christian missions were to learn, outward conformity did not mean inward acquiescence. It would have been nothing short of a miracle if the liberated slaves had been completely severed from their roots. Moreover, there needed to be a long period of acclimatisation for these people to understand and appreciate the inner values of Christianity, in the light of their experience. Nor should it be forgotten that a large proportion of these recaptives were, like James Johnson's parents, elderly folk who had been so drilled in traditional religion that it would have been difficult for them to understand a new religion. Above all, the way and manner in which these recaptives were grouped in the Colony along ethnic lines made possible a revivification and revitalisation of some old customs. And, as a study of the Colony in the first half of the nineteenth century has revealed, the togetherness of the Yoruba in the various settlements in the colony made

it possible for them to cling to their religion and culture with a tenacity bewildering to contemporary observers.[10] It was a state of affairs that James Johnson was to mourn throughout his life in Sierra Leone.

The Benguema in which James Johnson grew into boyhood was especially suited for the flourishing and persistence of many of the divinities of Yoruba worship. The god of thunder, *Shango*, was well represented, although the weekly Friday worship and parade were grander in neighbouring Waterloo; Benguema also boasted of Ifa diviners. The *Egungun* Cult, physically represented by robed figures who are believed to be ancestral spirits, was not only strong there but its head, until his conversion to Christianity, was a cousin of James Johnson, James Benjamin Johnson, who was an *Oje*, that is a priest. J. B. Johnson used to represent Benguema in the cult's meetings at Hastings, another settlement south of Waterloo.[11] Above all there was the cult of witches and wizards, comprising fourteen members, nine of whom became Christians. The activities of this cult, which involved surreptitious killing of several people in the village, actually became in March 1849 an open scandal—an event which James Johnson should have witnessed.[12]

Moreover Benguema society, like all the villages in the interior of the Colony, was an unstable and lawless society in the forties. Although the majority of its inhabitants were Yoruba, about nine other groups were also represented. Inter-ethnic tension was inevitable and often it developed into open warfare. The Benguema Aku in particular were very aggressive and several times in the forties they joined with their fellow tribesmen in Waterloo in physical engagement against the Ibo and "Calabar", whom they accused of "Chopping" an Aku "almost every year".[13]

Indeed the necessity of maintaining the peace in the Eastern District, that is the Waterloo District, of which Benguema was a part, had been a problem for the Colonial government about the time James Johnson was born. In 1838 a comprehensive administrative and social improvement programme was launched for the area. The number of constables was increased from one to three and the Manager, one G. W. Nicol, was given the following instruction that was eventually to apply to all the District: "to appoint one Headman over every ten families who shall be able to account for their number, *their condition, produce of their labour*, births and deaths and General [*sic*] conduct. Over ten such Headsmen or tithesmen please appoint a hundredth censor or centenary who must be able to read and write, and who will furnish you with the result of their censorship. The object of this division is to obtain (among other things) . . . the arrangement of all petty disputes, punishment of crimes of whatever degree as the minor offences can

easily be disposed of in a summary manner and those of a heinous nature sent to the sessions."[14]

By the time this new arrangement was applied to Benguema the social and tribal problems had grown serious, as the police records of the District clearly testify. In fact the instructions quoted above were probably never enforced. The village people had their own self-government, which was inevitably associated with traditional religious practices. Crime became rife, involving a larger number of people as the population grew, mainly through fresh settlers. True, many of these crimes were petty—larceny, pilfering, assaults and burglary—but a few acts of murder were committed as well. A gaoler had been appointed in 1838, and in 1853 alone a total number of fifty-five people had to be sent to prison. Among them was one James Johnson, convicted for stealing on 21 November and sentenced to thirty days' imprisonment. It is extremely doubtful whether this bearer of the name James Johnson was Holy Johnson. For one thing James Johnson was in the Grammar School and this conviction would have disqualified him for admission to Fourah Bay College in June 1854. However this evidence cannot be dismissed entirely, as knowledge of this event might have been unknown to C.M.S. authorities, and as the records indicate clearly that the culprit was from Benguema.

It is against the social background described above that we should understand the growth of James Johnson. In the meantime his social and religious life were being altered by education. He was sent to the school of the West African Methodist organisation in the village of Campbell Town, because this African Church had no school in Benguema, then a monopoly of the C.M.S. It is not known for how long he stayed in the school, but it is recorded that his father was baptised again in the Anglican communion in February 1847,[15] by which time James had transferred to the C.M.S. school in St. Matthews Parish. Campbell Town school was considered an excellent school. It received some attention from the Government which contributed to the salary of the teachers. As elsewhere in the Colony the method of education was the Lancastrian, or Monitorial, system, by which the pupils were divided into small classes. The children's lessons were taught by constant repetition, and they were initiated in writing by practising on slates. From this school James became familiar with the scriptures by the constant repetition of passages from them, as well as by singing psalms, hymns and reciting the catechism. It is worthy of note that among his colleagues in Campbell Town school was Henry Johnson who was to become Archdeacon of the Upper Niger, and G. J. Macaulay, later an Archdeacon in Sierra Leone.

Short though it was, James Johnson's association with the West

African Methodist body left a permanent effect upon his thinking. This organisation became a perennial fountain of inspiration for him. For after its break from the Wesleyan Mission in 1821 the members of this African Church displayed an energy and a liberality that brought success, especially in the villages, surpassing that of the C.M.S. and other alien missions. It was these African Methodists who founded the Samaria Church, Bethesda, Bethel and Tabernacle, and took the gospel to York, Tombo, Kent, Murray Town (where James Johnson's father became a member), Benguema and Banana Islands.

The success of these African Methodists, labelled as "wild Africans" by their Mission disparagers, can be noted from the fact that as early as 1829 the C.M.S. missionaries were so alarmed at the outburst of their activities and its results that a petition was presented to the Colonial Government about them. The villages had been the exclusive monopoly of the C.M.S. "Of late years, however," says the Annual Report for 1829, "the state of things has undergone an alteration. The Liberated African villages have been visited by independence Teachers, and not without success. Such Teachers have administered the ordinances in Liberated African villages. Their men, though without education, and with little sound knowledge of religious truth, possess the gift of an animating address with a large stock of scriptural expressions. They trouble not, we should think, their people with much instruction, but give decided encouragement to the vehement outward manifestations of inward excitement before adverted to, as evidences of the work of grace within. Thus meeting the taste of the people, they will possess an advantage over us on the very outset; and the dependence of such ministers on their congregations will, no doubt, be as recommendatory to the system of independency among the Africans as it has proved among other nations."[16]

Indeed the West African Methodists became popular with the people because their activities showed evidence of African racial consciousness and independence of mind. The congregations, who controlled their ministers, "have valued themselves not a little on their independence in matters of Church government".[17] At a time when the established missions had only thatched churches in the villages the adherents of the African organisation were prepared to volunteer labour and money for "places of worship superior to what the Colonial Government has hitherto afforded them" (C.M.S. churches in the villages).[18]

For Holy Johnson the West African Methodist movement was an indication of the capacity of Africans to understand Christianity, spread the gospel, direct their affairs and bear their burden, without any connection with or any help from any foreign body. Moreover,

in his judgment, it had other advantages for Africans. It inculcated in the converts the principles of self-help, self-reliance, dignity and racial pride. By the time he became an ordained priest of the Anglican communion in 1863, James Johnson had become irrevocably convinced that any Christian mission that did not leave Africans to be independent in this way was not only hampering the cause of Christianity in Africa but undermining the natural racial consciousness of Africans as well.

Hardly had he transferred to the C.M.S. primary school in Benguema than he began to manifest the deep spiritual impulses that never abandoned him for the rest of his life. He began to take seriously and literally the stories rammed into his head at school. It was too early for a boy of his age to be able to understand the substance of the tenets of the Christian faith. On being taught one day the First and Second commandments—the ones forbidding idol worship—he began to think that he himself and his parents had been guilty of sin against God and he resolved to stamp idolatry out of the family. Torn between the loyalties demanded from individuals by the two commandments and the other demanded from children to their parents he devised a clever trick that would reconcile the conflict. He unburdened his mind to his teacher and told him of the time when the propitiation of *ibeji* spirit used to take place.[19] The parents were not to know that he was behind the conspiracy. At about seven o'clock on 24 December 1847, the teacher walked in, and met the Johnson family "in the act of worshipping country fashion as they said". This teacher's journals are best allowed to speak: "this country fashion consists of three small pots almost full of water with kolas and some other mixed things put into each of them, and placed in the hollow of a round wall about two feet high, at the south-west corner of the house in the piazza. I also met a large goat tied close by, and ready to be offered up, a bason [*sic*] full of palm oil, besides some other articles, the owner himself with another man who was not a Christian, were just beginning offering these things to this country fashion before I arrived; two yams and about eight ripe bananas were already placed before it. They seemed to be very surprised and alarmed at my coming, they would try to hide the articles from me, but it was too late, because there was a bright light hanging up in the piazza over them, however the owner of the house rose up immediately in anger, and carried the goat back into the house. What are these things for? I asked. I am making country fashion for my two children who are twins (whom he showed to me close by, they are belonging to our school). What good can this do to your children? I asked. This country fashion can do so much good for my children, it keeps them always from sickness and death."[20]

Although the teacher upbraided James Johnson's father for his unblushing hypocrisy and destroyed the altar, the trick had failed. For his father soon rebuilt the altar and restored the gods. The persistence of his parents in idol-worship drove their son into becoming an iconoclast. One day when they were out of the house James cleared away the images and all propitiatory accessories, turning them into ashes. Never again, claimed James Johnson, did idolatry exist in his family.[21]

From childhood James Johnson had indicated a quality that was not to desert him in life—a sense of independent judgment and action. Apart from the step he took in destroying the *ibeji* idols he once refused to obey an instruction of his father. A teacher transferred to Kent had desired to take him along, under the excuse that if the boy lived with him his school-work would progress. The father and teacher had concluded an agreement behind James Johnson's back. When he was told to go he politely refused, observing that his friends who lived with masters rather than with their parents were as a rule late and irregular in attendance. And there the matter ended.[22]

The opportunities for learning, which James Johnson enjoyed through the benevolence of the Church Missionary Society, further strengthened his inclination to religion. First, since he was poor, he could have the luxury of a grammar school education only if he chose the Church for his career. The only Grammar School in the Colony was opened in Regent Square, Freetown, on 25 March 1845. This he entered as a C.M.S. scholar in 1851. It was a matter of luck and because of his character that he was given a place (the only one out of thirteen in his class at St. Matthew School). For he was not the brightest boy in his class. However it is said that from boyhood he had learned to employ his own words rather than quote others, a practice he retained for the rest of his life. At the Grammar School he had the opportunity to widen his horizon by the instructions he received in English Grammar and Composition, Greek, Mathematics, Geography with the use of the Globe and Mapping, Bible History, Astronomy, the Thirty-Nine Articles, English History, Writing, Recitation and Music. He also did a course in industrial education by participating in farming four hours a day and taking his turn in the ginning of cotton produced in a six-acre plantation. Nevertheless he made the best of his years as a student. He was a lover of books and he read extensively outside the classroom. None of his class-mates in this institution was to attain the quality of his mind or reach the height of his fame in Church and State. He was the first product of the Grammar School to achieve the status of Assistant Bishop.

But apart from the fact that he had no alternative to the Christian

ministry as a C.M.S. scholar, it seems that the Church was the best place for his temper and outlook. On his confession he had from childhood dedicated himself to the cause of religion, to the extent that he used to practise homiletics by mimicking preachers at the back of his father's house, preaching to imaginary congregations.

On 1 June 1854 he was withdrawn to Fourah Bay Institution, which had been founded in 1827 and later became the clergy-producing machine of the C.M.S. in West Africa until the end of the Second World War. He was the one hundred and twenty-fifth student to enter the Institution. According to the judgment of Edward Jones, the Negro Principal of the Institution from 1841 to 1858, James Johnson and his colleague, T. C. John, who were the only students admitted in 1854, had a more comprehensive and more thorough course than any of their predecessors. They read the Greek Testament twice over, learned considerable Hebrew, studied English History up to the reign of Queen Anne and familiarised themselves with a bit of "Euclid, Geometry and Algebra". Of course, as should be expected, their training was predominantly in the Anglican brand of theology.[23] He graduated from the Institution on 3 December 1858.

He was appointed to a tutorship at the Grammar School and we are fortunate in knowing the impression he made upon some of his students during his short career there. His religious fervour was noted to be very impressive. His mind, we are told, was always occupied by theology and it was his practice to pray on his knees, in a room where he could be spied upon, three times a day. He would stop his students' dinner if they did their homework badly, in the belief that they had done it out of playfulness.[24]

The fanatical piety and narrowmindedness on matters of dogma that he was to exhibit throughout his life were to a certain extent based on some of his experiences out of the classroom. This was particularly the case in respect to slavery, against which he nursed the bitterest aversion. As a child his parents had filled his ears with the horrors of slave raiding in Southern Nigeria and the wickedness of the society which sold them across the Atlantic and how they had eventually arrived in Freetown naked.[25] His mother related to him the bitter experience of the Middle Passage and the suicide committed by many of her companions in the slave ship. Later in the sixties James Johnson used to witness the disembarkation of liberated Africans in Kent, just as he had witnessed their settlement at Benguema. Also in his youth he was so appalled by the revelations contained in T. F. Buxton, *The Slave Trade and Its Remedy* that he swore to devote himself to the regeneration of his Negro brethren.[26]

It should be stressed that James Johnson's spiritual growth was neither sudden nor without flaws until after his Fourah Bay studentship. As pointed out earlier he might have been convicted of an act of stealing towards the end of 1854. Nor did he lack sexual emotions. In March of the same year, that is before he entered Fourah Bay and at the rather tender age of about nineteen, his name was mentioned in respect of one Rachel Garnon, an old student of C.M.S. Female Institution.[27] They were expected to marry, but for reasons which are still to be discovered, the marriage, which had been announced, did not take place. In the first report on him in Fourah Bay Institution, the Principal, the Reverend E. D. Jones, wrote of him as being less impressive in character than his colleague, T. C. John.[28] Even as late as 1868 a C.M.S. agent, Dr. G. T. Manley, who had just been released from an asylum, suspected that James Johnson was *in liaison* with his wife and was getting involved in the semantics of freemasons.[29]

James Johnson is himself the best witness to the fact that his spiritual metamorphosis was by no means complete until after he had left Fourah Bay and was serving as a Catechist in Kent between 1860 and 1863. How this fulfilment to his dedication to the Christian faith occurred is best seen in his own words: "It was in connection with the work in that district [of Kent] that I became a converted man in heart, that I yielded myself to the Lord Jesus Christ as my Master. I was preparing a Bible lesson for my class of school children on a particular occasion. I was reading with them the Book of Zechariah, and while I was preparing my lesson on the 3rd and 4th chapters of that book the Lord spoke to me as my Saviour, and within that week at a Holy Communion service I found salvation. My heart was filled with joy and gladness and thankfulness. That gave a different colour to my teaching and preaching at the time. On that occasion the joy and gladness of personal salvation led me to offer myself to God that He might send me out as a missionary among heathen people. . . . I conceived the idea of working among the people who did not know of the Saviour at all, and telling them of Jesus and the great Salvation He had wrought for mankind."[31]

Such unique spiritual experience vouchsafed to James Johnson, it may be stressed, has been shared by the truly saintly figures of Church History in circumstances not dissimilar. Both Francis of Assisi and Augustine of Hippo, to mention just two, were in their early lives far more profligate than James Johnson.

Though as a teacher he was on a salary of only 30 shillings a month, he refused to be attracted away from the Christian Church in 1862 to a secular situation that would have started him on a scale of nine pounds a month.[32] He was made a Catechist in 1863,

the twenty-third African in Sierra Leone since 1830, and was located under a European superintendent at Christ Church, Pademba Road. His appointment marked a definite turning point in his life. Henceforward the holiness that was to be attached to him was increasingly visible. His life became one of incredible austerity. Theology became his main mental pre-occupation; morality was henceforward an absolute reality and came before logic. He became a puritan in the strict sense and a fundamentalist in his theological position—what he described as "pure and simple Christianity". This constituted the Truth, the whole Truth, the revealed Truth, to which he was to direct the inner minds of all people and all races for the rest of his life. For it he endured hardships, he debated, he split hairs, he crusaded.

From 1863 his vision was fixed; he never lost it and he never added to it. He was to describe as "arrogance" the later Victorian school of thought which scientifically questioned the basic tenets of the Christian faith. From now on religion meant for him a complete surrender to the dogmas of the Christian faith, a Christianity so pure that charms and other social habits of Africans not in strict conformity with this new faith could have no right to exist. His standpoint in life henceforward was absolutely scriptural. The Bible, he said, came to men from heaven and its morality was "the purest and finest".[33] This total commitment, it is easy to perceive, places Holy Johnson among the Christian idealists whose thoughts and outlook are often out of touch with the world of mortals.

Indeed so complete was his surrender to Christianity that he began to manifest characteristics that might be described as anti-social. He became incapable of wit or humour, hardly ever to laugh for the rest of his life. Man as an end in himself did not exist, except as an instrument for the furtherance of God's will and the fulfilment of His purpose. Humility was his watchword, emphasising that man *per se* deserved no praise, which was only due to God, "the Maker not the instrument".[34] For him there could be no hero —and he had none, nor any conception of the omnipotent genius in history.

Indeed if ever a thoroughly Christianised man appeared in West Africa in Victorian and Edwardian times, that man was James Johnson. He never acted surreptitiously; he would never backbite or say behind any individual, black or white, what he would not say to his face. Word and action were fused in him. It can hardly be surprising that a man of this kind was rare and that he was to remain from 1863 onwards a lonely voice in the wilderness, perpetually in conflict with society and his age, admonishing always, rarely ever commending.

His journals and letters six years after his appointment as catechist are a great testimony to the transformed nature of his character and relentless crusade he had to fight against the godlessness of his age. In his judgment the times were out of joint and he considered it his duty to put them right. Particularly galling was the sexual immorality in which he saw the womenfolk of Sierra Leone Colony wallowing. Therefore he collected together young women whom he dosed with "moral philosophy", organised a Dorcas Society to whose members he gave "plain lectures in Scripture, Church profane history, Natural and Moral Philosophy", and compelled them to write essays on these.[35] He found odious and incompatible with his own understanding of Christianity the gregariousness of the Sierra Leonians who saw nothing inconsistent with their adopted faith in their convivialities connected with indigenous marriage and burial customs. He condemned, as promoters of immorality, the "companies" into which individuals of both sexes grouped themselves for mutual benefit. He was constantly mourning that hypocrisy, and formal mouth devotion to Christianity should continue to abound in the British Colony. Nor could be understand why there should be "heathens" in the territory. By 1866, when his efforts to change people into genuine Christians had not produced the quick and complete results he had anticipated, he had to lament: "It is no easy work to root out heathenism from the minds of our people: at the sound of every heathen drum they seem to think fondly of olden days."[36] A year later no improvement in the state of religiosity was in sight: "With many of our worshippers religion is only a matter of form and fashion: some of our members I fear are strangers to true piety."[37]

So concerned was he with the tone of behaviour in the Colony that he even paid attention to remarks in conversations in the streets to detect lewd pronouncements. His standard of morality and piety became too severe for several members of his Church, who accused him of inflicting them with long sermons and ceaseless emphasis on immorality and drunkenness.[38]

Sierra Leone men and women of James Johnson's youthful days were not wilfully degenerate. To some extent they were victims of the environment of the Colony. Colony-born citizens neglected agriculture, which was considered to be beneath their dignity. Nor could the soil yield enough to lower food prices. Unemployment began to stare young men in the face in the sixties. The clerical appointments which they wanted being unavailable they became traders and at one stage began to prefer prison, where they were assured of food, to a life of idleness and starvation. This was particularly so between 1865 and 1868 when provision prices rocketed

by about 300 per cent and the African members of the C.M.S., including James Johnson, had to plead for increased salaries.[39] Ladies, too, became victims of the situation. Though educated there were not enough positions in the civil service to absorb all of them; in vain did James Johnson apply to the Colonial Government on the behalf of many. They had no alternative to the unprofitable retail trade which, as James Johnson observed, brought them "in a whole month something less than nothing".[40] Since in addition to their needs they also had to take care of their poor parents they had no choice but to "constantly fall into the sin of fornication and adultery".[41]

James Johnson's puritanism was not confined to his fellow countrymen alone. He applied it to himself as well. His first letter to Henry Venn, the Honorary Secretary of the C.M.S., whose pro-African policies had already endeared him to James Johnson, was on a personal matter. He wanted to marry, but his partner must be an ideal woman. A bad marriage "will disgrace my ministry, lessen my influence, weaken my efforts and present no edifying example to the Church".[42] He was having "great difficulty" in getting "a pious and properly educated young woman". Not that there was a shortage of literary ladies, but in his estimation none was suitable for a minister of the Gospel. A careful search eventually revealed "in every way a worthy person"; her parents were in Lagos and he persuaded them to send their daughter to England for training in a Mission School. Friends had undertaken to pay the passage there and back but there was no means of maintaining her in England. A request for help was therefore made to the C.M.S.[43] But since the C.M.S. would not help he literally starved himself to send and maintain this girl at Acocks Green, near Birmingham. But in 1868 she died of a chill.

The dignity, Christian resignation and philosophic calmness with which James Johnson took this terrible blow—which he said nearly sent him insane—is worthy of note: "Whilst I pray for grace to submit to his chastening rod and take with patience that which he has been pleased to lay upon me, I humbly beg him to sanctify it that I may be thereby weaned from the world, kept from the paths of sin and led to be devoted to his service."[44] This tragedy turned him into an ascetic of a rare kind for the age in which he lived. A highly principled man, he refused to marry until (twenty-seven years later) he came across a lady of his spiritual taste and level. This was Sabina, a daughter of J. S. Leigh, an Egba *Saro* and one of the most prosperous businessmen of his day. The death of his fiancée in 1868 may have prejudiced James Johnson against the British climate and culture as detrimental to his race, and in subsequent years he was to reiterate the opinion, time and again,

that the best form of education for the people of West Africa could be obtained only in Africa itself.

Until his ordination to priesthood in December 1866, James Johnson's influence was concentrated in the parish rather than in the church. Although he was a probationery, a mere assistant to European missionaries, his work attracted the special attention of the Church Missionary Society to the extent that his entire journals in these years were published. He occupied himself with visiting the sick, converting "heathens" and returning backsliders to the fold. James Johnson's method of evangelisation was to meet individuals at home or accost them on the street, and to remind them of their sinful ways and to warn them of God's impending wrath if they should not amend their character. He was never tired of visiting both his parishioners and those for whom the Church was a remote world. His patience was inexhaustible when listening to the opinions of potential converts, particularly as his superior earning enabled him to rebut these completely. He was incredibly persuasive. His quiet talk had a powerful effect upon the individual man and the individual woman, when acting in his position as their spiritual guide and adviser. He made the men and women feel that each of them was an object of personal interest to him, for to each individual were manifest the tenderness of his heart, his considerate affection, his sweet reasonableness. No man or woman, whatever his errors, was left unattended by him.

His evangelistic ability can be illustrated by his successful conversion of John Macaulay, alias King Macaulay. John Macaulay was a Muslim-born Hausa who by 1863 had resided in the Colony for forty-eight years and who had become the most popular man in Freetown and king of the Aku. Until October 1863, when he was afflicted with a severe sickness, he had led "a very immoral life and followed all heathen practices".[45] This extreme illness was fully exploited by James Johnson who, to everybody's surprise, converted him to Christianity to the extent that he turned away his concubines and became a member of Christ Church.

Hardly had James Johnson taken over the full control of Christ Church than he established an elaborate system of sin-detection. It was a hierarchical system at the top of which he stood as general overseer. At the base the entire church community was divided into twelve classes, under twelve leaders. The community was divided according to spiritual fervour. The fresh convert must pass through a probationary period of at least three years; if his life conformed to Christian tenets he became a full communicant. Communicants who sold liquor were excluded from full membership "till they give up the trade".[46] There were a number of adherents who had to be probationers for upwards of ten years

for whom James Johnson mourned "continually that I have not been able to move them".[47] Leaders were people of a patently exemplary life. Their responsibility was enormous. The District of Pademba Road was divided between them and they had to watch the action, the movement, the thoughts and the statements of members both at home and at work. As James Johnson put it, their duty was to seek out "every case of sin".[48] Each week every act of misbehaviour was reviewed and punishment meted out. Later on female overseers were also appointed. The wheat and tares were separated, and the backsliders formed into a separate class at the very bottom of the hierarchy.

It was a spy system reminiscent of sixteenth century Massachusetts and Geneva, and it was the system that James Johnson was to use throughout his long career, in Lagos, in Abeokuta and in Ibadan. It would have been a device too rigorous for many members of any Christian organisation.

It was not only in Freetown in general and in Christ Church in particular that James Johnson sought to promote the growth of a puritanical kind of spirit, but it also prevailed in his family, and in this respect a brief look should be taken at the Johnson home. For it is devotion to the Christian Church that distinguishes James Johnson's family from the innumerable Johnsons in Sierra Leone. The family had two branches, one of which is now extinct. James Johnson's father was not the only victim of the slave trade. A sister of his, said to be related to the royal family of Ilesha, was captured about the same time as James Johnson's father.[49] Trained at the Girls' School at Charlotte she married one Agbogey, a liberated African under the care of the famous W. A. B. Johnson of Regent. He also bore the name of Johnson. One of her children was James Benjamin Johnson and was thus a first cousin of James Johnson. The two branches constituted themselves into one household and the two cousins grew together under the same roof. J. B. Johnson's life was destined to add to the intense Christian atmosphere of the Johnson family.

In his early years J. B. Johnson was a supercargo connected with the fleet of canoes which every week conveyed goods from Waterloo to Freetown. He changed in later years to become a farmer, specialising in fruit trees. His vast land of fifty acres is today in possession of the Reverend James Ingham Johnson, a Lokoh who was offered to J. B. Johnson as a foster child.[50] Less fortunate than James Johnson, in the sense that he had no formal education, J. B. Johnson learned reading and writing and became "a very enthusiastic Lay Reader"[51] in St. Matthew Church, Benguema. The story of his conversion from the *Egungun* cult to Christianity is of interest. One day whilst on his way to a meeting of *Ojes* at Hastings, just

before the railway crossing at Waterloo and not far from where the Government hospital stands today,[52] he swooned and heard:

> Hark my soul, it is the Lord;
> 'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word;
> Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee;
> Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me?

These words are a song by William Cowper (1731-1800) which became his favourite. From this spot members of his cult carried him to their grove, but when he regained consciousness he swore to be a Christian and henceforward became the bitterest enemy of the *Egungun* cult. According to the Reverend J. I. Johnson piousness and prayerfulness prevailed in the home of the Johnsons. One of the children of J. B. Johnson was the late Bishop T. S. Johnson, who took after the pious life of his father and uncle, forcing the C.M.S. to accept him for a Church career, in spite of his small stature and loss of an eye. His son, Evan Johnson, who is maintaining himself out of the instituion he is running, is at this moment of writing saving to train himself for a career in the Church.

It was the sad fortune of James Johnson's branch of the family that very few members remain. He himself died childless even though, having lost a wife in 1900 and being over sixty years of age, he had not lost hope of having a child should he ever marry again. Two of his three sisters, Mrs. Forbes and Mrs. Sali Cole, married and settled down in Freetown but they likewise had no children. The third appears to have had a daughter but in the last months of his life James Johnson began to fear that this daughter, his niece, would be unable to have children.[53]

But to return to James Johnson's early life. One formative and decisive influence on him in the early years is worthy of attention. He became a victim of sentimental loyalty and attachment to the Church Missionary Society and its interests, and this lasted throughout his life and career, excepting the year 1891 when he led a nationalist rebellion against the treatment meted by the Society to Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther in that year. He had a lasting deep sense of gratitude to the Society which had given him the opportunity to enjoy a decent living and play his part in the improvement of his people. This is the point that eluded his contemporaries to whom he seemed an enigma, a kind of Jekyll and Hyde character.

True if he were to be tested by his pronouncements alone, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, this opinion of him would seem to have some substance. For instance he was the earliest and the most outspoken advocate of an African Church which would be African in personnel, in liturgy, in hymnology, in

rituals, in theology and in forms accommodating to the racial peculiarities and customs of Africans compatible with the verities of the Christian faith. The logical step for a man who entertained these ideas, one would expect, was that he would translate them into action by founding an African Church with himself as the Primate. In fact he was the inspirer, if not the main cause, of many of the secessions from the Anglican Church in Nigeria. But James Johnson never abandoned the Church Missionary Society and even condemned all secessions from the Anglican Communion as unfortunate events against the interests of the Negro Race. In practical terms his African Church would be a contradiction in terms, since Anglicanism would form the nucleus. No less noteworthy is the fact that James Johnson's theology from his formative years was completely saturated with Anglicanism; consequently his attitude was often sectarian. Other Christians outside the Anglican communion he dismissed as "Dissenters", and Roman Catholics were not Christians at all but idolaters. Dissenters, he said, should not have any *locus standi* in human society. Quoting an Anglican divine in order to jibe at the Wesleyans in Sierra Leone he declared on one occasion: "If the vessel of the Church of England goes to the bottom, the cabin of dissenters will go with it."[54]

But viewed through Johnson's eyes he was not deliberately so double-faced. In the sixties, and for the rest of his life too, he had a grandiose and fixed conception of the Church Missionary Society that may seem to our generation naïve, if not ridiculous. In his view this missionary organisation epitomised undiluted altruism and was the providential agency for the achievement of all the aspirations of the African patriots of the nineteenth century. As he saw it the Society was committed to achieving the following objects—to educate Africans in all fields of human endeavour to the highest standard, to convert them to genuine Christianity, to raise Africa to the material and social standards of contemporary England, to put the educated elite in the highest positions of trust and responsibility, even over Europeans of less ability than Africans, to fight for the political emancipation of the continent and to prove to the disparagers of the Negro Race that, given equal opportunities, the latter were the "normal equals" of other races of mankind.

Nor was this all. This Society, in partnership with the British, should suppress slavery, put an end to inter-tribal warfare and teach Africans to be able to govern themselves. No conditions were to be attached to the discharge of this commitment. The reason for this, said James Johnson, was that by participating so zealously in depopulating and humiliating Africans in the transatlantic slave trade the British had inflicted on Africa so serious a wound that no exertions on their part could heal the wound and atone

for the sins committed.[55] Therefore the Society, as well as the British, could not have a purpose and an interest of their own.

It requires no imagination to perceive that this was a one-sided view which, with the possible exception of Henry Venn, could hardly be shared by the most pro-African philanthropists in nineteenth century Britain and how much less by missionaries in Africa. Little wonder then that by 1874 James Johnson had begun to disagree with British leaders in Church and State in Sierra Leone about the reason for the British presence in West Africa.

NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, "Report of School Campbell Town October 1843" in *Manager for 2nd Eastern District/Waterloo* (Record Book 1842 to 1854).
3. Bishop T. S. Johnson, "Biographical Notes" in possession of his son, the Rev. Evan Johnson, Freetown.
4. James Johnson, *A Brief Outline of the Story of my Life*, London, 1908, p. 7.
5. Rev. William Jowett (Ed.), *A Memoir of the Rev. W. A. B. Johnson*, London, Seeley Service, 1852.
6. S.L.A., cf. records of the Liberated African Department.
7. Local history given to the writer on Wednesday, 2 August 1967 at 52 Liverpool Street, Benguema, by the Rev. James Ingham Johnson.
8. For an account of this organisation see Christopher Fyfe, "The West African Methodists in the Nineteenth Century". *The Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1961, pp. 22-28.
9. James Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
10. Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, O.U.P., 1962, pp. 186-7, 292-3; J. E. Peterson, *Freetown: A Study of the Dynamics of Liberated African Society, 1807-1870*, Ph.D. Northwestern, July 1963, pp. 293-4.
11. C.M.S. CAI/094, C. T. Frey, *Journals*, Entry 20 January 1850; CAI/0228, J. H. Wilson, *Journals*, Entry 28 February 1848.
12. C.M.S. CAI/094, C. T. Frey, *Journals*, Entry 14 March 1849; CAI/0228, J. H. Wilson, *Journals*, Entries 10 and 20 March 1849.
13. C.M.S. CAI/094, C. T. Frey, *Journals*, Entries 28 December 1843, 2 January 1844.
14. S.L.A., Volume 7, *Liberated African Department Letter Book*, 22 August 1837 to 15 February 1842.
15. C.M.S. CA1/0228, J. H. Wilson, *Journals*, Entry 24 December 1847.
16. C.M.S. CA1/07, *Annual Report*, 1829.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. James Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
20. C.M.S. CA1/0228, J. H. Wilson, *Journals*, Entry 24 December 1847.

21. James Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
22. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 9/6/1917: T. S. Johnson's evidence.
23. C.M.S. CA1/0129, E. Jones, "Report for the half-year ending 14 April 1858".
24. A.B.C. Sibthorpe, *The History of Sierra Leone*, Third Edition, 1906, pp. 168-169.
25. James Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
26. *Jubilee Volume of the Sierra Leone Native Church*, London, 1917, pp. 86-7: Reminiscences by James Johnson, February 1913.
27. A.B.C. Sibthorpe, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
28. C.M.S. CA1/0129, Report dated 10/4/1855.
29. C.M.S. CA1/0144, G. T. Manley to Secretary, 14/9/1868.
31. James Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
32. C.M.S. CA1/03, E. D. Jones to Secretaries, 21/5/1863.
33. C.O.267/317, "The Fifty-fifth Annual Report of the Sierra Leone Auxiliary Bible Society, 1871" by James Johnson.
34. *Lagos Times*, 24/1/1891.
35. C.M.S. CA1/0123, James Johnson to Henry Venn, 15/4/1869.
36. *Ibid.*, James Johnson, *Journals*, March 1866.
37. *Ibid.*, James Johnson, *Journals*, October 1867.
38. C.M.S. CA1/0123, James Johnson, *Journals*, September 1864 and October 1867.
39. C.M.S. CA1/02, James Johnson and others to Finance Committee, 25/7/1869.
40. C.M.S. CA1/0123, James Johnson, *Journals*, October 1868.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. C.M.S. CA1/0123, James Johnson to Henry Venn, 20/12/1867.
44. *Ibid.*, *Journals*, October 1868.
45. *Ibid.*, *Journals*, March 1863.
46. *Ibid.*, James Johnson to Secretary, 15/4/1869.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. Bishop T. S. Johnson, *op. cit.*
50. Pointed out to writer 2 August 1967.
51. Bishop T. S. Johnson, *op. cit.*
52. Visited by writer 2 August 1967.
53. T. J. Thompson, *The Jubilee and Centenary Volume of Fourah Bay College*, Freetown, 1930, pp. 154-155, copy of James Johnson's will.
54. *The Day Spring and Sierra Leone Reporter*, 8 & 15 January 1869, Vol. 1, No. 19.
55. C.M.S. CAI/0123, James Johnson to M. Taylor and others, 19/4/1873; C.O. 269/369, James Johnson to Sir Henry Holland, 26/7/1887.

CHAPTER TWO

STORMY PETREL IN SIERRA LEONE I

> We continually cherish the remembrance of the days of former native independence and glory and are anxious to convince our enemies, open and covert, that we are not destitute of the elements of individual and national greatness. But we see nothing around us which we can call our own in the true sense of the term; nothing that shows an independent native capability excepting that infant Native Pastorate institution. For this reason and the conviction that we have that it is capable of being made a mighty instrument to develop the principles which create and strengthen a nation we cleave to it.
>
> James Johnson to Sir John Pope-Hennessy
> 6/12/1872

WHILST James Johnson was brooding over the low tone of morality and the mere churchianity of the world around him, events, momentous in the experience of its inhabitants, were being enacted in the Colony of Sierra Leone. Three of these events were of crucial significance. In 1861 the Church Missionary Society launched an experiment, the first of its kind in its history, by creating a Native Pastorate from nine of its churches—thereby devolving some measure of self-government on the African clergy and laymen. Two years later the British administration also began an experiment—again the first of its kind in Negro British Africa—by taking Africans into greater partnership in state deliberations, through the appointment of a liberated African, John Ezzidio,[1] to membership of the Legislative Council.

These two experiments owed nothing to the initiative of Africans; they were acts of benevolent paternalism and magnanimity on the part of the British rulers in Church and State. But the third—the Industrial Exhibition of 1865, which advertised the industrial skill

and economic potentialities of the Colony to the world in imitation of Britain's Great Exhibition of 1851—was the effort of European and African leaders of the community. James Johnson was not among the originators of this event, nor did he contribute as much as a penny to the total sum of £727 2s. 6d. which was raised to make the occasion a success and to which a large number of Europeans and the educated African elite subscribed generously.[2] Although he participated in the Exhibition, he did so in a queer and ridiculous fashion. Whilst people like Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, R. B. Blaize (a Government printer), J. B. Horton (the distinguished medical surgeon), and even an old pupil, A. B. C. Sibthorpe (the Kukuruku historian), showed their skill and won prizes, all that James Johnson contributed was a gourd presented in its raw natural form.[3]

Indeed James Johnson was a man of no consequence in society and politics in these early years. Leadership was in the hands of liberated Africans, independent and successful businessmen in their own right—people like John Ezzidio, Syble Boyle, Henry Lumpkins (senior) and William Grant. In the Anglican Church he was a mere auxiliary—a Catechist—under European bosses. It was not until December 1866 that he was fully ordained and not until 1870 that he was in full control of Christ Church, Pademba, and District. Of much greater influence was James Quaker, one of his teachers in the Grammar School, who eventually became principal of that institution and Secretary of the Native Pastorate.

But between 1868 and 1874 James Johnson's stature in the community increased enormously. By 1872 he, and he alone, was member of all the four committees of the Anglican Church.[4] Moreover not only did he make an excursion into the limelight but he also assumed the role of spokesman for the entire community in the Colony and began to pose as champion of the true interests of the Negro Race. As observed by his ecclesiastical superior, James Johnson was by 1874 not only "an intelligent labourer in the cause of Christ and his countrymen" but he was the "chosen champion"[5] of the grievances of his countrymen against the policies being pursued by the British rulers in Church and State. In these years his opinion was not only endorsed but also echoed by the African members of the Legislative Council and by Sir John Pope Hennessy, Governor of the West African Settlements from 1872 to 1873; he became leader of a nationalistic movement within and without the Anglican community; he became a subject of editorial attention and had begun to be a columnist, and for some time editor, of a newspaper extremely distasteful to Europeans. For the latter, particularly those in the C.M.S. and Wesleyan missions, he had become a *persona non grata.* His desire, they alleged, was to

see the departure from the Colony of European missionaries and administrative officials.[6]

And yet the spirit to champion the cause of his countrymen had been in James Johnson before he became a public figure. In Kent, before he was made a Catechist in 1863, he had overcome the opposition of the European administrator who would not treat him as his equal.[7] He was already indicating in his letters and journals the strength of his character. It would appear that he was aware of the proceedings of the Anthropological Institute of London, at which the Negroes were arrogantly and offhandedly described in derogatory terms as an inferior species of the human race, with biological differences from the supposedly superior Caucasoid species, for he had protested as early as 1864 against this pernicious doctrine.[8] Simultaneously, too, he had begun to notice and to commend the pro-African activities of Henry Venn, the man largely responsible for the training of a number of West African educated elite in commercial, naval, literary, professional, technical and ecclesiastical fields.[9] He had also begun to denounce Roman Catholicism as an enemy of the true interests of the Negro Race.[10] According to him "Romanism" was an emasculator of the reasoning faculty of Man, a breeder of authoritarian ecclesiastics and, through the Index, a killer of Man's freedom of will and choice to read whatever he liked, including the works of people like Martin Luther and Melancthon.

James Johnson's first major public appearance was in connection with the Native Pastorate question. This institution had been established in 1861 by the C.M.S. in accordance with the principles which Henry Venn had enunciated as being in the best interest of missionary expansion in Africa and Asia. The supreme objective of missions, declared the C.M.S. Secretary, was the spread of the gospel and not pastoral ministration. Once converts had been obtained and had gathered in heathen lands and once Churches were formed, native agents should be left with the pastoral work and the churches organised into Native Pastorates. At every stage the natives should be urged to bear their burden and progressively encouraged to administer their affairs, until such a time when subvention from the Parent Society would cease and control by European missionaries would also terminate. The congregations should then be left alone and the missions move to the "regions beyond" to repeat the process all over again. The ultimate aim was the development of Native Episcopate. As the official organ of the Society, the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, put it at the time of the formation of the Native Pastorate of Sierra Leone, its objective was "to render them (native Christians) self-ministering, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches, with their own native pastorate, and except

in colonies where European and native races are associated, their own native Episcopate."[11]

Since Henry Venn's theory of Church government was to be resolved by James Johnson into political and nationalistic factors, it is essential to define clearly the extent of the influence on him of Henry Venn's theory. Although Venn recognised the existence of nationalistic instincts in Africans and the necessity of the Church to come to terms with it, he did not see himself presiding over the liquidation of the C.M.S. missionary empire. Judging from the articles of the constitution designed for the Native Pastorate of Sierra Leone it is clear that, for Venn, an "independent" Native Episcopate would imply neither a complete severance from the parent body, nor ecclesiastical independence from Lambeth Palace, nor a sacrifice of the essential doctrines of the Church of Engand, nor a breakaway from the Anglican Communion. Moreover he emphasised that the process towards the goal was to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

It was an evolution that was demanded by the circumstances of Sierra Leone in the sixties. For the Native Pastorate scheme, which at the beginning comprised nine churches (excluding James Johnson's church) was, from the financial viewpoint, a venture based more on fantasy and confidence than on empirical data. Its estimated revenue of £1,600 per annum was never to be half reached in the next decade, in spite of the liberality of many of its supporters. Income stood at first at around £500, rising gradually to just over £700 in 1870, and was only barely sufficient to pay the salaries of its clerical and lay staff.[12] From the start it depended on the C.M.S. for an annual subvention of £300 which, according to Venn's theory, should diminish as the Pastorate learned to bear more and more of its burden. Not only did the hope of this subsidy recede with years but it also became clear that a sum of no less than £500 would be required every year for church and school repairs.

It was in such circumstances that the Church Committee, the Pastorate's executive which comprised Europeans and Africans, decided that they should accept what they were offered annually from the Colony's chest. To the agents both of the C.M.S. and the Native Pastorate this decision was not only natural but also just. State and Church, that is the Colonial Government and the Anglican Church, were only different parts of one Body;[13] they were the Established Church, in a position not dissimilar to that of the Church of England in Britain. Nor were they just being presumptuous. Since the British Government had taken over the Settlement, the Anglican Church had been institutionally linked with the Colonial Government, first through the Colonial Chaplain and since

1852 through the Bishop, both of whom were appointees of the British Government.

It is against this background that the ease with which application for public funds was successful should be understood. Samuel Wensley Blackall, the Governor who approved an annual grant of £500, through the Legislative Council, had no qualms that he was doing anything out of order. Indeed he was enthusiastic towards the Native Pastorate for another reason. He saw in the institution an agency for "the real development of self-reliance among the natives on a subject most important to their interests."[14] He not only contributed liberally to the funds but also accepted the office of President of the Pastorate.[15]

The attention and financial aid being lavished on the Native Pastorate by the Colonial Government were a patent demonstration of partisanship. It was a strengthening of the organic link between Church and State in a way prejudicial to the interests of other Christian communities. It was a blatant misappropriation of the taxes of the community, which included—though in a small number—'pagans' and Muslims. Nor was the existence of the Pastorate an unmixed blessing even for the Anglican community in the Colony. Potentially it was a divisive factor, breaking the Anglican body into two: the Pastorate and the C.M.S. For the clergymen and school teachers of the Pastorate owed their allegiance to the Africans, who paid their salaries, while African agents outside the Pastorate were payees of the C.M.S. with loyalty to the Society, under the jurisdiction of European missionaries.

However the potentially fissiparous element in the Native Pastorate for the Anglican community and the Colony did not begin to appear until 1868. Prior to this date relations with the C.M.S. had been very smooth indeed. There was no question of the Pastorate viewing itself as a separate entity, but as a child with the umbilical cord which connected it with its parent remaining intact. This "umbilical cord" was represented by the Bishop who was Chairman of the Church Committee. In fact the European missionaries were fully integrated into the administration of the Pastorate and co-operated to see that it was a success. Not only were members of the Pastorate determined to remain Anglican but they also were profuse in their gratitude to the Church Missionary Society. As the Pastorate's clergymen memorialised their Parent: "The separation we hope, is merely outward; invariably we shall still be united in the indissoluble bonds of the Gospel—on our part by respect, affection and gratitude; on your part, we trust, by your prayerful sympathy, counsel and guidance."[16]

Two individuals had different conceptions of the Native Pastorate, one within and the other without the Anglican Communion.

Respectively they were James Johnson and Benjamin Tregaskis, Superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission in Sierra Leone from 1864 to 1874. They became the bitterest enemies, the one as arch-defender, the other as the eternal foe of the institution.

James Johnson and Benjamin Tregaskis differed in both personality and ideology. Tregaskis was old enough to be Johnson's father, having been a missionary in the West Indies before James Johnson entered the primary school. The one was, *vis-à-vis* other Christian groups, an Anglican bigot whose "sectarian annoyances" rendered the Wesleyan clergymen very "sore";[17] the other was a Wesleyan of the deepest hue for whom the apostolic doctrine of the Church of England was gall and wormwood.[18] For the one the C.M.S. were the only true friends of Africa, for the other only the Wesleyans.[19] James Johnson believed in the Established Church, that is the Native Pastorate, the Wesleyan leader in the Dis-established Church. Both professed to be working in the true interests of the Negro Race. While James Johnson believed that the African was the best identifier of his true interests and should be the only agent (with European money and training) to achieve these interests, Benjamin Tregaskis held the view that the white man could discern these interests and be part of the agency for their realisation. For the African leader the European was to be a mere tool for Africans; for the Wesleyan Superintendent the races should work together if the Liberian kind of "retrogression" was to be avoided.[20] Lastly James Johnson's conception of the Church for West Africa was very narrow and exclusive; it was to be for Africans only. In contrast that of the Wesleyan leader was more elastic, more catholic in outlook; in Africa the Church should include all races, but control was to emanate from the Wesleyan Conference in England. Although Tregaskis was not opposed to the principle of a Native Pastorate he believed a Native Church would have to wait for a remote future.[21]

There was an irony about the termination of the duel between these contrasting characters. James Johnson defended the Pastorate with a zeal that degenerated to an anti-C.M.S. and anti-European crusade, and he became too extreme for many of his followers who perceived the shaky financial state of the institution and he found himself deserted by most of his African supporters. Benjamin Tregaskis, who started as the bitterest opponent of the Native Pastorate, ended up as the defender of the European race with the tacit approval of the C.M.S. European missionaries.

James Johnson's conception of the Pastorate was different from that of the agents of the institution mentioned earlier. For him there was no question of the institution being just a lackey of the Church Missionary Society, and receiving their orders, "counsel and