



The Church That Welcomed 10,000 Strangers

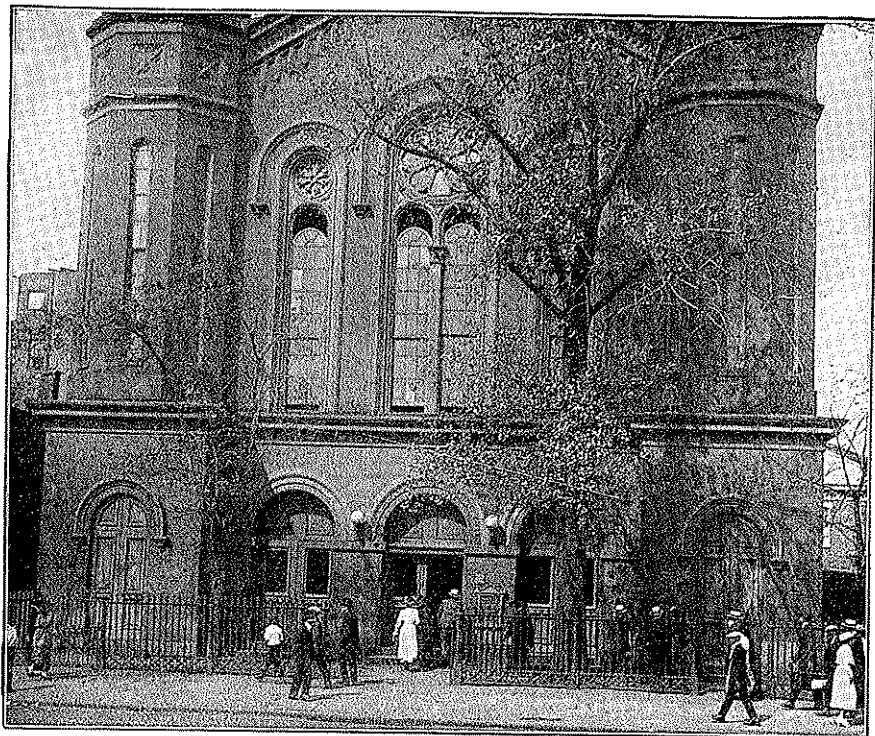
By Charles A. Tindley

THERE I stood, face to face with 10,000 black men, weary, homeless in a strange land—and they reached out their arms to me and said, "Where shall we go?"

Where should they go, indeed? They had already gone a long, long way from their old homes in the South, lured by the hope of safety of life and limb, and better working conditions for themselves and better educational opportunities for their children. There they stood in the gray streets of Philadelphia, and looked out upon the Promised Land that held no welcome for them—ten thousand of them homeless, and fifty thousand pressing on behind. They came in awful plight. Many of them had scarcely any clothes on their backs, and no money at all in their pockets. One man had lost his reason altogether. He had owned a farm of 300 acres in the South, with three mules and two yoke of oxen. One morning he had found a sign on his door which read: "Nigger, be gone before morning." He had fled in terror, with his wife and children. They had walked thirty miles to a railroad station. When he reached Philadelphia, he went raving mad and so died. There were others in a plight almost as bad as his.

And it was these folks that reached out their hands to me, as if I were Moses, and said, "Where shall we go?"

Dr. Tindley's handshake alone is worth coming to East Calvary church for. He is never appalled at the prospect of shaking 1200 hands every Sunday—he even stops at times to chat. Then the long line of those waiting to speak to him becomes an informal, laughing circle, and friendly groups cover the sidewalk for a block. Who says Northern churches aren't sociable?



Dr. Tindley's Church in Philadelphia

AT seventeen Dr. Tindley had never seen a book, nor the inside of a church—now he is the greatest Negro minister in America. It took him twenty years of hard plugging to achieve a college education—but he did it. He refused special concessions and honorary degrees, followed the regular academic curriculum in the midst of an active life in the ministry and elsewhere—and finally arrived at the goal of his ambitions—a degree from Bennett College in North Carolina.

One of his early jobs was janitor in East Calvary church in Philadelphia. His religious zeal forced him onward to the ministry; he finally went back to East Calvary as its pastor. That was seventeen years ago—there were only 150 members and he could not collect enough from them to pay a janitor. Now there are 4700 members, and the church is crowded to the doors every Sunday.

Even in the South, white men are asking Dr. Tindley's counsel concerning the present situation—and he now stands on the threshold of a supreme leadership which the coming years will test.

Well, we did what we could. The first thing was to find them a place to live. That was not very easy. Many people would not rent to black folks—not the poorest rooms. The rooms we could get were often very bad. At first we had to put as many as twenty people into a room 16 by 20. We filled up our church, but our church holds only 1,000. We established a mission where, in some fashion, we reached about 40,000 in all. Then some of my church members—about 120 of them—began to buy houses for them. Everyone who had a little money laid by bought houses. So gradually we found some place for the poor souls to stay a little while.

At the same time we got to work on more permanent plans. We didn't want them to live in overcrowded districts in Philadelphia. Most of them had come to better their condition, and we wanted it to be better. Most of them, too, had work—so they could earn their living if they could only find a place to live. Outside of Philadelphia we have now established several little colonies which relieve the congestion. In central New Jersey men of my race have bought 20,000 acres of land on which to build homes—called the Florence Estates—beautiful green country. This is to be improved and sold in small lots. No one can build a house there which costs less than \$1,500. We don't want shack-, you see. We want a nice, neat community. There is to be a post-office and schools, and churches, and good roads, and all public conveniences.

At the present time we have not only solved the question of housing for the time being, but are on the way to making really good permanent conditions.

But these folks who came were not merely homeless. They were discouraged. They thought God had forgotten all about them, that he was staying too far away, and not reaching out a hand to set very bad things straight. So we had to put some hope and faith into them. We gathered them into great meetings, and God came into the midst of them. And they knew that even if there should be a president who was not interested in the Negroes, or bad rulers, that they weren't to worry because their president was elected already. And they got true religion, many of them by the hundreds, and started on a righteous and faithful life in this new home. About ten thousand of them have joined churches. I hope to win a thousand more souls before Thanksgiving.

We are building a new church now that holds about 3,000—not nearly enough for all the members we might have if we had room.

And these folks were not merely homeless and discouraged when they came. They were mostly ignorant. So now we are working on the third phase of our redemption plan. We want to build a settlement house, which will cost about \$30,000, where we may teach the people. We want to gather in the children and the young folks, and the older folks, too, if they will come, and teach them the rudiments of an English education and a good trade. The girls we want to teach domestic science, laundry work, millinery, and needle-work, and the boys carpentry, and wood-work, and caning, and everything that is useful—every boy and girl a trade. We also want social rooms—a library and parlors where people may meet. And we want bathtubs and showers and a swimming pool.

We are doing all we can to teach our people now. Every single night there are classes in the church. We have an old private house where we gather the people to teach them, too. But we can never really do our best till we have the facilities. A great many of my own people are interested in helping. I know where I can get plenty of teachers. But, with all our buying of houses, we haven't much money.

All this I feel to be a very great step toward solving the race problem in our country. I feel that the exodus to the north has been the beginning of the freedom of my people. In the first place, it will move them out of congested districts—like many of those in the South—where the problem has become acute, into sparsely settled areas, where they can develop without coming into conflict with people of a different color and different ideas. It will give them a chance to start anew, and start better. Everything that we do to educate them, to help them to economic independence and decency, is solving the problem for black men and white men alike. No black man who thinks wants his white neighbor's house. He merely wants the right to earn one just as fine, if he can. He doesn't want to marry a white woman. He merely wants the girls of his own race to have a chance to be just as refined and pure and clever in their own way. He doesn't want any of the white man's things. He wants his own, but he wants them just as good; and when he has earned them he wants to be left alone to enjoy them.

In all this I am seeking for my people not *sameness* but *equality*. I don't want men of my race to override the white man, but I want to hasten the day when they will stand face to face with him—alone on their own ground. We must keep our humility and patience, but we must sanctify them to manly effort.

I would not keep the Negro a coward; I would make him a gentleman.