

# HERITAGE TREASURES

NUMBER I

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## CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

By William E. Foy

Introduction by Delbert W. Baker



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William Ellis Foy (1818–1893) was a seminary-trained black Free-will Baptist and Millerite preacher who experienced two visions during 1842. His visions convinced him of the soon coming of Jesus and he traveled to various places sharing them.

Foy, a native of Maine, received his first vision in Boston on January 18, 1842. It lasted for two and a half hours. “I was immediately seized as in the agonies of death,” he wrote, “and my breath left me; and it appeared to me that I was a spirit separate from this body. I then beheld one arrayed in white raiment.”<sup>1</sup> In this vision he saw the saints in paradise and some of their experiences. His second vision occurred two weeks later on February 4, 1842, in Boston. “I heard a voice, as it were, in the spirit, speaking unto me,” he recalled. “I immediately fell to the floor, and knew nothing about this body, until twelve hours and a half had passed away as I was afterwards informed.” In this vision he saw the judgment bar of God and “innumerable multitudes” gathered before it.<sup>2</sup>

With the help of two Millerite publishers, John and Charles H. Pearson, Foy published his first two visions on January 3, 1845, in this twenty-four-page tract.<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. Harmon, who later married James White and became one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, received her first vision just before the publication of this tract. She remembered hearing and talking with Foy. On one occasion Foy heard Harmon describe her vision at an Adventist meeting. He gave “a shout,” and “jumped right up and down” and kept saying that “it was just what he had seen [in vision], just what he had seen.”<sup>4</sup> Some contemporaries remembered that Foy had additional visions.<sup>5</sup> He actively shared his visions both in print and as an itinerant preacher.

Before the publication of *The Unknown Prophet*, which chronicles the life and times of Foy, little was known about him, and much of what was known was misleading and erroneous.<sup>6</sup> People often confused William Foy with Hazen Foss, an Adventist who refused to share what God had shown him in vision and who later gave up confidence in religion. Others believed that Foy never shared or refused to share his visions because he was afraid of a racial backlash. Others believed there had been a studied effort by church historians to suppress Foy’s contribution to religious and Advent history because he was a person of color. Still