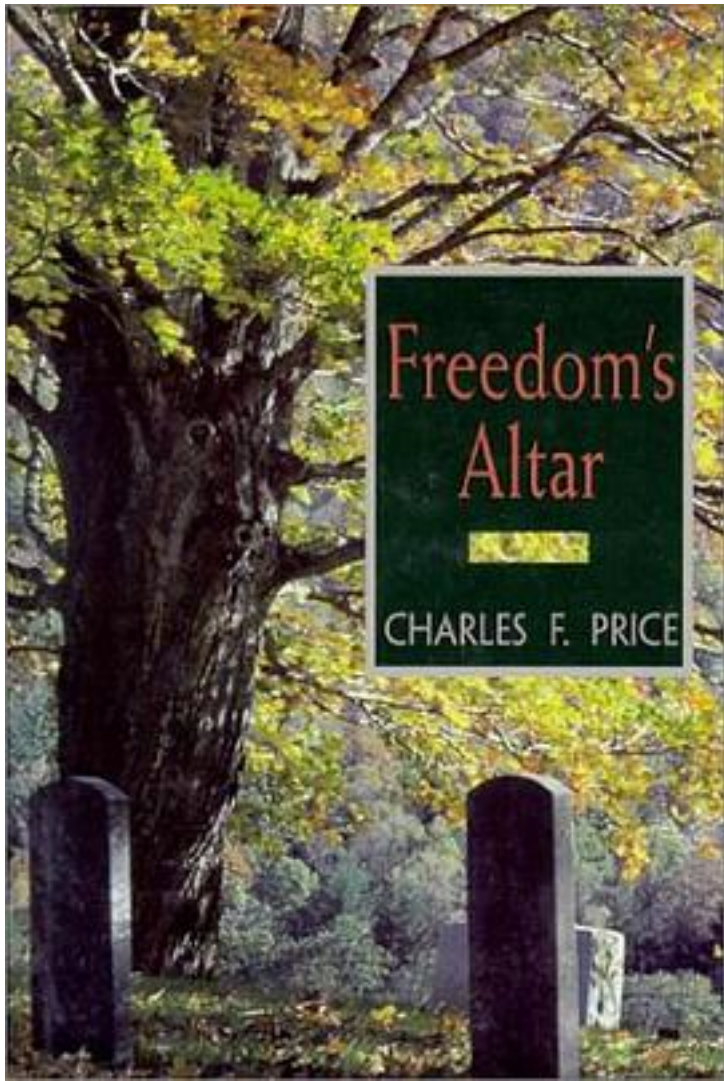


Freedom's Altar



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Judge Madison Curtis has just pronounced the benediction over the grave of his oldest daughter when two grimy women riding double on a mule enter his driveway. "Have ye got misfortune, I wonder?" the elder one calls. "Iffen ye do, I rejoice in hit." The Curtises have misfortune indeed. The Civil War has left them a dead daughter, two dead sons, vengeful neighbors, and a once-grand home now broken down. Just as debilitating is Judge Curtis's guilt over his actions in wartime, when he sacrificed another family to save his own. The most immediate reminder of the judge's past sins is a man he once held in bondage, who has returned to the mountains of western North Carolina after serving with the Union army. In slavery, the Curtises knew him as Black Gamaliel, but he now insists on being known by his proper name -- Daniel McFee. They achieve an uneasy peace as Daniel proposes a sharecropping arrangement and begins a new life in freedom. But the judge perceives that the opportunity for true racial reconciliation after the war is being squandered. Militating against it is an antihero who would elevate the blacks by crushing the landed whites -- a demagogue by day and a killer by night. He is Nahum Bellamy the Pilot, and he means to hold Judge Curtis accountable even unto death. In this, the sequel to his critically acclaimed novel *Hiwassee*, Charles F. Price examines those sacrificed on freedom's altar: carefree Andy Curtis, who returns from war to assume burdens beyond his capacity; Oliver Price, who must weigh his responsibility toward his dying wife against the need of his friends; and, foremost, the Curtises' former slaves, who struggle against bitterness and discover their betterselves at an hour of need.

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